Gatewatching and News Curation

Journalism, Social Media, and the Public Sphere

Axel Bruns

Gatewatching and News Curation: Journalism, Social Media, and the Public Sphere documents an emerging news media environment that is characterised by an increasingly networked and social structure. In this environment, professional journalists and non-professional news users alike are increasingly cast in the role of gatewatcher and news curator, and sometimes accept these roles with considerable enthusiasm. A growing part of their everyday activities takes place within the spaces operated by the major social media providers, where platform features outside of their control affect how they can post, find, access, share, curate, and otherwise engage with news, rumours, analysis, comments, opinion, and related forms of information.

If in the current social media environment the majority of users are engaged in sharing news; if the networked structure of these platforms means that users observe and learn from each other's sharing practices; if these practices result in the potential for widespread serendipitous news discovery; and if such news discovery is now overtaking search engines as the major driver of traffic to news sites—then gatewatching and news curation are no longer practiced only by citizen journalists, and it becomes important to fully understand the typical motivations, practices, and consequences of habitual news sharing through social media platforms.

Professional journalism and news media have yet to fully come to terms with these changes. The first wave of citizen media was normalised into professional journalistic practices—but this book argues that what we are observing in the present context instead is the normalisation of professional journalism into social media.

Axel Bruns is an Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor in the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. His work focuses on user engagement in social media and its implications for our understanding of the contemporary public sphere.

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Digital Formations

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Gatewatching and News Curation

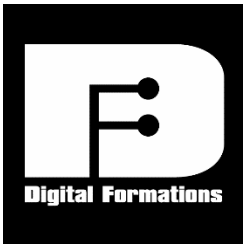
"*Gatewatching and News Curation* is an intelligent, insightful, and indispensable intervention in the debate over social media's impact on journalism. Axel Bruns masterfully charts the rise of new social media infrastructures, the spread of novel audience practises, and the corollary actions and reactions of journalists. He adroitly navigates conflicting trends and tensions that both challenge journalism and point to fresh directions, addressing questions over what journalism is, how it operates and to what purpose. *Gatewatching and News Curation* is a deep dive into the media at a time when audiences and journalists swim in an ocean of information, with news swirling around at all times of the day, in all shapes and sizes, via all sorts of intermediaries and devices."

—Alfred Hermida, University of British Columbia

"Axel Bruns brilliantly captures an under-researched feature of the unfinished communications revolution of our time: the decline of gatekeeping media that once decided for millions of people what was newsworthy, and what was the truth, and the rise of networks of gatewatching platforms that make, discover, share, and dispute news about our world. This is an elegant and uplifting book by a distinguished media scholar whose wise observations and lively conjectures deserve to be widely known, and widely appreciated."

—John Keane, University of Sydney; Author of *The Life and Death of Democracy*

Gatewatching and News Curation



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Vol. 113

The Digital Formations series is part of the Peter Lang Media and Communication list.
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bruns, Axel, author.
Title: Gatewatching and news curation: journalism,
social media, and the public sphere / Axel Bruns.
Description: New York: Peter Lang, 2018.
Series: Digital formations, vol. 113 | ISSN 1526-3169
Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2017014132 | ISBN 978-1-4331-3321-3 (hardcover: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-1-4331-3320-6 (paperback: alk. paper) | ISBN 978-1-4331-4397-7 (ebook pdf)
ISBN 978-1-4331-4398-4 (epub) | ISBN 978-1-4331-4399-1 (mobi)
Subjects: LCSH: Online journalism. | Blogs. | Journalism—Objectivity.
Classification: LCC PN4784.O62 B78 2018 | DDC 070.4—dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017014132
DOI 10.3726/b13293

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.**
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the "Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data are available
on the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de/.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of this book was researched and written in 2016 during a number of visits with colleagues in Europe, and in intensive writing sessions in airline lounges, on planes, and in hotel rooms. My sincere thanks go especially to the team at the Alexander-von-Humboldt-Institut für Internet und Gesellschaft in Berlin who hosted me as a visiting scholar during June and July—Christian Katzenbach, Karina Preiss, Wolfgang Schulz, Jeanette Hofmann, Larissa Wunderlich, and Cornelius Puschmann, thank you for your warm hospitality, and also for organising the best Association of Internet Researchers conference yet.

I also presented some of the ideas contained in this book in a number of guest lectures—many thanks to Luca Rossi and Gitte Stald of DECIDIS at IT University Copenhagen; Richard Rogers and the Digital Methods Initiative team at the University of Amsterdam; Jan Schmidt, Lisa Merten, and their colleagues at the Hans-Bredow-Institut in Hamburg; Gunn Enli, Eli Skogerbø, and Charles Ess at the University of Oslo; Anders Larsson at Westerdals School of Arts, Communication and Technology in Oslo; and Andra Siibak at the University of Tartu. Closer to home, I'd also like to express my sincere thanks to my colleagues at the Digital Media Research Centre at Queensland University of Technology, especially including Jean Burgess,

Patrik Wikström, Stuart Cunningham, Brenda Moon, Brian McNair, Folker Hanusch, Peta Mitchell, Tim Highfield, Aljosha Karim Schapals, Stephen Harrington, and Nic Suzor.

And as always, my most heartfelt gratitude and love goes to Ann McLean, who kept me sane through yet another major writing project, even at times when the task of wrangling this material into shape seemed insurmountable.

My research for this book was supported by the Australian Research Council Future Fellowship project *Understanding Intermedia Information Flows in the Australian Online Public Sphere*, Discovery project *Journalism beyond the Crisis: Emerging Forms, Practices and Uses*, and LIEF project *TrISMA: Tracking Infrastructure for Social Media in Australia*.

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INTRODUCTION

In Internet terms, 10 years is a very long time. In 2006, *Facebook* was still trying to break out of the social circles of U.S. colleges, and into wider society. *Twitter* had barely been launched, and was yet to receive public endorsement from celebrities, politicians, and sports stars. News blogs still represented a considerable challenge to the journalistic *status quo*, and the *Huffington Post* could still be regarded as a citizen journalism start-up. Much has changed since then, and the present book charts these changes. I published *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* in 2005, and at the time could not have foreseen the substantial, transformative role that the then emerging next generation of social media platforms, in particular, would come to play for the practices of professional journalism, the dissemination of news and related information, and our day-to-day engagement with news and politics; previous generations of social media and social networking tools, from *Friendster* to *MySpace*, certainly never managed to affect news practices to anywhere near the same degree.

What was already evident at the time, however, was the significant impact of new, independent tools for publishing news and commentary—ranging from individual news blogs to collaborative citizen journalism sites—that could operate outside the news industry proper. These sites offered a funda-

mentally redesigned approach to tracking and covering news stories: rather than primary gatekeeping (selecting only a handful of newsworthy stories to appear in a centralised news imprint), they engaged in a secondary practice of *gatewatching* by observing the stories covered in other, mainstream as well as alternative outlets, and linked to, shared, and expanded on these stories in their own coverage. Through implicit or explicit collaboration across this network of sites, this community of self-appointed news bloggers and citizen journalists came to serve as an important and at times powerful corrective to conventional, mainstream journalism, resulting in a predictably mixed reaction from professional journalists. In particular, the emergence of this alternative approach to doing journalism "added extra stimulus to the critique of journalistic professionalism and all its attendant myths (of objectivity, the public interest and so on)" (Keeble 2009: 338).

In the wake of this disruption professional and citizen journalism gradually settled into an uneasy truce that involved both the cautious normalisation of some aspects of citizen journalism into mainstream journalism practices and formats, and the grudging acceptance of leading new citizen journalism outlets as part of the mainstream industry, by the end of the 2000s. But time has not stood still since then, and neither can our understanding of journalism and its role in facilitating the circulation of news and information across society. As Vos has put it, "the real world of news production and distribution is changing so quickly that scholars are confronted with the changing dynamics of gatekeeping. If news making is in a period of transition, then gatekeeping is in transition. Our theorizing must transition as well" (2015: 5), well beyond the changes we could anticipate in 2005.

Those transitions have perhaps never been more evident than today; in fact, it is hardly an exaggeration to state that I began researching and writing this book in one world, and finished it in another. I started this work at a time before the successful Brexit referendum and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president, and concluded it in late 2016 after these fundamental disruptions of the existing world order. Alongside other, less momentous public debates elsewhere, both campaigns were dominated by 'post-factual' propaganda and the blatant lies of 'fake news', and by the arrival of 'alt-right', neo-fascist demagoguery into mainstream politics, and both have therefore already resulted in considerable and genuine soul-searching amongst professional journalists and their news organisations, as well as in a less edifying and largely self-serving backlash against social media for their apparent role in enabling so much mis- and disinformation to circulate unchallenged throughout

society. These are important issues to be addressed as we confront the present existential challenges facing liberal democracy—but we would do well to do so from a much more long-term perspective than may have been possible in the immediate trauma felt after Brexit and Trump.

This book, therefore, addresses these very current debates about news and journalism, about mainstream, alternative, and social media, and examines issues including the decline in journalistic authority, the circulation of 'fake news' and other misinformation, the move away from rational deliberation and towards a more affective engagement with the news, and the purported development of 'echo chambers' and 'filter bubbles' that are impervious to dissenting views—but it does so, I hope, without being dominated by them. Rather, it charts the broader trajectory of the transformations and changes that have played out as news producers and news users have sought to redefine their roles in an increasingly hybrid, networked, and social news media environment, and develops a more diachronic view of these developments that advances our understanding beyond the at times very pointillistic, case study-driven perspectives that have tended to dominate the literature. In doing so, it must at times necessarily simplify more complex developments occurring, for a variety of contextual reasons, at different speeds in different national mediaspheres—but even in spite of these variations at the local level, the overall, global trajectory of transformation in professional news production, popular news engagement, and societal debate remains a phenomenon that affects us all.

Coming Up in the News

The present volume is not a revision or update of *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* (Bruns 2005), therefore, but is instead designed as a sequel to the earlier book. It picks up the story from where we left it in 2005, traces developments in both professional and non-professional news practices since then, and explores their implications for industry and society.

Chapter 2 sets the scene, however, by revisiting the emergence of citizen journalism in the late 1990s and the popularisation of news blogging around the turn of the millennium; it introduces gatewatching as a foundational practice for this second tier of news sites as they observe and critique the mainstream media, and in doing so summarises some of the key ideas presented in *Gatewatching*. But in re-examining these developments from a distance of

more than 10 years, we are now also able to document the gradual normalisation (and to some extent, neutralisation) of the citizen-journalistic practices challenging mainstream journalism; beyond the occasional 'blog wars' between professional journalists and their self-appointed critics, this is also a story about the slow and at times reluctant embedding of columnist blogs and interactive features, of user-generated content, and even of some of the leading voices of citizen journalism into the products of the established news industry, therefore. As this normalisation proceeded, it managed for the most part to contain the most disruptive impacts of what I have called here the first wave of citizen media.

But it did so only just in time for the arrival of contemporary social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* as mass participation platforms, which initiated a second wave of disruption and transformation. The following four chapters examine these developments, from two different perspectives. First, as Broersma has pointed out, today's "news consumers are more media literate and have more possibilities to challenge professional news production. They openly comment on coverage, check news 'facts' themselves and publish alternative representations" (2013: 29)—and social media platforms have become the primary channels for doing so.

Chapter 3 examines how these processes unfold in the context of the most recognised news-related uses of social media: in covering acute, breaking news events. From the 2007 San Diego wildfires that first led *Twitter* user Chris Messina to propose the idea of a hashtag (Halavais 2014) through subsequent natural disasters, industrial accidents, terrorist attacks, and popular uprisings, and all the way to the Brexit and Trump victories themselves, social media (and here especially *Twitter*) are now without doubt *the* space where acute events break first and are tracked in the greatest detail, and where *ad hoc* publics (Bruns and Burgess 2015) rapidly assemble to gather and evaluate the available information as it emerges. Due to the widespread availability of mobile devices and connectivity, this process usually commences within minutes of an incident, drawing on first-hand eyewitness reports, but is also enhanced by a kind of secondary eyewitnessing that utilises gatewatching practices to identify and share emerging information from official bodies, news media, and other relevant institutions. What results from this is the use of social media to collectively compose "a first draft of the present" (Bruns and Weller 2016), ahead even of journalism's "first rough draft of history".

But social media are used for news-related purposes well beyond the extraordinary contexts of acute events, even if much of the available literature

continues to focus on such moments of heightened news engagement. Chapter 4 therefore addresses the less immediately visible, but much more widespread practices of everyday news engagement by social media users, focussing especially on the everyday sharing of news reports and related information that a majority of social media users now participate in. Such newssharing follows on naturally from the gatewatching processes through which users come across new news stories; in the process, they decide on whether these items warrant further dissemination to their own "personal publics" (Schmidt 2014)—that is, on whether they are "shareworthy" as well as newsworthy (Trilling *et al.* 2016). Available surveys on user practices indicate that—contrary to the limited number and range of users from which participants in the first wave of citizen media were recruited—this newssharing has now become habitual for a majority of Internet users, and can therefore be regarded as a truly demotic practice. Finally, then, those users who engage most consistently in such newssharing activities might also emerge as "niche authorities" who are known and respected for their news curation efforts on their topics of interest and expertise (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013: 305).

While these chapters largely examine the recent developments in gatewatching and newssharing from a user-centric perspective, such changing news engagement practices also affect the news industry, of course. As Broersma outlines it, "first, digitization and the economic downfall have stimulated competition between mass media. In addition, new niche media have been founded that tend to subvert the 'rules of the game' journalism has developed in its long-term project of professionalization" (Broersma 2013: 29), and the following two chapters therefore turn our attention towards the attempts to come to terms with an increasingly social media-driven news environment that have been made both by individual journalists and at the institutional level.

Chapter 5 begins by examining individual journalists' approaches to adopting and adapting social media as part of their professional practices. Here, much as in the first wave of citizen media we again find a mixture between outright hostility, grudging acceptance, and enthusiastic embrace of social media platforms and the communicative environments they provide; as the utility of social media especially in covering breaking news stories has become more obvious, journalists have gradually developed a number of strategies for embedding social media into their day-to-day work. In addition to promoting their own news stories and connecting—publicly or privately—with key sources via social media, this has also included some degree both of

public interaction with fellow journalists and of news discussion with ordinary audience members; some leading adopters of social media for journalistic purposes have well advanced beyond this, however, and established themselves as prominent social media news curators who pull together news and information from a variety of sources, well beyond their own imprint, into a consistent feed of updates on their core topics. It is especially these most active and most visible journalists who have also managed to develop a strong 'personal brand' on social media, independent of the news organisation that employs them—and such social media stars amongst journalists may derive considerable career benefits from this new-found independence.

This, then, necessarily also creates new challenges for news organisations, and we explore these in Chapter 6. The response by the journalism industry to the rise of social media has been as contradictory and conflicted as that by individual journalists: on the one hand, many news outlets have actively encouraged their newsroom staff to develop a professional presence on the leading social media platforms in order to promote and disseminate their content to the immense potential audience now gathered there; on the other, they have also sought to curtail their employees' activities on these platforms in order to avoid any negative repercussions for the news brand that may arise from journalists providing too much detail about their personal lives, activities, and views. Similarly, many news outlets have invested considerable resources into generating and optimising the social media engagement metrics for the stories they publish—yet their understanding of what these metrics mean often remains rudimentary at best. Perhaps the most fundamental problem for news organisations, however, is that so much more of the news process—from publication through dissemination to engagement—now takes place immediately within the third-party spaces provided by the social media platforms themselves: the outlet's own Website now merely serves as the place where a story is published (and with initiatives such as *Facebook*'s Instant Articles, which allows for native in-platform publishing, even that role is under threat), while everything else now unfolds in spaces that are beyond the direct control of the news publisher. This transfers considerable power over the news process to non-news organisations like *Facebook* and *Twitter*, and to their users.

Partly as an attempt by news outlets to wrest back some control over the news process, and partly as an experiment in embedding more social media logic into conventional online news publication formats, recent years have therefore also seen the emergence of new models for professional journalistic news coverage. Chapter 7 examines the most important of these new formats

in some detail: the liveblog. Liveblogs are presented, on the Websites of mainstream news outlets, in a form and format that closely mimics many of the fundamental affordances of social media: they present a reverse-chronological feed of brief news updates (in text, image, audio, or video) on a developing story that resembles the timelines of *Facebook* or *Twitter*; they frequently embed a variety of reposted snippets sourced from other news sites, official statements, social media discussion, and elsewhere; and they incorporate the journalistic liveblogger's own comments and evaluation. As a format, they therefore incorporate many of the core practices of everyday news engagement in social media—including gatewatching and newssharing—, but do so under the auspices of mainstream news organisations; it is therefore unsurprising, perhaps, that they have proven to be particularly popular amongst online news audiences and journalists alike. The journalists operating such liveblogs, then, do more than merely cover the news: they have become news curators, transparently tracking news developments and developing news frames, in constant interaction with their audiences, as events unfold.

As a result of these continuing transformations, the contemporary media ecology now consists of the primary spaces of news coverage in the mainstream industry, the secondary spaces of commentary and critique that are provided by citizen journalism sites, and the vast tertiary spaces of social media that tie together these stand-alone sites and facilitate the flow of news and information between them and between their users. Each of these spaces is further subdivided into dynamic communicative formations of widely variable size and duration, involving different collectives or more or less actively engaged participants. This complex picture of interweaving networks of interaction makes it difficult if not impossible to still imagine a singular *public sphere* in which public debate and deliberation is conducted, in individual nation states or at a more regional or global level by elite media on behalf of the citizenry; instead, what we encounter here is a complex multi-tiered assemblage of smaller or larger, shorter- or longer-lived *publics* that form around events, issues, topics, and themes of shared concern, and around a set of core texts and actors. These publics range from the centralised publics that continue to exist around mainstream news coverage to the much less prominent but no less important personal publics surrounding and connecting between ordinary social media users' accounts, and they form a structured but densely interwoven network of communicative spaces through which news and information can and does travel. Chapter 8 identifies these different types of publics and explores how their interplay might be studied further; in doing so, it also challenges

popular but simplistic conceptions of 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers' that are supposed to enable their inhabitants to insulate themselves from any news and information that challenges their own worldviews.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the book by presenting an overall picture of a contemporary global news media environment that is characterised by substantially increased social and societal involvement and a more and more networked structure—that is, of a *social news media network*. In this environment, professional journalists and non-professional news users alike are increasingly cast in the role of gatewatcher, newssharer, and news curator, and sometimes accept these roles with considerable enthusiasm; additionally, a growing part of their everyday news engagement activities takes place within the tertiary spaces operated by the major social media providers, where platform politics, affordances, algorithms, design, and other technosocial factors outside of their control affect how they can post, find, access, share, curate and otherwise engage with news, rumours, analysis, comments, opinion, and related forms of information. The complex and multilayered social news media network that is central to the contemporary mediasphere is characterised by a multitude of "curated flows" (Thorson and Wells 2015), therefore, that result from the interactions and interdependencies of professional journalists, citizen journalists, politicians, celebrities, experts, niche authorities, ordinary users, platform operators, designers, algorithms, and many more stakeholders besides, but are exclusively controlled by none of them. Well beyond this book, this emerging and dynamic social news media network, whose constitutive parts continue to rearrange themselves constantly as we observe them, will require considerably more study in the coming years.

Platforms of the Social News Media Network

Although the following chapters make every effort to discuss current practices at the intersection of journalism and social media independent of the specific social media platforms being used, there is nonetheless a considerable focus on *Twitter* over *Facebook* and other social media spaces. This is unavoidable given that so much more of the body of literature upon which this volume builds is centrally concerned with *Twitter* (Kümpel *et al.* 2015: 3), even though it has a considerably smaller userbase than *Facebook*. There are number of reasons for this imbalance. First, compared to *Facebook* it remains significantly easier—though by no means trivial—to generate large datasets on user en-

gagement with the news from the *Twitter* Application Programming Interface (API), and the growing use of 'big social data' following the "computational turn" in the humanities and social sciences (Berry 2011) has therefore also led to a sustained growth in the field of *Twitter* research, well beyond the study of news and journalism.

Second, however, the comparative platform affordances of *Facebook* and *Twitter* have also meant that *Twitter* is genuinely used more widely for some important forms of news engagement. More than 95% of user accounts on *Twitter* are public, and can be followed by any other user without a need to seek permission; by comparison, "about 72% Facebook users set their posts to *private*" (Dewan and Kumaraguru 2014: 1). This enables the rapid and more widespread transmission especially of breaking news across the *Twitter* network, while similar processes on *Facebook* are relatively slower and take more circuitous routes. Additionally, the very sparse infrastructure of interaction on *Twitter*—with its short 140-character messages and limited threading of messages, compared to the longer posts and more involved interactions via liking, reacting, and commenting on *Facebook*—also means that the forms of news engagement that these platforms are used for can vary significantly. Larsson and Christensen suggest that "we can perhaps consider Facebook as the news 'showroom'—used mostly for broadcasting messages—whilst Twitter is the news 'chat room'—used more for interaction" (Larsson and Christensen 2016: 13), therefore, but this observation may be true only for interactions that are fully public: in the private or semi-private realm of users' personal profiles, away from the public pages of news organisations, *Facebook* may well sustain some intense discussion of the news amongst smaller groups of participants, too.

It is important to keep in mind the specific features and limitations of each social media platform as we continue our discussion, therefore; "talking about 'social media' in general always risks missing important distinctions", as Dahlgren warns (2014: 196). And yet, the fact that these platforms do not exist in isolation from each other; that they share users to a considerable extent; that through automated as well as manual means, information flows between them at considerable volume; and that they both exist as part of a broader, thoroughly interconnected social news media network means that—with the necessary adjustments—many of the professional and user practices we find on *Twitter* also translate to *Facebook*, and vice versa. "There is a high overlap in the content of the two networks" in many news contexts (Dewan and Kumaraguru 2014: 11); for instance, even in spite of *Twitter*'s renowned rapid

response to major acute events, it is also true that such events also "appear fairly quickly on Facebook. … On average, … in just over 11 minutes after taking place in the real world" (2).

And still, *Twitter* does hold a special place in this story—over the past years, it has been the most lauded as well as the most attacked platform for its role driving the transformations to journalistic processes. This is remarkable especially in the context of its continuing financial instability; *Twitter* is a platform that has still not managed to find a sustainable business model, and it is regularly rumoured to be the target of takeovers by companies ranging from Salesforce through Disney to Google (e.g. *Fortune* 2016). One 2015 op-ed in *The Guardian* even asked whether *Twitter* is "too relevant to fail" (Bell 2015: n.p.), precisely because its role in facilitating the publication, dissemination, and discussion of journalistic content means that it "could be the world's independent newsroom" (Bell 2015). More generally, however, even if *Twitter* (or indeed *Facebook*) were to disappear, it is highly likely that they would be replaced by other platforms offering very similar functionality in the way that "Friendster [was] supplanted by MySpace and more recently by Facebook. … Underlying services like Twitter are a set of characteristics often referred to by the catchall phrase, the real-time Web" (Hermida 2010: n.p.)—and social media platforms that incorporate these characteristics are likely to be a feature of the global media landscape for the foreseeable future, even if their names or their owners may change from time to time. As Bell puts it, "a world without Twitter or with a radically changed Twitter is now unimaginable, as if television went off air in 1963 and never came back" (2015: n.p.).

For the moment, at any rate, *Twitter* remains a major component of the nexus between journalism and social media. Conversely, news remains just as central to *Twitter*; as Broersma and Graham report, this "was publicly acknowledged in a series of tweets by founder Jack Dorsey on Twitter's ninth birthday: 'Journalists were a big part of why we grew so quickly and still a big reason why people use Twitter: news. It's a natural fit. … We wouldn't be here without you'" (2016: 91). Traditionally, this may not have been true to the same extent of *Facebook*, where social networking amongst existing populations of friends and family was a core early driver of take-up, but news now also plays an increasingly important role there. This is why recent attacks against both *Facebook* and *Twitter* for their role in enabling the dissemination of 'fake news' (or more properly, factually inaccurate political propaganda) have drawn such instant responses from the management of both platforms (e.g. Zuckerberg 2016)—yet to single out only these leading social media

platforms as spaces where political propaganda circulates unchecked is overly simplistic and self-serving: social *and* mainstream media are equally implicated in this. Social media themselves *are* without doubt spaces in which mis- and disinformation circulates, but they also facilitate the rapid debunking of such information; mainstream media *should* have higher editorial standards that prevent the publication of blatant falsehoods and lies, and yet much of the political propaganda that is recirculated via social media originates from mainstream news articles that report the statements made by propagandists and demagogues without sufficient critical framing. Mainstream news organisations should not be allowed to shift the blame for 'fake news' to social media platforms without accepting their own share of responsibility—especially since, in the present media environment, they have a considerable presence of their own in social media spaces.

Finally, of course, the troubling rise of populism and propaganda in many established and emerging democracies is not simply a function of the institutions and platforms that produce and circulate news content; ultimately, especially in a social news media network, ordinary citizens themselves are the primary drivers of news dissemination and discussion, and how they—that is, how we all—engage with the news in this changing environment is now more crucial than ever before. This means that it is incumbent on every news user to ask themselves what sources they choose to follow (in social as well as in mainstream media); how they evaluate the information that reaches them; what material they select to re-share with their own networks, online and offline; and how and with whom they engage in discussion and debate, in public or in private. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, as the saying goes, and this is even more true in a social news media network environment that has moved well past the point of "high modernism" (Hallin 1992) when the leading journalism outlets could still be relied upon to comprehensively cover societal developments and debates. Today, "in media-saturated societies which bristle with communicative abundance", where 'mainstream' media no longer play the dominant role they once used to, we must instead all exercise our "monitory" civic duties (Keane 2009: 47), and in particular must combat propaganda and abuse on behalf of those fellow citizens who already feel too marginalised to do so for themselves.

A Study in Precarity

One theme that underlies this entire volume, therefore, is precarity. By most accounts, the journalism industry—globally, and in many national environments—is struggling, and has yet to settle into a sustainable equilibrium following the successive digital disruptions (from the Web through user-generated content and social media to the shift to mobile news engagement) that it has experienced since 1990; "to paraphrase one columnist, the sky is falling and it is hard to know how many will be left to cover the story" (Mosco 2009: 350). But there is some cause for (cautious) optimism here, too: while the journalism *industry* may be struggling, it is also evident that public interest in, and use of, *news* has never been greater. As McNair reminds us, therefore, we should not mistake the industry's past for its future: "the future of journalism is often conflated with the future of a particular journalistic medium, currently print. Newspapers are in crisis, it's said with good reason, and thus so too is journalism" (McNair 2009: 348).

Newspapers certainly are in crisis: as the Pew Research Center's *State of the News Media 2016* report states, for instance, the U.S. newspaper industry still hopes that its "core audience and subscriber base … will buy [it] enough time to help ease the digital transition. But recent data suggests [that] the hourglass may be nearing empty" (Pew Research Center 2016: 5), and that the print industry has failed to implement the longer-term strategic measures that would enable it to transition to a digital-first model. The same report also suggests that television news, which had thus far proven considerably more resilient, is the next legacy news medium to be affected: "TV-based news can't ignore the public's pull toward digital", and while its audience figures will have been boosted by the heightened public attention to the news during the 2015/16 U.S. presidential election campaign, "those audience gains followed a year of declines across the board in 2014" (6).

News organisations for whom their digital operations have already become a core concern stand to benefit from this digital transition, and least in principle: "nearly four-in-ten U.S. adults (38%) said that they often get news from digital sources …. That trails the 57% who often get news from a television source but outpaces both radio (25%) and print newspapers (20%)" (Pew Research Center 2016: 45). But included in those digital news access figures are both visits to conventional news Websites (28%) *and* news use through social media (18%), and underlying them is also a rapid shift towards mobile access: in 2015, for the top 50 U.S. newspaper Websites, "unique visitors on

mobile rose for 43 of the 50, with 35 showing a 10% or greater increase" (20). The shift to digital news has already happened, but the channels through which users engage with such digital news continue to evolve rapidly and will require further adjustment by the industry.

Finally, we might expect such developments to result in a substantial boost in industry revenue from online advertising. But this is only half true: while "total digital ad spending grew another 20% in 2015 to about $60 billion", that additional funding has not been directed in the first place at conventional news corporations:

> journalism organizations have not been the primary beneficiaries. … Even more of the digital ad revenue pie—65%—is swallowed up by just five tech companies. None of these are journalism organizations, though several—including Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Twitter—integrate news into their offerings. (Pew Research Center 2016: 6)

New York Times CEO Mark Thompson therefore has a blunt message for journalism organisations: "the plain truth is that advertising alone will not support quality journalism" (Thompson 2016: 109), and alternative funding models will need to be developed.

As the commercial news industry continues to struggle in this adverse environment, existing alternative funding models therefore gain additional importance. This includes first and foremost the public service media model in its state- or fee-funded European form; Tunstall points out, for instance, that "Europe's public service broadcasters … project credible news across TV, radio and online. The BBC has been described as producing 'the biggest and best online newspaper in the world'" (2009: 388), and even though the exceptionally well-resourced BBC may constitute an outlier even amongst public service media organisations, the overall point is nonetheless valid. Alternatively, trust-funded non-profit models such as *The Guardian*'s, where the Scott Trust's portfolio of non-journalistic commercial interests generates sufficient profits to sustain the news organisation's operations even if *The Guardian* in itself is posting annual losses, may offer a different opportunity to support quality journalism into its uncertain future. Finally, the development of crowd-funded and community-owned news organisations is also worth exploring, even if the long-term sustainability of such operations—beyond an initial wave of enthusiasm and support—has yet to be confirmed. Such citizen-supported news outlets may well be most successful when they address niche topics or cover (hyper)local news that have a clearly circumscribed audience,

however—on the available evidence, it appears unlikely that they could grow to rival major regional or national news outlets.

But at the same time, for all the growth in its digital advertising revenues, the social media market itself is also far from settled; it too remains precarious, and that precarity affects the many personal and professional endeavours that now fundamentally rely on social media. The robust current performance of platforms like *Facebook* obscures the fact that this remains a notoriously fast-paced industry that can experience comparatively rapid shifts in platform popularity; further, even popularity with a large number of users does not automatically translate into financial sustainability, as the cautionary tale of *Twitter* and its decade-long search for a sustainable business model shows all too clearly. Again, even if these platforms themselves disappeared in the short or medium term, it is unlikely that the idea and practices of social media—including the practices of news engagement via social media—would disappear with them; they have been too deeply ingrained in our everyday lives by now. However, professional journalists as well as ordinary news users may be forced from time to time to relearn how to publish, disseminate, discuss, and curate the news on yet another new social media platform, building new public personas and adjusting their practices to the specific affordances of each new platform as they do so.

In this precarious environment, then, where both the news industry itself and many of the communicative tools, channels, and platforms that it relies upon to disseminate its stories remain subject to rapid change and transformation, "the journalistic paradigm is continuously refractured. … Repairing it has become more complicated, if not impossible" (Broersma 2013: 29). Indeed, if 'repairing' is understood to mean restoring journalism to the former glory of its mythical golden age of "high modernism" (Hallin 1992), that aim is now simply unattainable: the mediasphere has transformed too far. Instead, "a more chaotic communication environment is coming into existence" (McNair 2009: 348), and for the journalism industry the primary aim at present must simply be to develop a sustainable *modus operandi* that suits this chaotic, complex, and constantly evolving media landscape; once a dominant species, professional journalism now needs to find a habitable niche in the new media ecology. This repositioning has clearly created new opportunities for alternative competitors, including both the 'born-digital' citizen journalism operators who have established themselves since the early 2000s as credible new voices in news coverage and debate, and the propagandists and demagogues who have gained greater prominence in more recent years

and now threaten the very future of liberal democracies—proving McNair's point that "chaos can be creative and liberating. It can also be confusing, and destructive of things we might wish to preserve" (2009: 349).

The *New York Times*' Mark Thompson therefore offers this bleak warning: "winter really is coming for many of the world's news publishers" (Thompson 2016: 108). We might extend this warning to some of the other elements of the social news media network that we will encounter in this book, too: winter may also be coming for *Twitter* and other social media platforms unless they can find a way to achieve financial sustainability and address the significant issues with incivility and abuse that have been flagged in recent times. And indeed, with the successes of Brexit and Trump, and a variety of other, more minor successes for propaganda and demagoguery, arguably winter has already set in for liberal democracy itself: the coming years will be critical in determining the future shape of the political world order, and the developments to come will affect the lives of many millions of people. "Navigating this emerging cultural chaos will be confusing, and disturbing at times, at least for the generation which grew up in the more settled times of the late 20th century. But it will be exciting, and rich with possibility" (McNair 2009: 349). Yes, winter is coming for journalism, but the existing, emerging, and potential practices of journalistic and para-journalistic news engagement documented in this volume also show that a vast number of news users are now prepared also to report, disseminate, discuss, and curate the news, with or without the help of professional news workers. This will not and cannot replace conventional journalism, but it has the potential to facilitate the critical engagement with the news that an industry operating under conditions of precarity can no longer reliably undertake on our behalf—especially in the new social media spaces where a substantial amount of everyday news engagement now takes place. Such developments are a source of hope, even in our troubled times.

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FROM GATEKEEPING TO GATEWATCHING

The First Wave of Citizen Media

A number of scholars have argued that the daily chroniclers and pamphleteers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be regarded as the first citizen journalists; Michael Schudson, for instance, suggests that "Joseph Addison in *The Spectator* of 1710 was essentially a blogger" (2013: 199). Modern-day citizen journalism, however, finally emerged in the mid- to late 1990s, and the establishment of the first Independent Media Center (IMC) as an alternative news outlet to cover the 1999 World Trade Organisation summit in Seattle is commonly seen as its break-through moment:

> several hundred media activists, many of whom have been working for years to develop an active independent media through their own organisations, came together in late November 1999 in Seattle to create an IMC to cover protests against the WTO. The Seattle IMC provided coverage of the WTO through both a printed publication called *The Blind Spot* and the first IMC website. While Indymedia is not a conscious mouthpiece of any particular point of view, many Indymedia organisers and people who post to the Indymedia newswires are supporters of the so-called 'anti-globalisation' (alternative globalisation, anti-corporatisation) movement. (Platon and Deuze 2003: 338)

In the Seattle Independent Media Center (which soon became known under the colloquial name of *Indymedia*), some of the core tenets of citizen journal-

ism are visible, therefore: the production of news that is positioned as inherently alternative, and even oppositional, to mainstream and commercial media coverage, by a dedicated group of participants—concerned citizens—who may have had some experience producing news and media content, but are not formally and professionally accredited as journalists.

The activities of *Indymedia*'s citizen journalist operation were in line with the broader DIY media ethos that was prevalent in the late 1990s, which was inspired by the emergence of the first 'Web 2.0' platforms for the creation and publication of user-generated content; the Seattle IMC, and a host of *Indymedia* sites which would soon be set up in locations all over the world, all put an "emphasis on the *production*, rather than the *consumption*, of media texts" (Meikle 2002: 87). For *Indymedia*, this attitude was driven also by a deep distrust of the accuracy and objectivity of mainstream media, which were perceived as being too closely aligned with dominant political and corporate interests (Hyde 2002)—inspired by a lyric from musician Jello Biafra, *Indymedia* therefore adopted "don't hate the media, become the media" as an underlying motto.

Given such distrust of the editorial decisions made in and by the mainstream media, the alternative vision of news and journalism that *Indymedia* developed therefore embraced an ethic of radical openness and transparency. Central to its initial operations was the principle of 'open publishing': "there is no gatekeeping and no editorial selection process—participants are free to upload whatever they choose, from articles and reports to announcements and appeals for equipment or advice" (Meikle 2002: 89), with the custom-built *Indymedia* online publishing platform immediately posting such articles to the Website and its newsfeeds. Tarleton therefore describes the IMC publishing philosophy as "an end-run around the information gatekeepers, made possible by the technology of the Internet" (2000: 53).

Indeed, internal plans for the further development of the *Indymedia* platform, and of the publishing processes it was intended to enable, envisaged an even more comprehensive redesign of conventional news production approaches: in order to fully realise another IMC catchphrase, "Everyone is a witness. Everyone is a journalist. Everyone edits." (Arnison 2002: n.p.), *Indymedia* developers planned to move away from the immediate and unedited publication of user-submitted stories by introducing a fully transparent "open editing" stage, which would continue to provide full access to all submitted articles but would also reveal the subsequent changes made by other members of the *Indymedia* collective and enable the public to review their editorial

discussions and decisions; leading developer Matthew Arnison outlined this agenda in an article that describes open editing as "a crucial part of open publishing" (2002). Although never implemented in their entirety, such proposals demonstrate that the Seattle IMC and the multitude of Independent Media Centers that followed it were never just meant as short-term responses to specific political events or issues, but—as their very name implies—also offered a radical critique of the *modus operandi* practiced in the journalism industry of the late twentieth century.

As Atton puts it, then,

> Indymedia reporting not only presents an alternative agenda, it also presents different ways of thinking about the world. To explore the construction of news is to ask questions about how reality is constructed; the professional norms of sourcing, framing and storytelling establish expectations for journalists and audiences about how to represent the world. … By placing apparently competing representations of the world alongside each other, Indymedia offers the possibility of a comparative critique. (Atton 2013: 139–40)

Such critique carried considerable force at first, and the initial impact of *Indymedia* on the public and scholarly perception of conventional journalism should not be underestimated. As noted, *Indymedia* also rode the wave of a broader move towards user-generated content and DIY media that was associated with the emergence of what at the time was described as 'Web 2.0', and the visibility of the Seattle IMC, whose activities were themselves covered by the mainstream media, led quickly to the establishment of a range of affiliated *Indymedia* sites around the world, usually drawing on the same open-source publishing platform developed by Matthew Arnison and a number of other volunteers. As Meikle reports, "in the ten months following Seattle, a network of more than 30 such IMCs had been set up, each using the same freely circulated software, and each relying on individual participants or visitors to submit content" (2002: 90). By the mid-2000s some 150 *Indymedia* sites were in existence, though at varying levels of activity and quality.

However, such genuine successes in spreading the *Indymedia* approach must also be contrasted with increasing challenges in sustaining this effort. The singular, event-driven focus of the Seattle Independent Media Center, which temporarily united activists of diverse political persuasions under the same IMC banner, did not translate easily to the longer-term challenge of providing general, multi-issue alternative news coverage; the short-term enthusiasm for 'becoming the media' during the event was difficult to sustain as

contributors returned to their everyday lives. But most crucially, perhaps, the light-touch open publishing philosophy of the *Indymedia* content production model also proved too easy to subvert and undermine in the absence of more fully developed open editing procedures:

> it is as if in its rush to privilege non-hierarchical, ultra-democratic and non-professionalised ways of doing newswork, the Indymedia project has ignored the threats to its independence that come through its open-publishing technology. When racists, anti-Semites and homophobes can 'publish' on its sites as easily as can the human rights campaigner, the environmental activist or the social anarchist, are we truly seeing a socially responsible journalism in action? When even the liberal mainstream press does not permit such unfettered access to its pages does alternative journalism even get close to its ideal of progressive social change? (Atton 2003: 269–70)

Although the *Indymedia* initiative must be recognised for its initial successes and its thoroughly innovative approach to generating and publishing citizen journalism content, then, we must also note that the organisational models it adopted turned out to be thoroughly unsustainable. Nonetheless, in spite of these practical challenges (many of which we will encounter again in different guises throughout this book), its role in popularising the idea of citizen journalism at the close of the twentieth century makes *Indymedia* the appropriate place to begin our account of how news practices have transformed in the context of continuing and considerable changes to local, national, and global media environments. Although *Indymedia* itself could not sustain the success of its intervention in the media coverage of the Seattle WTO meeting, and was ultimately hampered by internal contradictions that were never successfully resolved, it also provided an inspiration and a partial blueprint for many collective and individual citizen journalism and alternative news initiatives that followed.

Most importantly, by adopting a distinct journalistic ideology, implementing that ideology in the design of its site and the publishing processes underlying it, and applying this approach to a major news event, *Indymedia* became one of the first alternative media initiatives to model the core traits of citizen journalism as Kaufhold *et al*. describe them:

> *citizen journalism* is defined by a number of attributes which make it distinct from professional journalism, including unpaid work, absence of professional training, and often unedited publication of content, and may feature plain language, distinct story selection and news judgment, … free accessibility, and interactivity. (Kaufhold *et al.* 2010: 517)

Inherent in this description, and in the very term 'citizen journalism' itself, is a fundamental distinction from professional journalism—but this goes beyond the mere circumstances under which the journalistic work is performed (that is, whether news authors are paid or have had training as journalists): arguably much more crucial to the self-definition of citizen journalists is their departure from long-held principles of professional journalistic news coverage, and especially from the role that "journalistic values and norms such as objectivity, accuracy, and fairness" (Kim and Lowrey 2015: 300) play in the production of news. Citizen journalists did not necessarily dismiss such values outright, but held the view that professional journalism in the late 1990s and early 2000s often itself failed to realise such lofty ambitions, and that there was both a need and an opportunity to counterbalance these shortcomings by establishing alternative news publications. Where professional journalists were disinterested observers first, and citizens second, citizen journalists were in the first place also personally, immediately involved.

Perceptions of the technological potential of new communication platforms on the World Wide Web, and of the failure of contemporary news outlets to realise this potential, also played an important role here: the prevailing view was that the Internet had become "a new site for old activities", and "mainly dominated by existing political actors and other elites. It was politics as usual" (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 21). Citizen journalists saw the opportunity to establish alternative voices online and encourage the interactive participation of other citizens, not least also by exploring the opportunities for new processes and formats that 'Web 2.0' technologies afforded them.

The impact of the considerable technological shifts occurring at the time must not be underestimated here. Growing levels of Internet access and emerging platforms for user-generated content (UGC) lowered the barriers to access and participation in online publishing to a considerable degree (Jenkins and Thorburn 2003: 12), enabling what Douglas Rushkoff has described as a "leap to authorship" (2003: 35) for a growing number of people at least in developed and democratic nations. Although the majority of the content creation and publication activities that ensued were not overtly related to news and politics, the societal and democratic implications of this development were then and have continued to this day to be widely recognised by practitioners, scholars, and policy-makers alike; as Chadwick writes, "the Internet is creating a more open and fluid political opportunity structure—one that increasingly enables the public to exert its influence and hold politicians and media to account" (2011: 5). This should not be misunderstood as an imme-

diate and inevitable democratisation of media production, however—a range of sociodemographic, economic, and other factors continued to prevent a full levelling of the media playing field.

Key Elements of Citizen Journalism

Indymedia was neither the first nor ultimately the most widely read citizen journalism site—yet in its own development after the 'Battle of Seattle' it also demonstrates the gradual emergence and crystallisation of a number of key practices and approaches that were widely embraced by citizen journalists. In the first place, of course, *Indymedia* in its original Seattle model focussed on first-hand reporting: this is citizen journalism in the truest sense of the term—an inherently activist and oppositional form of journalism performed by citizens disenchanted with the coverage of major events by the established mainstream media. Except for the 'open publishing' approach used on the platform, the news gathering, authoring, and publication activities carried out by these citizen journalists would have been immediately familiar to professional journalists, even if they may have disagreed with the attitude, style, and political leanings of the eventual outcomes.

Such first-hand citizen reporting remained exceptional, however: citizen journalists were only in the position to report in this way if they took the time to travel to the scene of major events, or were unexpectedly caught up in them. The voluntary and unpaid nature of citizen journalism activities made it very unlikely that aspiring citizen journalists could afford it regularly to take substantial time off from their day-to-day commitments to engage in intensive first-hand reporting. Where such first-hand citizen reporting continued to occur, therefore, it was largely limited to local and hyperlocal reporting activities that required no more than a hobbyist's commitment—a model which the creation of an international network of localised Independent Media Centers actively encouraged. Only a handful of the first generation of citizen journalists—including for instance the *Drudge Report*'s Matt Drudge or *Crikey*'s Stephen Mayne—were able to sustain a more intensive commitment to the cause, supported by independent wealth and/or online advertising income.

Consequently, the vast majority of citizen journalists turned their focus towards the other major role of journalism in contemporary society: that of analysis, interpretation, and commentary. These activities depend not on a personal presence at the scene where newsworthy events are being played out, but in-

stead require access only to reliable reports about these events, or to the original source materials that underpin them. Citizen journalism of this type can therefore be seen as a kind of second-order journalism: it feeds on, processes, and evaluates the products of first-order, mainstream journalism, and puts these into greater context by examining them in combination and from a range of perspectives. This citizen journalism thus comes to represent what Herbert Gans described as a "second tier" of media, whose core purpose it is to interact with and interrogate the outputs of the first, mainstream tier of news media. Gans identified a need for the establishment of such a second tier as early as 1980:

> one of the purposes of the second tier is to continue where the central media leave off: to supply further and more detailed news for and about the perspectives of the audiences they serve. In the process, these media would also function as monitors and critics of the central media, indicating where and how, by their standards, the central media have been insufficiently multiperspectival. (1980: 322)

The technological changes that occurred between Gans's initial sketch of a two-tier media system in 1980 and the arrival of citizen journalism in the late 1990s further supported the establishment of this monitorial role. The introduction of cable television, 24-hour news channels, and eventually of online news platforms during the 1980s and 1990s meant a substantial multiplication of readily accessible channels through which citizen journalists could access diverse news stories about a given event, issue, or topic. Further, the growing use especially of online platforms for the direct publication of press releases, export reports, scholarly analysis, and other source information to the public—which commenced in earnest with the introduction of the World Wide Web—now meant that "in effect, the pipeline goes straight to the citizen" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999: 89): interested users could now bypass journalistic filters altogether. Sources themselves were "increasingly geared towards addressing their constituencies directly instead of using the news media as a go-between" (Bardoel and Deuze 2001: 98; cf. Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 13)—as a recent BBC report on the *Future of News* puts it, "the journalist's competitor is no longer another journalist. Often, it's the subject of the story. Political parties, celebrities, corporations communicate directly with the public" (BBC 2015: 8). This enabled interested citizen journalists to compare mainstream news reports across news outlets, or with original source material, to detect and critique different choices of framing or emphasis, or to introduce additional background information into the evaluation of a news story even if such information had not been incorporated into the articles authored by professional journalists.

Gatewatching, Not Gatekeeping

Most crucially, then, this monitorial, second-tier citizen journalism presents an important challenge to the role of mainstream journalists, editors, and outlets as news gatekeepers. "Editors and news directors might still be minding gates for their organizations, but so many gates now exist that one or two—or even a hundred—closed gates will not prevent information from being published. There will always be an open gate somewhere" (Vos 2015: 6). This raises questions about the continuing relevance of the journalistic gatekeeping model.

At a time of information and channel scarcity—when access to original news sources was available only to professional journalists, when local and even national populations were served by a strictly limited number of newspapers and terrestrial broadcast channels, and when the total space available for newsprint, and total time available for news broadcasts, was subject to significant limitations—news outlets were forced to make difficult choices about what of all available information was worth reporting to their audiences, and indeed performed a crucial public service in selecting "all the news that's fit to print", as the famous *New York Times* catch-cry goes. Yet as technological advancements have reduced such scarcity by allowing electronic news channels to multiply beyond count, that rationale for a strict gatekeeping regime has similarly faded: "in a world of ones and zeros, information is no longer scarce, hard to produce, nor difficult to repurpose and share" (Lewis 2012: 838). The justification for news selection is therefore now driven almost entirely by financial and commercial motives: how many news stories can a limited staff of journalists and editors produce in a given period of time, and what stories will attract a loyal audience? It is also, for at least some news organisations, a matter of politics. And the impact of such choices has become much more obvious to audiences that—especially online—are able to access competing news reports about the same event or issue that originate from all over the nation, and from all over the world.

This undermines the "implicit bargain between journalists and the public—an assumption about how society should handle the collection, filtering, and distribution of news information" (Lewis 2012: 838)—which entrusted journalists and news organisations with the role of news gatekeeper on behalf of the wider public. Now, at the turn of the new millennium, that public—and especially those members of the public who felt the calling to position themselves as citizen journalists—were able to take matters into their own

hands, covering especially those stories that they felt professional journalism had ignored, and adding alternative perspectives to those stories that professional journalism had already covered, but in insufficient detail. Where "gatekeeping placed the power over communication flows squarely with information professionals: … most of all reporters, editors, and other members of the press" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 27), now citizen journalists without such professional domestication sought to claw back some of that power by asserting their own, often very different judgments about what information was newsworthy and deserved coverage.

While the news organisations in the first tier of the media (the mainstream newspapers and broadcasters, and their online offshoots) continued to exercise an in-house gatekeeping regime, then—and increasingly used differences in their gatekeeping choices and overall news judgments as a point of differentiation not only from their established local competitors but also from the increasing national and international competition that the Internet's growing role as a news medium created—the Websites operated by citizen journalists generally never assumed an overt gatekeeping role. Rather, they selected the news stories that they were interested in and that they believed they could make a meaningful contribution to, and added to the existing mainstream coverage by pulling together, juxtaposing, interpreting, and critiquing various mainstream reports, background information, and source materials. This, then, is a distinctly different approach that I have described as *gatewatching* (Bruns 2005): the continuous observation of material that passes through the output gates of news outlets and other sources, in order to identify relevant such material for publication and discussion in the gatewatcher's own site.

Indeed, gatewatching may more often result in the further *publicising* of already available material (in full, in excerpt, or in the form of a link to the original source) than in the *publication* of entirely new content authored by the gatewatchers themselves—but such (re)publicising of existing content can nonetheless have a crucial impact on news flows. It aids the visibility of the source material and brings it to the attention of new audiences (much as the republication of wire services reports in print and broadcast news has traditionally done in the mainstream media), while adding further interpretation and contextualisation. In the process, the news becomes more multiperspectival, as multiple bloggers add their own commentary and analysis of the source material. While "the posting of established media source material does raise the question of whether this simply re-legitimises those media as the authentic forum for news" (Meikle 2002: 100), then, the answer to that question

depends crucially on the evaluation added by the gatewatcher in the process of republicising and reposting the material.

By comparison to the challenges facing citizen journalists seeking to engage in original reporting, such secondary reporting and analysis presents considerably lower barriers to access; in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it therefore became a much more widespread practice for online engagement with the news. This was aided also by the fact that online publishing in this period no longer required the creation of a dedicated, stand-alone citizen journalism site (such as *Indymedia*), but became substantially more accessible with the introduction of a number of popular blogging platforms. While the rapid growth of the international blogosphere in this period was driven by a range of interests, from publishing personal diaries to establishing a professional identity, blogs about news and politics therefore accounted for a substantial subset of this emerging phenomenon. From here on it is more appropriate to speak of citizen journalists and news bloggers as elements of a broader first wave of citizen media, then—with citizen journalists representing the more formalised, stand-alone model of sites such as *Indymedia*, and news bloggers representing the decentralised network of news-related sites in the overall blogosphere.

Collaborative Online News Production

Gatewatching was the foundational practice that united both ends of this spectrum from formal citizen journalism to occasional news blogging, augmented where feasible perhaps by some original citizen reporting. But such gatewatching was directed not only at the first-tier news organisations and other 'official' sources, but also at the gates of fellow citizen journalists and news bloggers, to observe, publicise, and potentially critique how they are interpreting the news. This engagement and debate between individual news blogs and citizen journalism sites—conducted largely through linking to and commenting on each other's posts—turned the process of news analysis and evaluation into a collaborative activity: in addition to the (largely one-directional) connection between societal elites and ordinary citizens that is facilitated by the conventional mainstream media, "now the horizontal flow, citizen-to-citizen, is as real and consequential as the vertical one", as blog evangelist Jay Rosen (2006: n.p.) claimed.

A range of studies have investigated how these processes of interaction and collaboration have unfolded across the network of citizen journalism sites and news blogs (e.g. Adamic and Glance 2005; Bruns and Adams 2009; High-

field 2011; Nuernbergk 2013), and it is no surprise that the mapping of hyperlink networks became a particularly popular research method around the same time that news blogging rose to prominence and influence. What such research has shown is that the collective and collaborative evaluation and acknowledgment of diverse perspectives on the news does not simply result in an equality of voices, however insightful or ill-informed they may be. Rather, time and again a number of especially prominent sites emerge, due variously to their gatewatching skills in sourcing and highlighting valuable information; the quality of their analysis and commentary on current issues in the news; or also to their sheer work ethic as consistent and reliable commentators on events. At the same time, the composition of this leadership group is also changeable and topic-dependent—only few citizen journalist sites and news blogs (usually those operated by a group of authors) ever managed to establish themselves as news generalists, while the majority focussed on specific news beats relating to their interests and expertise (Highfield 2011). This observation points to the fact that such citizen media phenomena generally should not be judged by examining the merits of individual sites and actors, but instead must be evaluated as a broader ecosystem of interdependent elements.

In a further break with the journalistic tradition established up to that point, such citizen journalism sites and news blogs usually also included their audiences as active contributors in the continued process of covering the news. While commentary and discussion features were added to mainstream news sites only reluctantly, and even then remained clearly distinct from the material contributed by professional journalists, equivalent participatory functionality constituted an integral element in this second tier of news-related sites right from their inception. These sites eroded the distinctions between author and audience to a significant degree by extending an invitation if not to contribute new articles themselves, then at least to comment on the articles published by the operators of these sites. Commenters on these sites were therefore positioned as what could be described as internal gatewatchers, observing and evaluating the output of the sites' authors and holding them to account where their coverage and analysis was found wanting; authors, in turn, were thus encouraged to respond to feedback and continue the conversation. This modelled, in many ways, the level of engagement that many contributors would have liked to see from professional journalists on mainstream sites as well. (Notably, though, the extent to which commenters engaged and authors responded on citizen journalism sites and news blogs also varied widely.)

What emerged from this is a form of engagement with the news that is collective, distributed, and participatory—a more detailed evaluation of current news stories might eventually emerge not from reading a single news blogger's commentary, but only from following the discussion across a number of interlinked pieces on different sites, and from engaging in the commentary threads attached to them. Not only because of their reliance on mainstream news reports and other source materials, but also because of this distributed and decentralised nature of the news discourse that their practices created, citizen journalists and news bloggers can therefore no longer be regarded as producing discrete news stories; neither can their active, commenting audiences be understood as mere users of the news. Rather, what emerged here is a more complex and incremental process that results in the gradual coverage and evaluation of the news—a process which might be best understood as a form of news *produsage*, positioning authors and audiences not simply as producers or users of news but instead enabling them both to become hybrid *produsers* (Bruns 2008a).

Unfinished News

A side effect of this shift from discrete production to continuing produsage, then, is also a reconceptualisation of the news as continually unfinished. As Hiler wrote at the time, "the Blogosphere is pioneering a new form of iterative journalism" (Hiler 2002: n.p.); it serves as a news evaluation engine whose inner workings are considerably different from those of the conventional mainstream media:

> the order of things in broadcast is 'filter, then publish.' The order in communities is 'publish, then filter.' … Writers submit their stories in advance, to be edited or rejected before the public ever sees them. Participants in a community, by contrast, say what they have to say, and the good is sorted from the mediocre after the fact. (Shirky 2002: n.p.)

As this builds on a continuous, collective, uncoordinated gatewatching effort by participating citizen journalists, news bloggers, and their commenters, the result is that "instead of being primarily journalist-centered, the news online appears increasingly to be also user-centered" (Boczkowski 2004: n.p.).

This too constituted a substantial break with established practice in the mainstream journalism industry, where—partly again for organisational and economic reasons—news stories and the formats in which they were packaged

(newspapers and broadcast bulletins) had to be designed as discrete, complete packages that would suit the publication rhythms of print newspapers and broadcast bulletins. Meg Pickard, then Head of Digital Engagement at *The Guardian*, has criticised this traditional perspective as recently as 2011: "journalists all too often create, publish and then go back to the beginning. And when something is out there live in the world, their engagement (interest) may already have moved on, even as users/readers are starting to consume, interact, share" (Pickard 2011: n.p.). By contrast, news engagement in citizen journalism and news blogs is always unfinished, much like the news itself, as incremental news updates on unfolding stories are constantly coming to hand, and are being uncovered through the practice of gatewatching.

Unfolding in a continuous cycle of gatewatching and publication, which becomes input for further gatewatching and publication—what Pickard describes as "a constant, rippling collaboration of skills, insight and activity around a context of mutual interest, for mutual benefit" (Pickard 2011: n.p.)—the engagement of news bloggers and citizen journalists with the outputs of mainstream news outlets and other sources (and increasingly also the incorporation of such citizen journalism content back into the mainstream news) thus turns the news from product to process. This, too, is typical for produsage: news bloggers and citizen journalists continually make small, incremental changes and additions to our understanding of a news story, potentially without ever contributing a major, fully authored news article in their own right. Even the mere linking to or republishing of excerpts from an existing news article can contribute to this process of news produsage, simply by increasing the visibility of a piece of information that otherwise might have been lost amongst a multitude of other items. Beyond the world of the first-tier citizen media platforms that are the focus of this chapter, we will encounter the dynamics of such a republicising of existing information through small, random citizen-journalistic interventions again in the following chapters as we turn our attention to more contemporary forms of news engagement via social media.

Ultimately, this shift from news as product to news as process also served to highlight the constructed nature of the news, and reveals the inner workings of journalistic news selection. Previously, "the gathering and processing stages [were] performed in the backstage area, concealed from the audience. The final product [was] then distributed, moving it to the frontstage area, where the audience consume[d] the news product" (Karlsson 2011: 282). Now, however, the availability of news reports and updates on the same event or issue in a

wide variety of states—from brief newsflashes to considered analyses; from original source statements to detailed commentary—implicitly pointed to the choices that various journalists and commentators have made in constructing their own articles. Where "traditionally, journalism has been among the most opaque of industries" and "the media have effectively remained a black box", now it became possible for readers to retrace "how the sausage is made" (Singer 2005: 179).

The First Wave of Citizen Media

These three key elements—gatewatching as a foundational information-gathering practice; collaborative news evaluation by distributed networks of participants; and the transformation of news from finished product to unfinished process—underpinned the operations of this first wave of citizen journalism and news blogging. Whether perceived as 'proper' journalism or not, it is evident from the success of many of the citizen media sites that emerged in the early years of the new millennium that online news audiences—or more accurately, news users—had a strong appetite for these new, alternative, and more or less participatory platforms. Stand-alone platforms such as the *Drudge Report* or the *Huffington Post* in the United States made important contributions as irreverent and opinionated spaces for political debate and gossip, while technology news site *Slashdot* positioned itself as a crucial source of industry news compiled exclusively from the contributions of its users (Chan 2002; Bruns 2005). Elsewhere in the world, sites such as the South Korean *OhmyNews* (Kahney 2003) or the Australian *Crikey* combined journalistic reporting and opinionated analysis with the explicit aim to address a gap for progressive and independent news in domestic markets characterised by a limited diversity of news outlets.

Several such publications emerged to greater prominence at first through the efforts of charismatic, driven individuals; Williams and Delli Carpini give the following character reference for the *Drudge Report*'s founder Matt Drudge, for instance, in the context of his role in breaking the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal: "by combining the sensibilities of a gadfly, a seemingly unquenchable hunger for celebrity, acceptance, and power, and the opportunities for gaining access to a wide public presented by the internet … Drudge undermined the gatekeeping function of the mainstream press and political elites" (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 72). Similar, if perhaps less harsh, descriptions apply

to the *Huffington Post*'s Arianna Huffington, *OhmyNews*' Oh Yeon Ho, or *Crikey* founder Stephen Mayne, as well as to many other first-wave citizen journalists and news bloggers who made significant commitments of time and money in establishing and developing their sites.

These flagships of citizen journalism were further accompanied by a much larger but rather less prominent flotilla of news blogs, initiated by individual and collective operators. This highly active and interconnected news blogosphere discussed the topics of the day from a wide variety of political, specialist, professional, and personal perspectives, in vastly divergent styles and rhythms of publication. These blogs, as well as the leading sites themselves, ultimately also profited from the increasing familiarity of online audiences with the generic and stylistic conventions of the blog format, as *Huffington Post* co-founder Jonah Peretti recalls:

> [the *Huffington Post*] had all the things that blogs were supposed to have so that people who knew about blogging would see it and say, "Oh, [comedian] Larry David is blogging [on the site]." Not, "Larry David's doing some weird new thing that Arianna Huffington invented." (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

In keeping with the gatewatching approach, the myriad of news blogs, but also those sites that would eventually emerge as leaders of this citizen media movement, predominantly assumed what Bardoel and Deuze (2001) describe as a "guidedog" role: they focussed on the processing and evaluation of available information from a variety of sources. Bowman and Willis describe this as "annotative reporting" , and highlight such practices as motivated to a significant extent by a perception of shortcomings in conventional media reporting: "adding to, or supplementing, the information in a given story is the goal of many participants who believe that a particular point of view, angle or piece of information is missing from coverage in the mainstream media" (2003: 34–35).

Crucially, much of this criticism is also focussed on reviewing gatekeeping choices: implicitly or explicitly, citizen journalists and news bloggers followed Herbert Gans's suggestion that "it is proper to ask who should be responsible for story selection and production. The news may be too important to leave to the journalists alone" (1980: 322). For any given event, issue, or topic, by adding to, commenting on, and juxtaposing the coverage by diverse mainstream media outlets this second tier of news blogs and citizen journalism sites also made explicit how professional journalists chose to report and frame the story by selecting and highlighting specific facts over others. Thus, "the internet

has challenged virtually all aspects of [the] journalistic gatekeeping concept" (Singer 2005: 178): even if this emerging set of second-tier news sites was inherently positioned as subordinate to the mainstream news organisations, they were able to generate real influence because the mainstream media were at times forced to acknowledge their shortcomings and introduce the analysis and commentary published in this second tier into their own coverage; indeed, then, "one way to measure the success of many of the projects … is to ask how effectively they can use the Net to force their cause onto the agenda of the mainstream media" (Meikle 2002: 8).

As a result, several major political scandals of the late 1990s and early 2000s, especially in the United States, have been shaped in significant ways by the interventions of news bloggers and citizen journalists: for instance, the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal began with revelations published in the *Drudge Report*; the news blogosphere combined to keep alive the story that Republican Senate Leader Trent Lott had made statements in support of racial segregation, eventually leading to his resignation from the leadership; blogs also played an important role in the critical evaluation of documents purporting to show inconsistencies in U.S. President George W. Bush's Air National Guard service record, which eventually led to the resignation of veteran CBS anchorman Dan Rather; and Ettema singles out influential political blog *Talking Points Memo* for its "relentless tracking of the scandal arising from the [George W.] Bush Administration's improper firing of US attorneys" (Ettema 2009: 320). That these examples are exclusively from the realm of U.S. politics—where news blogs and citizen journalism were first seen to make an impact—should not distract us from the fact that similar, if perhaps less widely known cases have also been observed in many other nations.

Vocal early critics of citizen journalism, such as U.S. columnist John C. Dvorak, are therefore correct in saying that "yes, bloggers have been breaking news stories here and there, but it's usually because they amplify something that media professionals have already written about but that was ignored by the major media" (Dvorak 2006: n.p.), but this is not inherently a cause for criticism. Rather, it is precisely this function of identifying, evaluating, and amplifying aspects in the available record (from mainstream media, as well as from original sources), eventually also in order to re-insert these aspects into the discourse of the mainstream media, that has become the crucial contribution made by this first wave of news blogs and citizen journalism sites. Using the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal as their example, Williams and Delli Carpini point out that this interplay between first-tier mainstream and second-tier

citizen media, as well as between journalistic reporting and original source materials, provides a key demonstration of the hybrid and complexly interwoven media environment of the early twenty-first century:

> the ability of a nation of 250 million people (to say nothing of the world-wide audience) to follow the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal through a host of different media and genres (from straight news to talk shows to satire), and then discuss it and the variety of more fundamental issues it raises with fellow citizens, is a remarkable occurrence. Many aspects of the internet, such as its interactivity, scope, and the ability for all users to become producers as well as consumers of information and opinion, contribute to this deliberative process. (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 75–76)

Importantly, too, in this multi-channel, multi-outlet environment the gatekeeping and framing efforts of individual news actors no longer held significant sway over how the issues at hand are perceived by the news audience: "a large majority of the public … created their own narrative" of the scandal (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 76).

Parasites or Para-Journalists? Citizen Journalism and the Mainstream Media

As a result, these new citizen journalism and news blogging sites began to threaten the agenda-setting power of conventional journalism. As Bardoel and Deuze argued at the time, "the balance of power between journalism and its publics is shifting. … New media technologies and trends in civil society force us to rethink journalism's role at the start of the new millennium" (2001: 92). Gatewatching as a collaborative and continuous form of engagement with and critique of the mainstream news poses fundamental challenges to conventional, professional journalistic processes and practices, or to what Deuze has described as the "occupational ideology" (Deuze 2005: 444) of professional journalists.

Gatewatching, applied to a broad range of journalistic and non-journalistic gates, removes the ability of journalists and editors to deploy gatekeeping in order to determine on behalf of their audiences what information is or is not newsworthy; the distributed evaluation and interpretation of the news highlights the unattainability of the journalistic ideal of objectivity, and instead points to the fact that news reports are always the product of value judgments, framing choices, and more or less conscious personal and institutional biases; and the processual approach to the news undermines journalists' claims to

provide "all the news that's fit to print" even on a single issue or event. In addition, the emergence of credible alternative voices alongside conventional, mainstream journalism—voices that largely fed off yet nonetheless had the tendency to roundly criticise shortcomings in the content produced by professional journalists—necessarily also constituted a significant irritation and in some cases even an existential threat to the journalism industry, itself "a business mainly confined to journalistic elites" (Heinrich 2012b: 61). "All of this", as Lasica put it at the time, "begs the question: Will forms of participatory journalism and traditional journalism complement each other, or collide head on? It may be a bit of both" (2003b: n.p.). That assessment would turn out to be correct, as the first decade of the new millennium showed.

Embracing the People Formerly Known as the Audience

Several journalists and commentators openly welcomed news blogs and citizen journalism sites as increasing the diversity and reach of journalism: journalist and blogger J.D Lasica himself described blogging as "a random act of journalism. And that's the real revolution here: In a world of micro-content delivered to niche audiences, more and more of the small tidbits of news that we encounter each day are being conveyed through personal media—chiefly Weblogs" (2003a: 71). This idea of small-scale, occasional contributions that add up to a greater whole again highlights especially the multiperspectivality of citizen journalism activities, which stems from their significantly lowered barriers to entry: as a broader range of users are able to become *produsers* of the news, however infrequently and randomly, the net volume and diversity of perspectives on the news rises. Such "multiperspectival news is the bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media" (Gans 2003: 103).

Another early proponent of citizen journalism, Dan Gillmor, reflected on how this affects the professional journalist, realising that

> my readers know more than I do. This has become almost a mantra in my work. It is by definition the reality for every journalist, no matter what his or her beat. And it's a great opportunity, not a threat, because when we ask our readers for their help and knowledge, they are willing to share it—and we can all benefit. If modern American journalism has been a lecture, it's evolving into something that incorporates a conversation and seminar. (2003: vi)

This perspective, then, repositions journalism as a more inclusive, collaborative encounter between professional and citizen practitioners; in the process, it also redefines the role of the (professional) journalist, who can now no longer merely be a content producer and publisher, but must also demonstrate community engagement and leadership. As *Instapundit* founder Glenn Reynolds put it, "the term 'correspondent' is reverting to its original meaning of 'one who corresponds'" (2003: 82).

Indeed, echoing John Perry Barlow's famous "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace" (Barlow 1996) in tone and style some 10 years later, journalism researcher and blogger Jay Rosen reflected on the growing role of users in the production and circulation of the news as a result of the rise of citizen journalism and news blogging by publishing a statement on behalf of what he called "the people formerly known as the audience":

> the people formerly known as the audience are those who *were* on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another—and who *today* are not in a situation like that *at all*. (Rosen 2006: n.p.)

Much as Barlow's earlier "Declaration" had claimed a fundamental shift in the power balance between the world's governments and their people, conceiving of those people as free inhabitants of an independent cyberspace, Rosen's "people formerly known as the audience" similarly asserted greater power than they had had before: in this case, over the means of producing and circulating media texts—alongside, in concert with, and sometimes in opposition to the established mainstream news media.

If realised, this power shift would necessarily also have important implications for the structure of democratic society, given the key role played by journalism in informing the people. "The argument at that time suggested [that] the use of blogs would bring a set of fundamental changes to the media and journalism logic …; that is, independent blogs would offer data and opinions on topics … that were not discussed in the mainstream news media" (Bailey and Marques 2012: 398). This was widely seen as heralding a democratisation of news and opinion, and as a crucial shift away from the domination of the news by major political and economic interests: "the democratization of opinion on the net is easily the most important thing to happen to journalism since TV, and the most positive thing to happen to journalism since radio" (Shirky 2001: n.p.).

It should be noted that—particularly in a U.S. context—the need for such a democratisation was felt especially acutely in the early 2000s. In the aftermath of the disputed presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000, and of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and in the lead-up to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that followed, there was a strong sense that mainstream media in the United States (and, to a lesser extent, in many other western nations) were shying away from overtly critical coverage of the 'War on Terror' and related policy decisions for fear of being branded as unpatriotic. "News leadership requires that editorial independence and good editorial judgement must be put in evidence. Most of the leading United States news media comprehensively failed this test during the George W. Bush Presidency" (Tunstall 2009: 387a). This left a vacuum for critical reporting, analysis, and commentary which was readily filled by citizen journalists and news bloggers, to the point that a recognised genre of 'war blogs' began to emerge. (It should be noted here that such blogs were not uniformly anti-war or pacifist, however: a significant proportion supported the Iraq and/or Afghanistan wars as such, but not the military strategies pursued by the Bush/Cheney administration and its allies.)

Indeed, a number of mainstream journalists, frustrated with the limitations imposed on their coverage of the wars by self-censoring news outlets, became war bloggers themselves, and such journalists' blog posts "provided a much broader range of opinions on both the strategies and motivations of all sides in the conflict than were available, particularly to Americans, on broadcast and cable television" (Rushkoff 2003: 17). They were joined by an even larger range of citizen bloggers, in the United States and elsewhere, providing more or less informed commentary from a wide diversity of perspectives—including, most famously, the pseudonymous Iraqi war blogger Salam Pax, whose first-hand reportage from Baghdad during the U.S.-led aerial bombing campaign received world-wide recognition (he was subsequently recruited to write as a columnist for *The Guardian*). In combination, these war bloggers—whatever their attitudes towards the wars themselves—generated a much more in-depth body of reportage and analysis of the wars than the carefully stage-managed and arguably self-censoring coverage in the mainstream media alone could have achieved.

In addition, news bloggers and citizen journalists also played a growing role in the day-to-day coverage of domestic political issues—initially again especially in the United States. Another major breakthrough moment for such news blogging arrived in the subsequent next campaign: "use of digital

technology moved from the periphery toward the center of US politics in the 2004 election cycle" (Singer 2005: 173). Not only did a number of the presidential contenders themselves experiment with campaign blogs for the first time—most notably perhaps the progressive Democrat candidate Howard Dean—, but a handful of political journalists and a much greater number of independent news bloggers also began to cover and analyse the primary campaigns in exhaustive detail in dedicated political blogs (Singer 2005: 176), hosted on mainstream sites or on separate platforms. Eventually, indeed, for the first time a number of bloggers were officially accredited as members of the press at the nominating conventions of both major U.S. parties; such recognition alongside the mainstream media was rightly seen at the time as an acknowledgement that citizen journalism was now a legitimate component of the media system. This meant a considerable blurring between professional journalism on the one hand, and the para-journalism conducted by citizens on the other.

Such developments seem to support Rosen's elegiac assertion that "the people formerly known as the audience are simply *the public* made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable. You should welcome that, media people. But whether you do or not we want you to know we're here" (Rosen 2006: n.p.)—and mainstream media did indeed begin to experiment with a range of approaches for including user contributions into their (online) products. This development and deployment of participatory opportunities proceeded unevenly and with widely varying levels of enthusiasm, however: some news outlets merely sought to modernise their letters-to-the-editor functionality by providing more accessible email addresses and feedback functions, but showed no interest in relinquishing any control over the gatekeeping processes by which such write-ins would be vetted and selected for publication; others re-badged their existing opinion and analysis columns as 'blogs', but failed to also implement the follow-on user commentary and discussion functionality that had proved to be such a crucial element of blogging in the proper sense of the term.

Gradually, however, many news outlets did implement reader commentary functions that they attached to some or all of the news stories and opinion articles they published online. These used various pre- or post-moderation regimes, ranging from the slow and labour-intensive manual review of all user comments before publication, through the automated vetting of comments at the point of publication by testing against a defined set of swearwords and other unacceptable terms, to the selective moderation of comments after pub-

lication when flagged as inappropriate by other participants; for the most part, they also featured very little post-publication involvement from the original authors of the journalistic content that audiences commented on. Although at times such commentary sections, especially if they are well-managed and also involve journalistic staff as ongoing participants, can attract serious and sustained discussion about the matters covered in the original articles, for the most part these sections have therefore turned out to be disorganised and dysfunctional; they are often dominated by the loudest and most persistent voices, and can be subject to significant chilling effects that drown out opposing perspectives (Blom *et al.* 2014).

Importantly, it must be noted that (as the more engaging comments sections in a number of leading news blogs have demonstrated) such dysfunctionality is not inevitable, but results largely from the specific implementation choices made by mainstream news outlets. "Weblogs are far more animated than the often-stilted forums at news Web sites. They elicit a much broader conversation in which what people have to say about what's being written is regarded as being of equal importance" (Grabowicz 2003: 74). By contrast, however, as Bowman and Willis have noted,

> media companies have viewed the concept of online community no differently than a section of a newspaper (à la Letters to the Editor) or a segment of a newscast. It is something that has been segregated from the news—a closed-off annex where readers can talk and discuss, as long as the media companies don't have to be too involved. Such an architected virtual space is not a true online community. Real communities have leaders, moderators and involved participants who care about their space. (2003: 55)

Notably, some leading news outlets have at times attempted to advance beyond the deployment of merely tokenistic spaces for user participation that remain segregated from the 'real' business of journalism. In 2006, for instance, CNN launched its iReport initiative, "in order to collect user-generated content for breaking news stories. The program invited people to send pictures and mobile footage through the website CNN.com. After being reviewed by CNN's editors, the best content could be aired on the broadcasting channel" (Bruno 2011: 45); the initiative was gradually expanded to become an online community of citizen reporters that was also prominently featured on the CNN homepage, and has made important contributions especially to the coverage of breaking news stories and other major events by harnessing a greater range of eyewitness perspectives.

Similarly recognising the growing importance of user-generated content (UGC), "in June 2005 a team of BBC journalists started to sow the seeds of

what would soon become their 'UGC Hub', a desk at the core of the BBC newsroom in charge of searching, verifying, and distributing material produced directly by citizens" (Bruno 2011: 29). Again, the UGC Hub plays a prominent role especially in the context of breaking news events when the BBC's own reportorial resources are unable to capture the full picture of unfolding stories:

> initially only three journalists were assigned to the Hub, but after the 2009 Iranian revolt the BBC decided to invest more heavily in the project. [In 2011,] about 23 journalists work full-time at the UGC Hub, providing 24/7 coverage of material circulating in the social media environments. According to BBC data, every day they process something like 10,000 user contributions of various types. (Bruno 2011: 31–32)

The BBC's Matthew Eltringham has charted the gradual learning curve within the organisation that led to the establishment of the UGC Hub, and highlights especially the experience of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, "when the BBC … received thousands of—largely unsolicited—emails, pictures and videos that were testimony to a dramatic and tragic story" (Eltringham 2010: n.p.), and of the 7 July 2005 terrorist attacks in London, when user-generated eyewitness evidence of the attacks was available well ahead of official statements, but was not yet being efficiently incorporated into journalistic processes:

> when I analysed what the audience had told us about the momentous events of that day, I discovered we had credible intelligence of every single one of the four bombs by 9:58am—including one that told us of the Tavistock Square bomb by 9:55am; just ten minutes after it had happened. At that time the BBC, and the rest of the media, were still reporting that there had been some kind of signalling or electrical fault. These erroneous reports moved one eyewitness, Lou Stern, to send in his pictures of the bus bomb because, as he put it, it clearly wasn't a signalling fault. (Eltringham 2010: n.p.)

The UGC Hub was a response to these shortcomings, then, and sought to harness the BBC's audience "for news-gathering purposes" (Stray 2010: n.p.) as citizen journalists—Eltringham describes this as "'social newsgathering' or, put another way, 'finding good stuff on the web'" (Eltringham 2010: n.p.).

Protecting the Journalistic Profession through Boundary Work

Although initiatives such as CNN's iReport and the BBC UGC Hub clearly recognised the value of citizen reporting in the context of major news events that are—at least at first—inaccessible to journalists, however, they also main-

tained a clear distinction between the role of citizens as (occasional) sources of newsworthy information on the one hand, and the role of the journalist as analyst and author of news reports on the other hand. Even major initiatives like the UGC Hub did not conceive of citizens as journalists in any meaningful sense of the term; they merely made it easier for them to become sources of eyewitness information. The participatory position afforded to ordinary users in such contexts lagged well behind what was available to them in the context of independent news blogs and citizen journalism sites, where they were able to author and publish their own news reports, analyses, and opinion pieces. Even iReport and the UGC Hub, to say nothing of the lesser commentary functions half-heartedly implemented to placate the participatory demands of online audiences-turned-users, therefore represent what Singer has described as "an industry determinedly clinging to the conviction that their gatekeeping role remained essential. At best, many acknowledged a potential shift in emphasis: away from control over the availability of information to control over its quality" (Singer 2015: 86–87).

Such reluctant and limited engagement with the participatory possibilities of 'Web 2.0' publishing technologies must be understood as a form of boundary work, and is common across a wide range of domains afflicted by sudden and unpredictable changes to their communicatory and media environments: "traditional elites … often attempt to reinforce their position by boundary drawing, sealing off aspects of their mediated practices from outside influences. However, as media systems become more hybrid, the power of elite organisational actors has generally weakened" (Chadwick *et al.* 2016: 18). Although journalism is not alone in engaging in such boundary work—Chadwick *et al.* also highlight similar tendencies in politics, for instance—Lewis argues that attempts to draw a clear line between 'professional' journalists and 'amateur' audiences are especially well developed here, "in part because of journalism's malleable, evolving character—especially in the digital era—and also in part because journalists tend to talk openly about such things, as in the highly public 'battle' over blogging as journalism" (Lewis 2012: 842).

Indeed, one major reason that journalism has been especially forceful—if not necessarily particularly successful—in its attempts to establish clear demarcations between professional practitioners and amateur enthusiasts has been the fact that the factors that distinguish both sides from each other are not particularly well-defined, even in spite of the prevalence of the term 'professional' to describe mainstream journalists. Detractors of the citizen journalism concept frequently argue from colourful analogies such as this: "citizen

journalism, to me, is like citizen professional baseball—it's just not practical. You can't play professional baseball just because you think the Seattle Mariners stink. You're not a good enough ballplayer" (Dvorak 2006: n.p.). Yet the analogy (and others have similarly compared citizen journalists with 'citizen surgeons' or 'citizen airline pilots') does not withstand sustained scrutiny: on the one hand, sportspeople *are* frequently recruited from amateur leagues into professional teams, because sporting abilities rely crucially on innate physical attributes that are harnessed and improved by regular training and exercise—self-evidently, one can *not* become the next Usain Bolt simply by training as a professional athlete, unless one meets specific physical requirements beforehand. On the other hand, contrary to the deep disciplinary knowledge required to become a surgeon or pilot, the journalistic profession requires comparatively little inherent specialisation and has no formal requirements of entry: "journalism is *not* science" (Carlson and Lewis 2015: n.p.), and as many scholars have noted should be regarded as a craft rather than as a profession (Lewis 2012: 843). Notably, such disciplinary expertise is required of journalists if they specialise in a particular news beat (such as science or business reporting)—but that expertise is the expertise related to the field of the beat: it is the expertise of scientists or entrepreneurs, rather than of journalists.

It is therefore in fact entirely plausible for a domain expert (in science, in business, or elsewhere) to become a credible journalistic or quasi-journalistic voice in their field, if they can accumulate sufficient practice in the craft of journalism (chiefly, the skills to determine the facts of a matter, and to present a cogent analysis and argument based on those facts), even if they have had no formal training as a journalist; in fact, such experts populate the opinion columns of the mainstream news outlets, too. What was different about the emergence of citizen journalists and news bloggers, however, was that—unlike such domain experts and other pundits who have been domesticated into journalistic practice on the initiative of the news industry itself—these new participants in the news process assumed their positions as analysts and commentators without seeking professional journalism's approval to do so. They therefore also felt free to vocally criticise mainstream journalism, because their access to the media system did not depend on the news industry's continued good will. As a result, "the blogging community is far from shy about going after journalists for offenses real and imagined, shocking thin-skinned journalists unused to being scrutinized [in] the way they scrutinize others" (Singer 2005: 180).

As Wall recalls, there was therefore "a less-than enthusiastic embrace by many traditional news outlets, as a 'clash of cultures' erupted in which amateur content, fueled by a growing participatory ethos, conflicted with the perceived needs of professional journalists to maintain their authority" (Wall 2015: 798). Australia's 'blog wars' of 2007 provide a vivid illustration of this clash of cultures (cf. Bruns 2008b Bruns and Highfield 2012). In the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, which pitted the 11-year-old conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard against his new Labor Party challenger Kevin Rudd, national opinion polls had long predicted a substantial shift of votes towards Labor, making the defeat of the incumbent government in a landslide result increasingly likely. However, several conservative newspapers in the country, led by the national daily *The Australian*, continued to publish series of upbeat electoral analyses that predicted that an inevitable 'narrowing' of the opinion polls would occur closer to election day and would result in the re-election of the Howard government.

This perspective, in turn, was hotly disputed by a number of independent blogs that provided their own analyses of the polls, based on the publicly available raw polling data. On sites with deliberately self-ironic names such as *Possums Pollytics* or *The Poll Bludger*, these bloggers published detailed long-term studies of polling data, compared against historical polling trends and taking account of the margins of error of available polls, to conclusively debunk the thesis of an impending 'narrowing' and a re-election of the government. Notably, they also engaged in additional post-publication discussion with their readers to address further questions and explain their interpretations of the data—features that were largely absent from the mainstream media editorials, which were presented as final and definitive statements on these matters that audiences would do well to accept without question.

The bloggers' analysis was widely circulated online, and must be seen as substantially undermining *The Australian*'s ability to control the framing of the poll results. Clearly stung by such unaccustomed criticism, in an anonymous editorial it attacked its critics as "sheltered academics and failed journalists who would not get a job on a real newspaper" (*The Australian* 2007: n.p.) and dismissed their efforts as the work of partisan amateurs:

> on almost every issue it is difficult not to conclude that most of the electronic offerings that feed off the work of *The Australian* to create their own content are a waste of time. They contribute only defamatory comments and politically coloured analysis. (*The Australian* 2007: n.p.)

Crucial to this episode, however—and reflecting a pattern that has been repeated widely around the world—, is the fact that the independent poll analysts whose work so evidently irritated the arch-conservative editors at *The Australian* were precisely not inexperienced amateurs, but professional psephologists: scientists specialising in the quantitative study of public opinion. Although not formally trained in the craft of journalism, their disciplinary expertise in the domain relevant to the matter at hand trumped the professional skills of the journalists reporting on the poll results—and for the first time in an Australian election campaign, they now also had ready access to the means of publishing their analyses of the polls directly to an interested public.

The Australian 'blog wars' episode provides a clear illustration, therefore, of the fact that "much of the consternation in journalism today pertains to how the field is 'constructing itself'. After all, what *is* journalism and what *qualifies* one to claim a place in journalism at a time when the means to publish and carry out traditional functions of journalism are so widely distributed among the populace at large" (Lewis 2012: 842), and when the members of that populace no longer just include opinionated but ill-informed followers of news and politics, but genuine experts who stand ready to critique and correct the work of professional journalists in potentially highly public and popular news blogs and citizen journalism sites?

Similar scuffles between 'professional' and 'citizen' journalists have played out across many other national mediaspheres, shifted forwards or backwards by some years depending on the speed at which alternative citizen media platforms have emerged to prominence in these various media environments. "The best evidence we have that something truly new is going on is our mainstream media's inability to understand it", as Rushkoff pointedly put it at the time (2003: 53–54), and the sustained and shrill attacks by mainstream media commentators on their citizen journalist counterparts especially in the early years of the new millennium demonstrate this lack of understanding in compelling detail. Writing in the *New York Times*, no less, columnist Thomas L. Friedman suggested in 2002 that "the Internet, at its ugliest, is just an open sewer: an electronic conduit for untreated, unfiltered information" (2002: n.p.), yet even more moderate voices continued for a very long time to reinforce their claim that some very clear boundaries separated professional from amateur content, in spite of the growing evidence to the contrary. As Alleyne noted as early as 1997, "such defensiveness reveals the extent to which online communication technologies—which give all who own them the chance to be mass communicators—threaten traditional bastions of power" (1997: 33).

Further, the persistent attacks on news bloggers and citizen journalists—many of whom participated in these emerging practices because of a deep interest in the news, and therefore also represented some of the conventional news media's most committed followers—also resulted in a significant change in attitudes on the side of the citizen journalists, many of whom began to "look upon mainstream media as an arrogant, elitist club that puts its own version of self-interest and economic survival above the societal responsibility of a free press" (Lasica 2003a: 71).

As Mare has pointed out, then, this over-the-top reaction against news blogs and citizen journalism has the hallmarks of a 'moral panic', "promoted by journalists and news organisations whose loud and strident voices warn of the growth of slacktivism (the act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem) and noise within the communication ecosystem" (Mare 2013: 87). Yet few of the criticisms made by professional journalists of their new citizen competitors are entirely convincing, largely because so much citizen journalism practice mimics the behaviour of professional journalists themselves. Even as citizen journalists are criticised for their opinionated, partisan commentary on the news, for instance, we are able to find the same form of commentary in the mainstream media; indeed, as Kovach and Rosenstiel point out, well before the arrival of citizen journalism it was the press that created "a new class of activist pundits: loosely credentialled personalities who often thrive on being provocateurs. These people are treated as authorities, but they actually are neither news sources nor journalists. They lack the expertise to offer informal analysis. They also have no responsibility for impartiality or even accuracy" (1999: 21). We might even argue that citizen journalists are more accountable than the pundits presented in the mainstream media, because they have no media imprint to lend them authority but must instead earn such authority for themselves by establishing a track record as reliable independent commentators.

Indeed, the prevalence of activist commentary over impartial first-hand reporting in citizen journalism content merely harks back to some of the foundational practices of modern journalism: it "mirrors the trend of partisanship embraced by many in the European press and is reminiscent of the journalism practiced at American newspapers from before the nation's founding through the turn of the 20th century" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589; cf. Sivek 2014). By contrast, the strict enforcement of objectivity is a relatively recent and particularly American phenomenon which is not as common elsewhere in the world, where competing mainstream media outlets with clearly articulated po-

litical stances are conducting public debates with each other on behalf of their audiences. "Being impartial is not a core principle of journalism" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001: 95), and fulsome claims to objectivity and impartiality by the mainstream news media could well be seen as inherently dishonest, in comparison with the open acknowledgment of a particular political positioning that many citizen journalists offer.

However unconvincing, then, these attacks against citizen journalism represent a form of boundary work, and point to the significance of the challenge that these new, participatory forms of news engagement presented for the journalism industry. These attacks "serve to police the boundaries of the profession by reiterating accepted definitions of what it is to be a journalist. When these boundaries are transgressed, the paradigm is threatened" (Mare 2013: 87). Ultimately, this can be seen as a fear of innovation and change in professional practices—and this is a fear that has a long tradition in the industry: "most if not all innovations in journalism tend to be met by doubts regarding their perceived impact on editorial autonomy" (Deuze 2005: 449). At the same time, the idealised picture of 'proper' journalism against which the new entrants are measured (and found wanting) also reflects a profound nostalgia for some mythical golden age of objective, impartial, and independent professional journalism that in all probability never actually existed in reality.

The circling of the wagons around this ideal picture of professional journalism, in response to the threats from a shifting paradigm of media access and participation, has contributed to the increasingly explicit formulation of what Deuze describes as "a consensual occupational ideology among journalists in different parts of the world" (Deuze 2005: 444), however. Fundamentally built on a positioning of journalists as providing "a public service (as watchdogs or 'newshounds', active collectors and disseminators of information)" (447) to their audiences, this inevitably also placed those audiences in a secondary, passive role as information recipients rather than as active users and producers of information in their own right: "the public was distinguished from media elites and policy experts, with the former viewed as generally passive, easily manipulated consumers of information and the latter as information gatekeepers who represented the public's interest in the construction of political and social reality" (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 63). This passive role is inherently incompatible with the more participatory approach pursued by citizen journalism, of course.

"Exploring the boundaries of journalism is not an intellectual exercise relevant only to … the academy. Definitions matter, because *how* we think

about the issue of boundaries has real consequences", as Carlson and Lewis point out (2015: n.pag.). Most centrally, they have implications for the legal protections afforded to professional and citizen journalists. Although Rosen recounts optimistically that "blogs have been called little First Amendment machines. They extend freedom of the press to more actors" (2006: n.p.), this is true only to the extent that news bloggers and other citizen journalists are legally recognised *as* press: as operating in a journalistic capacity. Such recognition remains far from universal. Importantly, this is not merely a matter of distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes: as recently as 2015, for instance, Fulton reports that "Australia's attorney general, Senator George Brandis, stated that bloggers are not journalists" (Fulton 2015: 362), while in neighbouring New Zealand, a "High Court judgement has stated that bloggers can be legally classified as journalists, and online platforms, such as blogs and websites, can be recognised as a news site" (365). It should not need pointing out that such diverging assessments, sometimes made *ad hoc* and for political rather than principled reasons, can have significant consequences relating to citizen journalists' freedom of speech and their ability to protect their sources.

The Gradual Normalisation of Citizen Journalism Elements

The prevalent practice of gatewatching—by this or any other name—has repeatedly exposed news bloggers and citizen journalists to attacks for their apparent "parasitical" relationship with mainstream news (Chadwick 2011: 19); blogger-journalist Paul Andrews, for instance, noted in 2003 that "without the daily work of print journalists, one wonders if even the news-conscious blogs would contain any real news" (2003: 63). But with the gradual establishment of citizen journalism outlets as credible voices in the overall news landscape that relationship also began to flow the other way, as especially some of the major scandals we have already encountered demonstrated: "broadcast news often feeds off and incorporates elements of citizen journalism through the use of eyewitness footage … [or] the reporting of stories originally broken by citizen journalism initiatives on the web" (Mare 2013: 88). Such developments demonstrate that ultimately "this changing environment cannot be held outside journalism. The journalist does not work in 'splendid isolation,' partly because of the sheer abundance of information and the fact that publics are perfectly capable of accessing and providing news and information for/by themselves" (Bardoel and Deuze 2001: 98).

Such increasing contact between professional and citizen journalism opens the door to an exploration of the forms of journalism practiced elsewhere, even in spite of continued tendencies to draw clear boundaries between the two camps. "Professions naturally seek to patrol and preserve their familiar jurisdiction, while also colonizing activities occurring at the periphery, such as blogging and UGC" (Lewis 2012: 850); therefore, in spite of professional journalists' sometimes profound misgivings towards citizen journalism, expressed at both personal and institutional levels, the first decade of the twenty-first century also saw the gradual adoption of at least some of the features that characterised citizen journalism. This applied especially to blogs: as Singer observed in 2005, "journalists are molding this distinctive online format to fit—and in some ways augment—traditional professional norms and practices. Blogs, in other words, are being 'normalized' by journalists much as other aspects of the internet have been" (2005: 174).

This normalisation resulted both in the adoption of blogging by some professional journalists, and in the acceptance of some independent news bloggers by the journalistic establishment. As we have seen already, "bloggers now receive press credentials, though they were once considered as trespassers by mainstream journalists" (Hermida 2012: 661), and this recognition as credible voices contributing to public debate is also simply an acknowledgment of the continuing popularity of some of the leading news blogs and citizen journalism sites, even in spite of the sustained criticism and denigration they had been exposed to from some circles in the journalistic establishment. Whatever misgivings about the style and quality of blogs they continued to hold, professional journalists eventually had to accept that "this type of 'reporting' seems to be what blog readers expect and blog writers provide" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589), had to make their peace with it, and eventually perhaps even had to explore this style of writing for themselves. As Singer reported at the time, "by mid-2004, the American Press Institute listed more than 400 blogs published by journalists (and a handful of journalism professors)" (2005: 176).

Part of this settlement also included a realisation that professional and citizen journalists were not inherently and inevitably pitched against one another—they could also genuinely complement one another. In keeping with the two-tier structure outlined by Herbert Gans, where mainstream media organisations report the news and minor media outlets analyse and critique these reports, it is possible that citizen journalists are "strengthening the role of news media organizations, … distributing the news media's story rather than creating their own" (Grafström and Windell 2012: 73). The gatewatch-

ing practices of citizen journalists crucially depend on having gates to watch, after all, and at least some of those gates will continue to be those of the mainstream media. In this emerging structure, then, initial charges of a parasitic exploitation of professional news outlets by citizen journalists and were replaced by the emergence of an "almost symbiotic relationship between mainstream news blogs and the main media platforms" (Bailey and Marques 2012: 398).

Somewhat ironically, in fact, the multiplication of the number of gates through which information might pass to reach an (online) audience has also given rise to a renewed recognition of the contribution that journalistic news selection in its ideal form is able to make: "the rise of the Internet and the coming of broadband … do not mean, as some have suggested, that the concept of applying judgment to the news—of trying to decide what people need and want to know to self-govern—is obsolete. They make the need all the greater" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001: 24). However, given the inherent uncontrollability of the gates that open onto the public arena in the new environment, this news judgment can no longer be described as *gatekeeping* in the traditional sense of the term, nor is it necessarily able to be performed by professional journalists only: "traditional media gatekeepers … become just one of many pathways by which we learn about and make sense of new information" (Nahon *et al.* 2013: 480). In other words, professional and citizen journalists *both* provide a valuable service to their users, by highlighting—perhaps in very different ways and for very different reasons—what news they deem to be worthy of further attention.

Such cautious symbiosis has served to soften the institutional boundaries between the two sides. On the one hand, some professional journalists tried their hand at blogging, becoming what Singer (2005) described as "j-bloggers" and confronting the challenge of finding a voice as bloggers without undermining their established personas as professional journalists. "For journalists, the potential conflict of roles—non-partisan fact collectors or commentators on those facts—can create problems" (178), and it therefore remained important to clearly demarcate these roles as distinct from one another, not least also through the design and positioning of their blogs in the context of their news Websites, even if it meant a certain dissonance between the divergent roles played by the same journalist across different sections of a site.

On the other hand, a number of independent news bloggers were brought inside the boundaries of the news industry by being given a space on the Websites of mainstream news outlets, or by being hired formally as columnists. Platon and Deuze described this approach as representing a new form of

"'competitor-colleague' journalism which may yet prove to be the crucible for new ways of reconnecting journalism, news and media professionals with ideals of sharing access and participatory storytelling in journalism" (2003: 352); it provided additional legitimation to those citizen journalists who were thus recognised, and perhaps also enabled them to commit more time to this part of their lives by offering increased financial stability. Ultimately, some of these semi-professional "'in-betweeners' of journalistic culture—citizens who are *not professional journalists*, yet play a greater role in the journalistic process than mere receivers" (Ahva 2016: 1)—were able to convert the additional name recognition that the more prominent media platform offered them into an ongoing, full-time career. As a result, they now

> act as consultants to campaigns, interest groups, government agencies, and older media. The blog and other interactive Internet genres are no longer the radical departure they … were in the mid-2000s; they have been appropriated by all elite sectors of public communication in the advanced democracies, from politicians and agency officials to professional journalists to television and radio presenters. (Chadwick *et al.* 2016: 14)

This normalisation and professionalisation of citizen journalism within the confines of conventional news organisations—a very different spin on the call to 'become the media' that was *Indymedia*'s catch-cry—was not always without its own pitfalls and challenges, however. "Bloggers might migrate to different competitor news portals when convenient for them. The users of the blog tend to follow the journalist to another portal because of the established relationship of trust" (Bailey and Marques 2012: 407); in the reinvention of professional journalists as 'j-bloggers' and the recruiting of prominent citizen journalists to bolster the line-up of commentators available at a given news site we therefore also see a first step towards the personal branding of journalists and commentators that we will encounter again in Chapter 5 of this book. Conversely, the freedom of expression conferred by the independent news blog format may be curtailed by having to operate within the imprint of a news organisation. The prominent independent Australian news blogger Tim Dunlop, for instance, had been recruited in 2006 to write a political blog for the mainstream News Ltd. site *news.com.au*—but when he used that blog during the Australian 'blog wars' of 2007 to criticise the harshly worded editorial in *news.com.au*'s sister site *The Australian* that we discussed earlier, Dunlop's post was removed from *news.com.au*'s site, and Dunlop eventually resigned over this act of corporate censorship

(Flew 2008). Such cases demonstrate a continuing struggle to negotiate between the professional ethos and corporate imperatives of the news industry on the one hand, and the emerging attitudes, styles, and ethics of citizen journalism on the other.

The alternative to such arrangements between the two sides was for major citizen journalism operators to gain financial sustainability in their own right. Such sites—"the elite of the elite" (Nahon and Hemsley 2014: 1303) of citizen journalism—include the *Huffington Post*, *The Drudge Report*, or the Korean *OhmyNews*, but their commercial transformation necessarily also changed them: as Chadwick *et al.* point out, for example, "by the time it was acquired by AOL in 2011 for 315 million dollars, the [*Huffington*] *Post*, with more monthly visitors than the *New York Times* website …, was a world away from the cliché of the plucky independent blog running on a shoestring budget" (2016: 14). Indeed, such sites are now major media players in their own right, and able to interact as equals with mainstream media outlets: in addition to its own international offshoots, for instance, "the Huffington Post has focused on partnerships with traditional news providers such as *Le Monde* in France, L'Espresso group in Italy, and *El Pais* in Spain and is increasingly looking to share content across countries" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 91).

In their wake, and with news users now widely accepting citizen journalism at least in principle as a credible alternative to mainstream news, other new and experimental platforms have continued to emerge. Few of these are likely to rise to the level of a *HuffPo* or *Drudge*, and many do not aim to do so; they focus instead on more limited endeavours including thematically specific or (hyper)locally focussed citizen journalism. But many continue to subscribe to the principles of citizen journalism, operating as "participatory news organizations that feature participation to such a degree that their journalistic operations would be nearly impossible without it. They are all maintained by small, professional editorial teams and supported by wide networks of participating citizens" (Ahva 2016: 5). In doing so, they continue to challenge the institutional boundaries of professional journalism.

Some such sites are notable also for their experiments with alternative funding and sustainability models. Some operate as non-profit organisations funded by charitable donations or trusts, and in doing so may reverse what Habermas once lamented as "the transformation from a journalism of conviction to one of commerce" (1974: 53). Unique amongst these models is *The Conversation*, which sources its content exclusively from university scholars

and provides journalistic editing services to its authors in order to make their contributions as accessible as possible for a wide international audience. This journalism-as-a-service model was initially funded by a consortium of Australian universities, and has since expanded to include operations in the U.K., U.S., France, Canada, and southern Africa. Yet other citizen journalism sites have managed to develop affiliations with and attract funding from mainstream media organisations without necessarily being incorporated into these organisations: the German hyperlocal citizen journalism community platform *myHeimat*, for instance, is now part-owned by regional news organisations, but is operated as a separate entity that complements rather than competes with the conventional newspapers and news sites published by those companies (Bruns 2010).

Any such tendencies towards the acceptance and normalisation of citizen journalism within or alongside the conventional news industry must also be seen against the backdrop of a news industry that continues to struggle with the broader digital transformation of its sector. Even if some of the early attacks against citizen journalism forcefully criticised its emphasis on opinion and commentary over original reporting, a substantive shift towards commentary has occurred in mainstream media content as well, to the point that "the vast majority of online 'news' is really commentary on news that originates from the declining number of professional journalists" (Bird 2009: 294). This is driven by a number of interlocking factors.

First, the production of commentary is simply considerably cheaper than the production of news reports; this is one of the reasons that commentary was so prevalent in citizen journalism in the first place, of course, since citizen journalists rarely had the funds to travel to the scene of the news event, or the time to spend on in-depth investigative research. Given the continuing (and arguably worsening) financial stresses on the mainstream news industry, in its attempts to cope with this lack of funds by reducing the size of the workforce of correspondents professional journalism has now become more like citizen journalism—and this decline in the staff available to produce original reporting may constitute a profound concern for democratic societies.

Second, partly because this decline in original reporting also results in a greater reliance on wire services as news sources, and because increasing amounts of information are available directly from primary news sources, original commentary now provides an increasingly important point of distinction even between mainstream news outlets. The fundamental facts of the matter

can be ascertained from almost any news outlet, or from the news actors themselves, but it is how they are interpreted by leading analysts and columnists that attracts a readership. "In an era with a growing supply of readily available information and disinformation, as well as competition from the blogosphere and social media, news organisations have upgraded the market value of interpretation and opinion making, and political commentary has been gaining importance as a journalistic genre" (Rogstad 2014: 690–91). This, too, could be regarded as the normalisation of a foundational aspect of citizen journalism across wider journalistic practice.

Third, such interpretation and analysis of the news—as opposed to 'simple', straight reporting—may also be especially attractive to audiences, generating a more loyal following and commercially lucrative repeat visits to news sites. This is crucially important in an environment where it remains difficult to make online news pay for itself. However, this drive to provide engaging and attractive commentary may also serve to cheapen and simplify the journalistic analysis: "in their position as interpreters, journalists often explain the political reality in a popularised way with the use of dramatic visuals to capture and sustain the audience's attention and involvement" (Rogstad 2014: 692). Here, perhaps, we see a significant departure of mainstream journalism practices from citizen journalism, as a result of commercial imperatives: where independent, non-commercial citizen journalism sites generally tend to attract only a small but committed audience, the need to maximise attraction and reach in a commercial context may result in a more populist, less in-depth coverage.

This increased blurring of the boundaries between professional and citizen journalism, between mainstream and alternative media, is one of the hallmarks of a hybrid media system as Chadwick *et al.* (2016) describe it, of course. Although Klinger and Svensson are right to note that this "does not dissolve the different norms and processes—the rules of the game" (2016: 25)—that distinguish the different components of this system, it is nonetheless evident from our discussion here that over time there has been a significant equalisation in practices between professional and citizen journalism—and that, somewhat surprisingly, this equalisation has also seen professional news media take on a growing range of the characteristics that they once criticised in citizen media. Chief amongst these has been the prevalence of opinion and commentary.

Beyond the First Wave of Citizen Media

As a result, then, "journalism no longer dominates the mediascape as *the* source for helping a society learn about itself. Instead, journalism has become part of a holistic mix of media elements that intentionally or unintentionally provide people with varied glimpses of the world around them" (Berkowitz 2009: 290). By the end of the 2000s, the Websites of conventional news outlets had transformed to incorporate a modest amount of the interactive and participatory features that were central to citizen journalism sites and news blogs, while a range of such alternative citizen media sites (and some of the charismatic proprietors operating them) had also been established as continuing fixtures in the wider news media landscape. There was also an increasing overlap between the two sides, with citizen journalists and news bloggers appearing as commentators in the mainstream media on occasion, and professional journalists publishing their own blogs.

And yet, such individual success stories should not obscure the fact that "the history of alternative media is predominantly one of failure: failure to reach any but the most specialist of audiences and a consequent failure to effect the political and social transformations that represent the ambition of so many of its projects" (Atton 2013: 131). For every successful citizen journalism site or news blog, many more faltered and failed, due variously to their inability to attract sufficient users, the difficulties in generating engaging and insightful content on an ongoing basis, or their operators' struggles to commit the necessary time and energy to keep the sites going for the long term. In short, the early enthusiasm for citizen journalism and news blogging—for 'becoming the media'—dissipated as the day-to-day routine and tedium of tracking and commenting on the news set in, and only those citizen journalists with the strongest desire for and greatest commitment to making their voices heard in public debate continued their efforts. This also served to relativise some of the grandest claims about the fundamental paradigm shift in journalism that citizen journalism and news blogging were supposed to be driving: "early claims that blogs were a 'new genre of journalism' … gave way to the recognition that some blogs were doing journalism only some of the time" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 589).

In part this decline in news blogging was driven also by the fact that—in spite of the ready accessibility of hosted blogging platforms—there still remained considerable hurdles to continuing engagement. J.D. Lasica may have been right to state that "to practice random acts of journalism, you don't need

a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you" (2003a: 73), but the *regular*, habitual updating of a news blog that was required to establish the blogger as a noted voice in the blogosphere was anything but random; in order to be recognised by their peers, or by professional journalists, such bloggers had to adopt a "Pro-Am" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) attitude towards their work, and act in a truly para-journalistic capacity: "they move from merely seeing their blog as a form of journalism to actually engag[ing] in journalistic behaviors, such as quoting sources, checking their facts, and posting corrections" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 599). This is not to claim that all citizen journalists and news bloggers necessarily set out to seek mainstream recognition and impact, of course—as Atton notes, "some alternative media—such as the publications of separatist feminism or the anti-technology writings of primitivist anarchists—will, by their self-determined ideological location, lie beyond the mainstream. Their limited reach and radical content lends them a 'purity' that offers ideological protection, but it also weakens their influence" (Atton 2013: 131). However, even to be recognised merely by their fellow ideological travellers as credible and reliable voices for their cause required them to take a quasi-professional attitude to their citizen journalism activities.

As noted, the adoption of interactive and participatory features into mainstream journalism remained similarly haphazard—while the first decade of the new millennium saw the emergence of 'j-blogging', many such blogs remained rebadged opinion columns, and "most (but not all) political j-bloggers [were] retaining their traditional journalistic gatekeeping role by incorporating limited or no material from users, despite the inherently conversational and participatory nature of the format" (Singer 2005: 189). This approach is central to what Singer has described as the normalisation of the disruptive blog format into everyday journalistic routine: it represents an adoption of the superficial features of blogging (the presentation of journalistic commentary in the conversational style of blogs, and in the form of a reverse-chronological feed on the journalist's profile page on a news site) without at the same time making any more than passing gestures towards an engagement of the column's readership or towards increasing the transparency of the news process by including links to source materials or to other news articles about the current topic that have been published elsewhere on the Web. Further, even if "these blogs indicate a move away from the neutral stance of the traditional journalist", these new j-bloggers largely represented "columnists already comfortable with incorporating opinion in[to] what they write" (Singer 2005: 192).

Such normalisation—in journalism and in other fields where blogs have provided a new platform for information dissemination—has progressed to such an extent that the very term 'blog' may seem somewhat anachronistic today. This confirms Clay Shirky's 2003 prediction that "the term 'blog' will fall into the middle distance, as 'home page' and 'portal' have, words that used to mean some concrete thing, but which were stretched by use past the point of meaning" (2003: n.p.); indeed, today a blogger may simply point to their 'Website', even if that site is supported by one of the blogging platforms that continue to enjoy widespread popularity. Quite appropriately, perhaps, the fact that a site is, technically, a blog is no longer as important as the content it contains—as Katzenbach attests, blogs as a specific form of publishing no longer have "a major distinct function in the emergence and establishment" of a public (2016: 12; my translation).

Even in spite of this decline in the breadth of citizen media after the first wave of enthusiasm, our discussion in this chapter has shown clearly that citizen journalism and news blogging have had an important impact on the overall mediasphere wherever they have been practiced. However, by the end of the 2000s they were practiced largely by a self-selecting elite of what we might describe, following Coleman (2003: 735), as "political junkies" with an especially heightened interest in the news. This further undermines any hopes that the emergence of citizen journalism and news blogging would substantially democratise public debate about news and politics; "the internet pluralizes but does not inherently democratize spheres of social, cultural, political, or economic activity" (Papacharissi 2014: 8). In reality, the "main effect" of the emergence of such new publishing formats "was not to engage more people but rather to provide new venues for existing political actors" (Singer 2005: 175). This is not a negligible contribution in itself: at times, these platforms enabled small-time activists to reach national and global audiences, and allowed domain experts such as the psephologists who played such a crucial role in Australia's 'blog wars' to debunk the self-serving narratives spun by partisan commentators in the national news media. Dahlgren describes this new class of voices in public debate as "civic intellectuals", as distinct from the public intellectuals legitimised by the conventional mainstream media—"they derive from and are anchored in the citizenry" and contribute "to the expansion (and evolution) of the intellectual character of the public sphere" (Dahlgren 2012: 105).

Nonetheless, citizen journalism and news blogging gradually contracted around a hard core of quasi-professional para-journalists on the one hand,

and professional domain experts engaging in extracurricular activities by contributing their knowledge to public debate on the other. Increasingly, such practitioners tended "to have journalistic motivations and follow professional journalistic norms, in particular when they blog about public affairs" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2011: 600), and—except for the continuing boundary work performed by journalism professionals—there were therefore few reasons why such Pro-Am citizen journalists could not have cooperated with, or operated within the confines of, mainstream news outlets as well. Indeed, as we have already seen, eventually some leading citizen journalists were indeed recruited to join the other side, leading Atton to ask whether the "professionalized media" are "perhaps a more fruitful location for alternative media practices than we might think" (Atton 2013: 144). Dahlgren similarly notes that his civic intellectuals "are largely an online phenomenon (though in principle they could make use of the older mass media)" (2012: 105). Although arguably their status has changed and diminished with the growing hybridisation of national and global mediaspheres, this recognises that the mainstream media continue to exercise a certain power to keep the gates: not those that determine whether a specific piece of information will reach an audience, but those that determine which actors are afforded greater visibility and reach by being featured in leading print, broadcast, and online news outlets.

Here, Rosen's grand vision of "the people formerly known as the audience" taking matters into their own hands and establishing "a new balance of power" between media producers and media users (2006: n.p.) meets head-on the *Realpolitik* of the attention economy, where industrial and institutional structures still matter. "The history of alternative media shows us that we cannot expect citizen-journalism projects to provide serious competition to established, corporate media—their resources and reach are insufficient, their ideologies often too specialist to appeal to broad audiences" (Atton 2013: 141). Their emergence highlights a real and critical problem—"that the [mainstream] media are seen as letting us down in every way" (Dvorak 2006: n.p.)—but it became evident as the first wave of citizen media ebbed away that they could not provide a comprehensive solution by themselves. Their major contribution was not to establish an alternative media system that audiences could use to inform themselves without ever having to rely on mainstream media reporting again; rather, in keeping with Gans's two-tier model, they established themselves as a corrective to mainstream media coverage by critiquing the reporting, framing, and analytical choices made by first-tier journalists and commentators. Discussing this in the context of

the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, Williams and Delli Carpini suggest that their major contribution was therefore to facilitate a decline in the "ability of mainstream journalists and political elites to act as gatekeepers and agenda-setters" (2000: 77).

Even if the wave of citizen journalism and news blogging has itself declined again from its peak in the early 2000s, then, it has had a lasting impact on the mainstream news industry:

> projects do not need to be permanent or long-standing to produce important new ways of creating journalism. What are the conditions that lead to innovative practices by citizen journalists? How do the practices and tools they pioneer then spread? At what point does the acceptance of their innovations become an act of domestication that potentially appropriates citizen creativity and originality? (Wall 2015: 806)

We might see this as another way in which citizen journalism has 'become the media': though falling short of a complete paradigm shift, it has transformed in a number of subtle ways the forms of journalism that are practiced within the industry, and the range of actors who now regularly get to participate in mediated public debate. By revealing the constructed and unfinished nature of the news, and moving more of the processes of its construction into public, frontstage view, it has positioned transparency as "a new norm (if not *the* new norm) in journalism, promoting accountability" (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 370) and thereby also serving to transform the role of journalists—eventually perhaps enabling them "to rejoin civil society, and to start talking to their readers and viewers as one citizen to another, rather than as experts claiming to be above politics", as Hallin (1992: 20) envisioned it as early as 1992.

Enter Social Media

In historical terms—and keeping in mind that developments proceeded at different pace in different countries and regions—the discussion so far takes us to around 2007 or 2008. While rear-guard battles such as the Australian 'blog wars' were still being fought in some territories, for the most part an uneasy truce had been established between professional and citizen journalism: the remaining citizen journalism sites and news blogs were unlikely to disappear any time soon, but they were equally unlikely to effect wholesale change in the news industry beyond the shifts they had already provoked. The next impulses

in the continuing transformation of journalistic practices (on both sides of the pro/am divide) should come from the introduction of new platforms for public communication by "the people formerly known as the audience": from a new generation of social media platforms including *Facebook* and *Twitter*.

Both these platforms had been launched some years earlier: *TheFacebook*, as it was known at the time, was launched as a campus network at Harvard University in early 2004, while *Twitter* was made available to a small community of early users in San Francisco in March 2006. In both cases, it took several years for these platforms to reach a large, mass user community: *Facebook* was made available globally only in September 2006, while *Twitter* had its breakthrough within the tech community during the 2007 South by Southwest Interactive conference and received a substantial boost in general popularity when TV celebrity Oprah promoted the service on her show in April 2009. But much as blogs and other online publishing technologies had been during the first wave of citizen media, these platforms also became experimental spaces for the development of new forms of news engagement that carried on some of the ethos and ambition of citizen journalism and news blogging; indeed, "a multitude of the functions … assigned to blogs … has by now migrated to platforms such as Facebook [and] Twitter" (Katzenbach 2016: 11; my translation).

In the years since they first emerged to public prominence, two key functions of social media in the context of news dissemination, discussion, and evaluation have become especially significant, and are the subject of the following two chapters. On the one hand, social media—and here especially *Twitter*—are now recognised as contributing in crucial ways to the coverage and curation of information relating to breaking news events. Much more so than first-wave citizen media, they enable citizens to contribute original and immediate reporting on the events unfolding around them; additionally, they also facilitate the *ad hoc* gathering of publics and communities that collectively and collaboratively 'work the story' to make sense of these events. We will explore these processes in Chapter 3. On the other hand, social media are now also crucial networks for the everyday sharing of and engagement with the news, and have fundamentally changed the way in which many people encounter and access the news. This has profound implications for how individual users and society as a whole inform themselves about the world around them, which Chapter 4 discusses in detail. Finally, in addition to these changes in user practices, the emergence of social media as important news media has also necessitat-

ed further adjustments to professional news sourcing, reporting, publishing, and engagement practices. Much as with the first wave of citizen media, such transformations have proceeded reluctantly and unevenly, but today a number of new models for doing professional journalism are emerging; these are explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

If anything, the challenge to the journalistic mainstream from these new developments is even more profound than that from news blogs and citizen journalism sites, even if some of the key concerns for professional journalism remain the same:

> the network logic of social network sites erodes the information monopolies of news companies even more than relatively static publishing platforms such as websites and blogs do. The sharing of news on Twitter and Facebook challenges their role as society's gatekeepers for information on current affairs, which is part and parcel of journalism but also harms their business model. (Broersma and Graham 2016: 91)

This is in part also because social media further lower the barriers of entry to citizen-journalistic practices, by providing even more standardised platforms that crucially also incorporate the network functionality required for connecting with and addressing large, potentially global audiences. As a result, "citizens once running their own blogs as independent editors often dropped these labor-intensive sites for social networking sites such as Twitter, which require fewer skills and commitment than it takes to run a blog" (Wall 2015: 803).

We will return repeatedly to the importance of the fact that social media platforms inherently include social *networking* functions throughout the remainder of this book—arguably, this is one of the most crucial distinctions from the first wave of citizen media, which consisted instead of a multitude of stand-alone citizen journalism sites and news blogs that had to be connected manually, painstakingly, by building networks one hyperlink at a time. By contrast, the emergence of social media with their built-in network logic has had profound implications: it has meant that "journalism is not just in the process of negotiating a shift to a digital media environment, but more significantly to a networked one" (Hermida 2012: 660–61), and that "the information asymmetry between established media organizations vis-á-vis the newcomers" that Grafström and Windell had identified (2012: 75) has been reduced substantially. Taken together, these changes also significantly affect how we might conceptualise the structure of information flows across the public sphere—a question that we return to in Chapter 8.

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· 3 ·

#BREAKING

Social News Curation during Acute Events

Before the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave of citizen media settled into a role as second-tier media providing a control and corrective on the mainstream media, the hope had been that they might become vehicles for original, first-hand news reporting. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, however, the considerable barriers to regular newsgathering and reporting that remained in this first wave proved too high to allow for the establishment of sustainable citizen reporting platforms—such ambitions were realised only occasionally in short-term contexts (such as *Indymedia*'s 1999 effort in Seattle), or when facilitated by mainstream news organisations (for instance in the form of CNN's iReport project or the BBC UGC Hub). Overall, citizens never managed to 'become the media' to the extent that they could find sustainable models to replace the full breadth of mainstream media functions.

But citizens regularly did play crucial roles as eyewitness reporters during major breaking news events, at least when such events took place in highly populated areas—and in some such cases, "citizen journalism on blogs or public contributor sites like YouTube offered better access than was afforded professional journalists" (Kaufhold *et al.* 2010: 517c). Major international events that generated such citizen reportage during the first wave of citizen media

included the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 7 July 2005 bombing attacks in London, or the 2005 hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and surrounding areas, but a range of events of less substantial impact also highlighted the potential inherent in citizen reporting to news organisations in various national and local media environments. Indeed, as Allan reports, the London bombings experience led directly to the establishment of the BBC UGC Hub as a long-term effort to harness citizen reporting (Allan 2013: 167).

Such natural disasters and terrorist attacks, along with other unforeseen and suddenly emerging developments, belong to a category that Burgess and Crawford (2011) have described as "acute events": they are, "at least at their initial occurrence, spontaneous and not managed by officials within institutional settings" (Livingston and Bennett 2003: 364–65), and generate "event-driven news" (364)—rapidly unfolding news stories that only gradually crystallise into a clear picture of the situation, pieced together from a multitude of more or less verified updates originating from a range of official and unofficial sources. Citizens have long played a role in the construction of such event-driven news stories: as eyewitness informants reporting their observations orally to journalists at first, but increasingly also as sources of first-hand photo, audio, and video footage. Their role has gradually become more important with the growing availability of portable consumer devices that were able to capture such footage—at first in the form of amateur photo and film cameras (consider for instance the famous Zapruder film that captured the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy in 1963), and more recently with the availability of more and more powerful converged mobile digital devices that not only provide the functionality to capture eyewitness footage, but also to instantly post it to the Web (Vis *et al.* 2014: 385).

During the first wave of citizen media in the early 2000s, this convergence had not yet occurred fully; as a result, events such as the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States were at first still reported mostly by mainstream media cameras rather than through user-generated footage. By 2004, this had already begun to change, and tourist camera videos of the devastating impact of the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami circulated soon after the event. During the 7 July 2005 attacks in London, some victims and bystanders already shared their photos in the immediate aftermath, by using their early-generation smartphones to upload such content to photosharing site *Flickr* or to email them directly to family, friends, and the media. Yet the ability for such footage to reach a wider audience was still limited by the available infra-

structure: those who operated their own blogs or were members of photo- and videosharing sites such as *Flickr* and *YouTube* could post their content directly to the Web, but there was no guarantee that such material would then be discovered and utilised by mainstream or citizen media sites at the time; these sites largely facilitated only the publication of content, not its social discovery. Again, this shortcoming is specifically what an initiative like the BBC UGC Hub was set up to address: its "responsibility is to look for videos, images and first-hand accounts suitable for deepening the coverage of BBC Online, as well as to locate reliable sources that could also be used in various BBC radio and TV programs" (Bruno 2011: 30a).

The arrival of the current generation of popular social media sites—chiefly represented by *Facebook* and *Twitter*—has fundamentally changed this situation. In principle, of course, *all* media are social, in the sense that they facilitate communication between their authors and publishers and a more or less abstract, imagined audience consisting of other authors and publishers as well as readers, listeners, or viewers (Bruns 2015). Most publishing formats have remained largely one-directional, however: they include few opportunities for this audience to engage with and respond to authors and publishers directly. Even in the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave of citizen media, such engagement functions largely constituted an afterthought: bloggers engaged with other bloggers by linking to each other's sites, or to individual blog posts (and later blogging platforms made such inlinks more visible through so-called trackbacks or pingbacks), and blog readers responded to blog authors through the commentary functions attached to articles. But news bloggers and citizen journalists could choose the extent to which they provided and utilised such functions—as many mainstream media columnists-turned-bloggers demonstrated, it was possible to be a 'blogger' without ever linking to others or responding to commenters.

By contrast, what affords the current social media platforms their additional level of sociality, and means that they deserve to be set apart as explicitly *social* media, is that the interconnections and engagement between individual users are inherently built into these platforms. *Twitter* and *Facebook* are fundamentally constituted by the networks of followers or friends that have developed on these sites, just as much as they are constituted by the content that their users have posted and shared through them. It is a core practice here to connect with others—to 'follow' them on *Twitter*, or to create a reciprocal 'friendship' on *Facebook*—to the point that it is almost impossible, and certainly unusual, to use these platforms without connecting with other users

in this way. But to connect with another user is to subscribe to their feed of updates, and so these networks mean that whatever a given user posts on these sites is highly likely to reach at least a handful of others. Further, the functionality to share and comment on these posts is similarly built into the fundamental affordances of these sites, which makes it possible for information to be passed on across the network, at times widely and rapidly. Compared to older media, and even to the citizen journalism sites and news blogs of the first wave, this is "sociality of a different order of magnitude" (Bruns 2015: 2).

In the context of our present discussion, it is most important to note that such functionality has made it possible for the first-hand and eyewitness accounts of citizen reporters to 'go viral' to a much greater extent than had previously been possible—not only within these platforms themselves, but due to the interconnections between different media forms also across platforms and into the mainstream media. This is true almost equally for *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and a number of other social media platforms, but *Twitter* is nonetheless often singled out as the platform where such phenomena are most likely to occur, and occur rapidly—as Hermida notes,

> Twitter shares some similarities with other forms of communication. Like the telephone, it facilitates a real-time exchange of information. Like instant messaging, the information is sent in short bursts. But it extends the affordances of previous modes of communication by combining these features in both a one-to-many and many-to-many framework that is public, archived and searchable. Twitter allows a large number of users to communicate with each other simultaneously in real-time, based on an asymmetrical relationship between friends and followers. The messages form social streams of connected data that provide value both individually and in aggregate. (Hermida 2010a: n.p.)

Crucial to this are a number of features that are unique to or especially well developed on *Twitter*. First, although it does offer the opportunity to make accounts 'private' and visible only to approved followers, some 94% of all *Twitter* accounts are public, and can be followed by anyone; indeed, it is even possible to review the posts made by such public accounts simply by visiting the *Twitter* Website, without the need to create an account and log on to the site. Other platforms—such as *Facebook*—may also offer the opportunity to make accounts and their posts fully public, but the default here is usually to allow much more limited access to one's posts; in the context of acute news events, such limitations can serve to hinder the visibility and rapid dissemination of eyewitness reporting. Second, *Twitter* follower connections are non-reciprocal—except for 'private' accounts, it is possible in principle to

follow any other account on the platform without a need to be approved as a follower by the account's operator. This means that users caught up in major events and acting as citizen reporters can rapidly accumulate a large new following, further amplifying the reach of their updates. Third, and perhaps most importantly, *Twitter* users introduced the hashtag as a tool to mark their posts as relevant to a given topic (and Twitter, Inc. subsequently incorporated this functionality into the platform itself). Hashtags have made it possible to use the *Twitter* search function to quickly find all posts relating to a given event, issue, or topic, and indeed to continue to follow a live feed of new hashtagged posts as they come to hand. They are therefore inherently well suited to tracking the coverage of unfolding events—and it is no accident that hashtags first emerged on *Twitter* in the context of an acute event: the 2007 San Diego wildfires (Halavais 2014). In turn, finally, by tracking relevant hashtags users may also discover the accounts of key information sources on the hashtag event, whom they can then follow directly. More so than most other social media platforms, then, through this combination of features "Twitter provides a structure for [users] to act together as if in an organised way …. This provides a mechanism to aggregate, archive and analyse the individual tweets as a whole" (Hermida 2010a: n.p.).

On *Twitter* and elsewhere, this is not without its challenges, however—especially in the context of major breaking news events generating equal levels of information, misinformation, and even disinformation. As Yardi and boyd note for *Twitter*, for instance, "through hashtags and the public timeline, people can witness public conversations they otherwise might not and can participate in conversations they otherwise may not, but the environment's constraints limits their ability to do this well. This has implications for access to resources and diversity of information" (Yardi and boyd 2010: 317). Perhaps the key challenge in this context is the speed at which information about breaking news events becomes available through social media, and at which it scrolls past the user's window of attention. Due to its technical as well as user interface design *Twitter* is once again both the leading and the most problematic site in this context: "the code behind Twitter privileges social communication that is often event-based and event-driven, much like the content that traditionally makes the news. Twitter … actively encourages the here and now" (Hermida 2013: 298)—and it does so in a way that outpaces even the already accelerated rhythms of the electronic mainstream media's 24-hour news cycle, which still rely on access to reporters on the scene. Especially as acute events happen and breaking news

unfolds, a social media platform such as *Twitter* therefore "covers up for the weaknesses of the mainstream media through real time and seamless news updates" (anonymous journalist qtd. in Mare 2013: 91), but it also introduces new challenges of its own by providing a platform for the instant and unrestrained circulation of information and rumour about what is currently happening. This chapter explores how social media such as *Twitter* enter into the processes of breaking news coverage, therefore, and how their users contribute to, track, and make sense of the acute event feeds they observe in social media. We will see how these developments constitute the start of a *second* wave of citizen media that comes to have even more profound effects on journalism than the first.

News Breaks on *Twitter*

"Today … Twitter is an essential tool for breaking and researching stories. Frequently, a story will break on Twitter before appearing a few minutes later on the 'traditional' agency wires" (Eltringham 2010: n.p.). This is the view of Matthew Eltringham, editor of the BBC's College of Journalism Website, expressed as early as 2010. Although the singular focus on *Twitter* in this statement may underestimate the contributions made by other platforms—Dewan and Kumaraguru have found that "real world events appear fairly quickly on Facebook", too (2014: 2)—it nonetheless points to a very substantial and comparatively fast mindshift for a profession that, as we have seen in Chapter 2, has traditionally been very reluctant to embrace new media technologies. Key to this relatively rapid acceptance of social media in general, and *Twitter* in particular, as a tool of the trade for journalists (at least in the context of acute events) has been their demonstrable utility in breaking news events. Professionals in the industry have quickly realised that "social media use … allows journalists to gather first-hand material from the ground; this is especially advantageous if the journalist is physically remote from the scene. It can enhance the degree of authenticity, as it takes journalists closer to where the story is actually happening" (Gulyas 2013: 272).

A number of major events over the past 10 years have significantly contributed to this. While a number of more minor acute events following the San Diego wildfires contributed to the development and widespread acceptance of hashtags as means of bringing together users around a shared topic of interest

in an *ad hoc* fashion, many commentators point to the Mumbai terrorist attack on 26 November 2008 as the first major event during which *Twitter* played an important role in the sourcing and dissemination of eyewitness accounts even while the attack itself still unfolded. As Allan reports,

> during the crisis, the highly sensationalized forms of news coverage provided by the Indian news media—what critics called the "TV terror" of the 24-hour news channels—were widely condemned for reporting "exclusives," which more often than not proved to be wildly inaccurate rumors. Attracting much more positive attention, however, was the surprising role played by ordinary citizens in gathering information, with the micro-blogging service Twitter regularly singled out for praise as a vital source for real-time citizen news. (Allan 2013: 169–70)

Mainstream news outlets themselves soon tapped into this new resource, reporting on how the attack was covered by eyewitnesses and other bystanders on *Twitter* and sourcing their information directly from the platform. In the end, "The Guardian, CNN, and other news sites instead curated what was popping up on Twitter, Flickr and elsewhere", but not all news organisations were prepared to change their approach so quickly, so soon: for instance, "NYTimes.com posted a front-page notice asking witnesses in Mumbai to send reports" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.) using non-public channels such as email.

Especially notable during this incident was the apparent use of social media by eyewitnesses caught up in the attacks even as they were still holed up in the danger zone—a practice that may well have placed such witnesses in additional danger if the attackers had had access to social media themselves. Echoing the Palestinian terror attack on the 1972 Munich Olympic Games, during which the attackers were informed about police plans and movements by watching the live broadcast TV coverage from outside the Olympic village where they had taken hostages, in Mumbai too the terrorists could have followed *Twitter* and other social media to gain a detailed picture of counter-terror units' movements outside the hotel they had attacked. Although it remains unclear whether the Mumbai attackers did use such information, concerns about this possibility certainly circulated at the time:

> one instance of false reporting, repeatedly circulated on Twitter, claimed that the Indian government was alarmed by what was happening on the social network. Fearful that the information being shared by eyewitnesses on the scene was proving to be useful to the attackers, government officials, it was alleged, were urging Twitter users to cease their efforts, while also attempting to block Twitter's access to the country itself. (Allan 2013: 170)

Such blocking might well have done more harm than good, however, as it would also have prevented ordinary bystanders from receiving the information required to keep themselves out of danger.

A number of other acute events followed the Mumbai attacks in subsequent years, and contributed to the growing recognition of *Twitter* itself, and of social media more generally, as important tools for reporting and sourcing information during such incidents. They include the water landing of a commercial passenger plane on the Hudson River in New York City in 2010—when, as O'Connor reports,

> despite the fact that the headquarters of international wire services, major metropolitan newspapers, and big-time television networks are *literally opposite* the crash site, Twitter user Janis Krums scooped them all when he "tweeted" his report of "a plane in the Hudson" and posted an iPhone photo on TwitPic (O'Connor 2009: n.p.)

—as well as the 2009 Iranian election and its aftermath, during which the U.S. State Department asked *Twitter* to delay scheduled server maintenance in order not to disrupt the use of the platform as a way for opposition activists to share information about protests against vote rigging (Braun and Gillespie 2011: 390). They also include major natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the series of earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand, during 2010 and 2011, or the earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear meltdown in the Sendai region of Japan in 2011—after each of which the first major news alerts by eyewitnesses and news organisations, as well as reports, photos, and videos, were disseminated using social media.

Such breaking news events even include, somewhat more inadvertently, the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Not only did rumours of this U.S. military operation first circulate on *Twitter*, ahead of a press conference by President Barack Obama, when "a tweet by Keith Urbahn, a staff member of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld", revealed the news (Moon and Hadley 2014: 289; also see Newman 2011: 30–34)—in retrospect it also emerged that the military incursion itself had unknowingly been live-tweeted by an Abbottabad resident wondering about the unusual level of military activity. As Newman reports,

> the following morning he tweeted:
> Uh oh, now I'm the guy who liveblogged the Osama raid without knowing it. (Newman 2011: 30)

The role of social media in the coverage of such events not only led mainstream media to take a growing interest in the way that social media content might be able to be used to supplement conventional reporting, especially in the context of breaking news when credible information from the scene of the incident is scarce. In addition, ordinary social media users also increasingly turned to social media as a primary source of information about these events, alongside or even as a replacement for more conventional media channels. In Haiti, for instance, "not only news organizations, but also users around the world started to use social media websites to get up-to-date information on the earthquake and to support the local population" (Bruno 2011: 7). This is unsurprising at a time when—because there are no professional journalists on the ground yet—even mainstream media are reduced to reporting on the rumours they can glean from *Twitter* and similar platforms, but the more familiar and comfortable users become with this approach to sourcing their information, the harder it also becomes for mainstream media to win them back again during the later stages of an incident.

Bruno therefore proposes that, "if we allow ourselves to paraphrase the *CNN effect* of the 1990s, this changeover in the media landscape could be called the *Twitter effect*" (Bruno 2011: 8): news breaks on *Twitter*, and the mainstream media are forced to play catch-up. As a result, Jarvis suggests, "the witnesses are taking over the news. That will fundamentally change our experience of news, the role of witnesses and participants, the role of journalists and news organisations, and the impact reporting has on events" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.). Indeed, the observation of such processes in other events also creates "a learning effect" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1397), making it increasingly likely that social media users will be similarly prepared to act as eyewitnesses if ever they are caught up in breaking news events themselves. Building on Singer's concept of normalisation as we have encountered it in the previous chapter (Singer 2005), we could therefore suggest that what can be observed over the course of a number of successive acute events during the second half of the 2000s is the normalisation of the use of *Twitter* and other social media platforms for eyewitness reporting by citizen reporters.

Unsurprisingly, social media have turned out to be an especially important reporting tool at times when other media channels are unavailable due to outages or interference. Participants here may include not only those citizens directly caught up immediately in the event, but also others located further afield. In addition to the noted role played by social media in protests after the 2009 Iranian elections, Mare reports that when autocratic regimes in Malawi

and Mozambique imposed media censorship, "citizen journalists outside the two countries took it upon themselves to maintain the momentum, using social media and mobile phones to bridge geographical barriers and maintain the coverage of events in the virtual sphere" (Mare 2013: 89). Even better known, and by now almost assuming mythological status as a break-through moment for both *Facebook* and *Twitter* as tools for the dissemination of breaking news, is the role that these platforms played in covering—and helping to organise—the protests collectively known as the Arab Spring in countries across Northern Africa and the Middle East. Here again, the mainstream media turned "to Twitter, both to learn from on-the-ground sources, and to rapidly distribute updates" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1376)—but so did the people of these countries themselves, and their supporters and sympathisers elsewhere in the world, especially in the absence of other reliable media sources:

> the Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak were organized through a complex network that combined heavy Twitter and Facebook use with other forms of interpersonal communication. During this period, access to mainstream media was [variously] blocked, foreign and native journalists were intimidated, and access to the Internet was controlled and eventually shut down. Twitter, however, provided a continuous stream of events in real time throughout the crisis. (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 266)

Such uses fundamentally challenge the control over the flows of information that had previously been exercised by autocratic, undemocratic regimes from Tunisia to Egypt, from Russia to Turkey. But in a similar way they also once again challenge the regimes of gatekeeping still employed by the mainstream media, as source information and eyewitness accounts during acute events now readily circulate on social media well before, and independently of, the news judgments applied by journalists and editors. This is beneficial—"social media demonstrate an unprecedented ability for the politically engaged to both bypass and influence traditional information flows" (Paterson 2013: 2)—as well as problematic—social media also facilitate the circulation of unverified and potentially fundamentally wrong information about the events they cover—, but most immediately it poses a fundamentally challenge to journalists to adjust their working practices to this new media environment. As one of the journalists interviewed by Verweij and van Noort put it, "if you as a journalist don't use it, you do yourself a disservice as news breaks on Twitter, radio, television, newspaper—in that order" (qtd. in Verweij and van Noort 2014: 111).

The Dynamics of Breaking News on Social Media

"There is journalism before Twitter and journalism after Twitter. No single company has ever had the power to report and disseminate events with the speed and geographic reach of the network" (Bell 2015: n.p.). This is even in spite of the fact that *Twitter*'s developers themselves were largely unaware of its potential as a news network. As the platform's co-founder Biz Stone pointed out in a 2009 interview,

> the news applications surprised us …. We noticed in prototypes early on … that things like earthquakes led to Twitter updates. The first Twitter report of the ground shaking during recent tremors in California, for example, came nine minutes before the first Associated Press alert. So we knew early on that a shared event such as an earthquake would lead people to look at Twitter for news almost without thinking. (Biz Stone in O'Connor 2009: n.p.)

The simple, even simplistic, *Twitter* user interface with its 140-character updates may contribute in important ways to such uses: compared even to *Facebook*, and certainly to older online publishing platforms such as blogs, it makes it a great deal easier to post a quick update from on the ground even while still in the danger area; *Twitter* cleverly tapped into the now widespread uptake of SMS texting via mobile devices, and translated such practices to a Web-based social media and social networking environment. Although at times inadvisable, it is therefore common to see updates from users caught up in breaking news events well before they have reached safety.

This "can also benefit journalism, which thereby gains a new seismograph for current and surprising events" (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 9; my translation)—and indeed the seismological metaphor is especially apt, as studies in Japan have shown that spikes in *Twitter* activity can be used to detect new earthquakes well before official agencies have assessed their magnitude and location (Sakaki *et al.* 2010). In the process, the *Twitter* response to acute events—whether natural disasters or anthropogenic crises—undergoes a number of stages, which are worth exploring in greater detail in the following discussion. It should again be noted that for the most part, these also apply to other social media platforms, but that the specific configuration of platform affordances provided by *Twitter* means that "it consistently carries news before either Facebook or Google Plus" (Osborne and Dredze 2014: 613).

Ad Hoc Emergence

With almost any breaking news event that occurs in a populated environment, there is by now a very good chance that one of the bystanders caught up in the event will not only have a social media account, but will also have access to a mobile device connected to the Internet, enabling them to post a first report from the scene almost immediately. Unless they are themselves—by sheer coincidence—present on the scene, this necessarily outpaces and out-scoops any professional journalists; indeed, it is notable that the professional journalists who are sometimes the first voices to be featured in the mainstream media as natural disasters or human-made events occur are often drawn into the coverage not by virtue of their professional standing, but because they happened to be holidaying at the scene of a natural disaster or live in the suburb affected by a terror attack. Even these professional journalists, in other words, participate at that moment in the role of eyewitnesses and citizen journalists.

In this earliest, emergent state of a breaking news story, then, "posts from citizen journalists and eyewitnesses can help fill the 'news vacuum' that immediately follows an event, when media organisations do not have a reporter in the field" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1195). The social media users who contribute to the coverage of the event at this point do so not out of a profound desire to 'become the media', as the very deliberate, self-selecting citizen journalists and news bloggers of the first wave of citizen media did, but simply because they are thrust by circumstances into the centre of developments—they are, in the truest sense of the term, performing random acts of journalism. But, suddenly "recast as journalists" by accident in this way, "they function based on what they have been socialized to recognize as accepted news values, [and] adapt them to the context … and their own perspective" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). Their immediate coverage typically includes text-based updates posted via *Twitter* and *Facebook*, but increasingly also involves audio and video materials; "large amounts of user-generated imagery [are] typically produced in response to crisis events and circulated within wider media ecologies" (Vis *et al.* 2014: 385), and often attempt to mirror the professional styles of disaster coverage that such citizen reporters are familiar with from the nightly news.

Such reports are visible in the first place only to other users who already follow these inadvertent eyewitnesses, and who may in turn redistribute these updates by retweeting them on *Twitter* or on-sharing them on *Facebook*; gradually, this enables the reports to reach a larger audience and may also result

in multiple such updates from different eyewitnesses appearing alongside each other in social media users' newsfeeds. Original posters or subsequent redistributors may also already have begun to introduce what appear to be sensible hashtags that describe the event; although individual and idiosyncratic at first, through repetition and imitation these will often quickly converge into one or a handful of widely used hashtags that increasingly enable interested social media users to track the event as it unfolds. In this way, social media such as Twitter "serve as a convening site wherein people without previously shared interests or existing relationships gather around a particular topic" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1397).

Notably, as they arise such hashtags may also be "understood as frames for naming … events" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 278), and thus exercise a certain interpretive power over what is unfolding; this power is especially pronounced given that the emergent hashtag may indeed be the first time that a breaking news event is given a distinctive descriptive marker. Borrowing an example from Don DeLillo's famous novel *White Noise* (1985), a hashtag such as #toxicevent would contribute to a very different framing from #trainaccident or #chemicalspill, for instance. The appropriate hashtags for specific events are therefore sometimes hotly disputed even while the event still unfolds: this occurs both for simply practical reasons, as in the case of the 2010/2011 Christchurch earthquakes, when the concurrent use of #eqnz and #nzeq (both standing for "New Zealand earthquake", but in different order) threatened to bifurcate the *Twitter* community and to undermine efficient information dissemination (Bruns and Burgess 2015); and at times when the interpretation implied by a chosen hashtag (e.g. #accident vs. #attack) might result in very different responses from participating users.

In earlier events, such hashtags emerged largely from the general *Twitter* user community engaging with an acute event; more recently, however, news organisations and other relevant authorities have become more active in proposing their own hashtag choices (not least also to reassert their news framing power, perhaps), with varying degrees of success. During the 2010/11 Christchurch earthquakes, *Twitter* users actively requested that the official New Zealand Civil Defence account use the #eqnz hashtag in order to make its updates more widely visible; in essence, the social media community provided some *ad hoc* training to the operators of the account in this instance (Bruns and Burgess 2015). Today, hashtags usually emerge from the interplay between communities and authorities—sometimes controversially so, when the hashtag chosen by a news organisation appears unacceptable to large

numbers of social media users because it implies a framing that is not yet borne out by the available information about the event. In such cases, users may choose to persist in using their own hashtags, offering a different framing.

As hashtags are established and the accessibility and circulation of relevant information about an acute event is thus enhanced, this also enables the greater participation of more remote social media users: while they may not have any first-hand information to contribute, they can source additional material from the social media platform or from elsewhere on the Web, and introduce it to the hashtag feed by (re)posting it with the event hashtag attached. This largely also bypasses the bottlenecks to information dissemination imposed by infrastructure breakdowns or state censorship: as Meraz and Papacharissi describe it in the context of the Iranian post-election protests in 2009, social media "enabled a global audience to remotely listen in on the Iranian conflict when access to other media was blocked" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 141), as well as to support the struggle by assisting in the dissemination of crucial information.

But due to the nature of *Twitter* and similar platforms as fundamentally social media, what is being shared here does not solely consist of conventional news reports. "Hashtag feeds deviate from the organizational logic of prominent news values to provide coherence by blending fact with opinion, and objectivity with subjectivity": they include "both news and conversations about the news" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 267). In this they therefore resemble the spaces of citizen journalism and news blogging in their second-tier roles, as we have encountered them during the first wave of citizen media, more than the products of conventional journalism—even though, as we have noted in Chapter 2, in the wake of citizen media there has also been a considerable shift towards the greater inclusion of opinion and commentary and away from the ideal of pure objectivity in the mainstream journalism industry.

Selective Repetition through Gatewatching

What unfolds in social media environments, once the initial breaking news event hashtag has been established and an *ad hoc* public (Bruns and Burgess 2015) of participants has gathered around it, thus represents a hybrid form of news coverage: social media serve "as a common medium for professional journalism and citizen journalism, and as a site of global information flow" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1377). The content that begins to circulate here combines

a range of materials: it includes first-hand eyewitness reports and footage from citizen reporters on the ground; breaking news updates posted by the accounts of journalists and news organisations, at first in plain text but gradually also including snippets of mainstream news footage and/or links to articles on their Websites; information from official sources such as government authorities, police and other emergency services, politicians, or commercial services including public transport, communication, or health services providers; as well as opinion, commentary, analysis, and reaction from a broad range of more or less informed and knowledgeable professional and amateur participants. The volume of such information ebbs and flows with the dynamics of the event itself, from "the torrent of conjecture ahead of President Obama's announcement of the death of Bin Laden" (Hermida 2014: 360) to the flurry of re-sharing key official statements as they are finally published.

The products of conventional, professional journalism represent only one component of the information that circulates across social media platforms in the immediate aftermath of acute events, therefore, and arguably constitute not even the largest part. Instead, in concert with other platforms,

> Twitter facilitates the instant, online dissemination and reception of short fragments of information from sources outside the formal structures of journalism, creating social awareness streams that provide a constantly updated, live representation of the experiences, interests, and opinions of users. (Hermida 2014: 360)

Such streams are fundamentally unfiltered, and co-created by many hundreds or thousands of participants, all re-sharing existing information and posting original material in an at best loosely coordinated fashion. This is facilitated by the extremely low barriers to participation in such social media spaces, where the first step from information recipient to information disseminator is made by a click or the 'retweet' or 'share' button; in this sense, these participants all act as produsers of the communal information stream.

In their raw form, such streams may be overwhelming for users, and can be difficult to parse. Notably, in these streams "new pieces of information are released piecemeal, often starting off as unverified information in the form of a rumour" that can "spread to large numbers of users" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 2), and an important challenge for users is therefore to distinguish rumour from fact. This is a collective task addressed by the active participants in acute events streams—it does not always succeed, but a recent study on a number of acute events suggests that there are some notable differences in how social media users engage with true and false information: "while the median

true rumour is resolved in about 2 hours, the median false rumour takes over 14 hours to be resolved" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 14).

The barriers to participating in the social media coverage of breaking news events are thus as low as re-posting an existing message, or tweeting a new post using a prominent event hashtag. There are no effective mechanisms in place to bar users from contributing in this way or to remove their posts from the stream, even if they have turned out to contain untruths. The streams relating to acute, breaking news events are therefore often voluminous and fast-paced. These three factors combine to position the further re-posting of existing social media posts as the major mechanism for the collective management of acute events streams by the community of users participating in them. This may appear paradoxical at first, as it further increases the volume of information in the stream; however, through the selective reposting of especially valuable and insightful information social media users are able to lend such posts (and the users who posted them) a comparatively greater visibility than is available for posts that appear only once, without further re-posting. These collectively amplified posts therefore gain a much greater chance of being widely disseminated and read.

Describing this process for the case of the #egypt stream covering the Arab Spring protests, Meraz and Papacharissi note that this "the repetitive pace of activity, attained through retweeting, provided a refrain-like rhythm to the stream, supported through a chorus of users who collectively crowdsourced prevalent actors and their tweets to prominence" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). The central mechanism in such crowdsourcing processes is the practice of gatewatching that we have already encountered as a foundational element for the first wave of citizen journalism in Chapter 2, translated here to the environments of contemporary social media. Such gatewatching is now all the more crucial as there is now no opportunity at all any more to keep the gates of other participants' social media accounts and control what information passes through them; any user can contribute to any event stream, regardless of their ability to make a meaningful contribution. In this situation, gatewatching—the observation of the output gates of other social media participants, and the selective re-sharing of information that appears most important, relevant, and meaningful—is operationalised as the key mechanism for collectively highlighting and amplifying those posts that deserve greater attention and reach.

Such collective gatewatching processes make a number of contributions. First, as Hermida notes, they determine to some extent "who makes the news"

and "what becomes newsworthy", at least within the social media stream itself (Hermida 2013: 305). The selection criteria utilised here may well deviate from those common in the mainstream media, however: as we have already seen, social media streams tend to combine a broader range of news, opinion, analysis, and reaction than is commonly found in conventional news channels. As a result, the range of content selected, and the range of sources that such content originates from, may well be broader and more diverse.

At the same time, the long-term socialisation of *Twitter* and *Facebook* users to conventional news formats does also mean that such formats do tend to be prominent here. In the case of #egypt, for instance,

> the stream gravitated toward news and opinions relevant to the uprisings, even though the architecture of the platform permitted deviation from the dominant focus. Comments that were irrelevant or unrelated were simply not retweeted or were ignored and thus were organically eliminated from the process of forming the dominant news frame or story. (Papacharissi 2014: 43)

This, then, is a second major contribution made by collective gatewatching: not only does it help to surface some of the most salient content available in the stream by selectively re-posting and thus amplifying it, but in the process it also selects and supports specific news frames applied to the event. We have seen this already with the emergence of hashtags themselves, which often imply a certain framing (at least when they are not entirely descriptive, as in the case of #egypt—but even here the greater overall attention paid to #egypt rather than #libya or #tunisia could be seen as a form of framing); the further framing work performed by the gatewatching processes *within* a given hashtag therefore represents a secondary, more detailed and specific form of news framing, or indeed frame amplification (Sivek 2014: 601).

In performing these functions, then, the collective gatewatching of unfolding events through social media also lends these events a greater consistency and coherence. The emergence of key news stories and news frames that such gatewatching enables results "in the collaborative construction of events out of atomized stories and stories out of subjectively experienced events" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 267). By virtue of its selective, continuous repetition of key content, gatewatching creates information redundancy—but in the "always-on, ambient environment" (Hermida 2013: 305) of high-volume, real-time social media streams such redundancy is positive and beneficial rather than problematic. In particular, redundancy and repetition make it possible even for more casual followers to use social media to stay

informed about a breaking news event: they do not need to remain constantly attentive to the event stream, but can dip in and out without fearing that they might miss the crucial new information contained in a message that appears only once. Indeed, at least in major breaking news events that attract a large number of users participating as gatewatchers in this way, they may not even need to follow the event stream itself, but are likely to see enough re-posted information in the personal feeds of their friends and connections to be able to form at least a first impression of what is happening.

The news choices made by social media users acting as gatewatchers during breaking news events are often also affective in nature, at least to a point: in #egypt, for instance, "most tweets were not just news or just opinion, but typically a blend of emotionally charged opinions on news or news updates to the point where it was difficult to distinguish news from opinion and from emotion, and doing so missed the point" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). Arguably, in fact—and mirroring the motivations of many of the citizen journalists and news bloggers of the first wave of citizen media—it is precisely this perceived affective connection to the news event that motivates social media users to become active as gatewatchers in the first place. Indeed, Papacharissi suggests that this is a fundamental, distinctive feature of social media platforms themselves: "the storytelling infrastructure of platforms like Facebook or Twitter invites observers to tune into events they are physically removed from by imagining what these might feel like for people directly experiencing them", thereby contributing to "civic mobilization" around such events (Papacharissi 2014: 4).

But this observation should not be misunderstood as a sign that social media feeds relating to breaking news events are overwhelmed by emotive statements to the detriment of the circulation of meaningful information. Rather, precisely because they do care deeply about the acute events they are observing from a distance, social media users invest their time in the selective gatewatching of information that makes a relevant and meaningful contribution to understanding the event. This selection process has been documented in a number of studies: Chew and Eysenbach, for instance, found that merely personal reactions to acute events were rarely retweeted; "there is … little interest or perceived benefit in reposting second-hand personal information" (Chew and Eysenbach 2010: 10; cf. Bruns *et al.* 2012) when more valuable news and analysis could be retweeted instead. During the Egyptian uprising, too, "comments that were irrelevant or unrelated were simply not retweeted or ignored, and thus organically eliminated from the process of forming the

dominant news story" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). And the Pew Research Center reports that even in the highly emotively charged atmosphere following the killing of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin, "after the July 13, 2013, acquittal of [shooter] George Zimmerman … the largest component of the Twitter conversation (39% of all expressed sentiments in tweets about the event) shared news of that verdict without offering an opinion" (Pew Research Center, 2013: 3).

Gatewatching as a Collective and Collaborative Practice

In other words, "tuning in affectively does not mean that reactions are strictly emotional; they may also be rational" (Papacharissi 2014: 4)—*because* a story feels important to them, social media gatewatchers may invest especially much time and effort in getting the information right and avoiding the spread of misinformation. Although the kind of gatewatching we can observe here is at first an individual, uncoordinated activity, the level of interest and engagement that results from such affective connection to an acute event can therefore also lead to more collective and collaborative practices: gatewatchers begin to observe each other's selection choices, and may adopt or critique them. From this perspective, "social networks can be regarded as huge pools of 'collective intelligence'" (Broersma and Graham 2012: 404; also cf. Hermida 2010b: 298; 2012: 662).

It is therefore possible to see hashtags as "a user-generated collaborative argument on what is news" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 268): participating users support the collective highlighting of key information, and thereby the framing of an event, but by choosing diverse aspects of the developments that they feel are worth highlighting also introduce different angles on the same story that other users, in turn, may endorse or dismiss in their own gatewatching and reposting activities. In addition, of course, users do not only work with the material already circulating within the established social media stream, but also continuously introduce new information found elsewhere: outside of the main hashtag relating to the event, and reposted with the hashtag attached; on mainstream and alternative news sites, and introduced into the hashtag discussion through new posts; on the sites of relevant organisations providing additional source materials, and brought to the attention of hashtag followers by posting links; or even from non-Internet media including radio and television, and shared through summaries or screenshots. This results in several overlapping layers of gatewatching practices, therefore,

drawing on material both internal and external to social media and publicising its existence by sharing it on social media.

As the social media stream related to an acute event thus becomes the collation point for information gleaned from a wide range of online and offline media, of official and unofficial sources, and of journalistic, para-journalistic, and non-journalistic contributors, the processes by which such materials are gathered and evaluated by the participating community of social media users can be described as a form of "social media curation" (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 4). Heinderyckx suggests that such curation constitutes a kind of "second-order gatekeeping" (2015: 262), but to describe the process in this way substantially overstates the ability of social media users to keep the gates through which information flows: because of the collective and eventually perhaps also collaborative nature of social media curation, in which no one user has the power to restrict information from circulation and in which the visibility of any piece of information is determined only by the aggregate choices of re-sharing made by a multitude of participants, what happens here is at best a process of collective, selective amplification. All of the information shared and evaluated through social media curation has already passed through the gates of publication; it cannot be withdrawn from circulation, but only made more or less visible through the concerted efforts of social media users.

In spite of the widespread use of 'curation' as a term to describe these processes, this *social* and *real-time* curation therefore diverges crucially from the individual, retrospective curation performed by conventional curators:

> the traditional notion of a curator is a trained expert who selects the finest objects and arranges them in a careful and meaningful way. This is curation in a world of scarce and precious objects. By contrast, social media is not a world of precious scarcity but of data abundance. Digital media can be copied, transferred, filtered, remixed, and sorted on the fly. (Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010: 312)

The processes observed here once again point to Shirky's observation that such online media reorder the publishing process from 'filter, then publish' to 'publish, then filter', therefore (Shirky 2002: n.p.). The approach on *Twitter* is often one of 'tweet first, verify later', and this has been criticised—especially by professional journalists—as enabling the circulation of rumours and misinformation; however, at the same time this approach also suits the almost irresistible drive towards an instantaneity of coverage that is a fundamental feature of a real-time medium such as *Twitter* (as well as, to a perhaps less pro-

nounced extent, of other social media platforms). "The ability to live-tweet events as they happen presents the primary appeal of Twitter. At times when mainstream media are restricted in their ability to report, or disseminate information, it is because of this ability that platforms like Twitter rise to prominence" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 273). Here we see another reason for the especially strong uptake of *Twitter* and similar platforms during breaking news events, then: while mainstream journalists are still evaluating what information they feel comfortable releasing to their audiences, social media enable the emergence of "a parallel market of information" that keeps "the information flows going—even if it means as a mix of truths, half truths, and untruths" (Moyo 2009: 563).

Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira have suggested that this points to a fundamental "temporal incompatibility of Twitter with our conventional definitions of what is news, what separates fact from opinion, and subjectivity from objectivity" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 274): they suggest that the platform "affords journalists neither the time to process information, nor the privilege of being the first to report it" (279). Although this may be true, it is also evident that an increasing number of journalists are themselves beginning to make effective use of social media during acute events, both in sharing their own reports (and those of their colleagues), and in sourcing first-hand information and analysis from the wider social media community (Heinrich 2012a: 772); we will explore such professional uses further in Chapters 5 and 6. Further, while the logics and dynamics of social media such as *Twitter* may be incompatible with the most conventional forms of news reporting, they are not entirely different from the similarly fast-paced rhythms of 24-hour broadcast news channels—both are forced to make rapid, *ad hoc* news judgments.

Indeed, Hermida suggests that rather than undermining journalistic processes and practices social media are extending them to participation by a much broader range of actors, including both professional journalists and other interested social media users. "A networked, distributed architecture of communication does not require an abandonment of the discipline of verification" that is fundamental to journalistic work, for instance: instead, the literacies required for verification are "informed by the standards of routines, rituals, and practices set by print journalism" and are now "socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content" (Hermida 2012: 662). The social media users who collectively and even collaboratively verify the information that already circulates through

their networks, by selectively re-posting the material they deem to be trustworthy, are therefore exercising a very well-established type of news judgment, even if they do so in unconventional contexts and by non-traditional means.

Such verification processes clearly are not always successful; for instance, "following the Boston Marathon bombings [in 2013], social media tried to crowdsource the identifying of the perpetrators with unsatisfactory results" (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 408), leading to the dissemination of information and photos of innocent bystanders wrongly thought to have been involved in the attack. This is deeply concerning and can have profoundly negative repercussions for the individuals concerned; however, similar such mistakes have also been made at times by mainstream media outlets, and such cases cannot therefore be used to fundamentally dismiss social verification processes as ineffective. Mistakes have been and will continue to be made; the more important question—and one which still requires further study—is whether such mistakes occur significantly more often on social media than they do in conventional mainstream news media. A recent study by Zubiaga *et al.* remains somewhat inconclusive on this point: they report that "whilst one can readily see users denying rumours once they have been debunked, users appear to be less capable of distinguishing true from false rumours when their veracity remains in question" (Zubiaga *et al.* 2016: 1).

In applying their news judgment both on what stories are likely to be true or false, and on what information is relevant and deserves further amplification, social media users are drawing on a set of unspoken news values that are largely likely to be derived from a life-long socialisation by exposure to the mainstream news. As a greater number of users are relying on social media as an important or even as their primary news source, however (Newman *et al.* 2016: 9), there is also the possibility for new news values to arise endogenously, reflecting less the long-established understandings of conventional journalism and more a collective sense of what social media users themselves believe to be important. This could prove to be a subtle but an important shift:

> differences lie not in the news values that are prevalent, but in who makes the decisions based on the same news values. So, whereas in a traditional news room, it is the professional hierarchy and ethos that drives how these news values are applied to judge and cover events, in the case of Twitter, these judgments were made collectively and organically. (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 272)

The Structuration of Social News Curation Communities

It is important not to overstate the extent to which such activities proceed through conscious collaboration—for the most part, they are likely to be aggregate and collective rather than explicitly interactive and coordinated. But it is precisely these differences between merely casual, *ad hoc* contribution (by re-sharing an occasional social media post) and more committed, considered, and collaborative curation that lead to a gradual structuration amongst the crowds of social media users participating in the tracking of acute events, and that can lead to the formation of genuine communities of leading contributors at their core. Such community formation does not always take place to the fullest extent—sometimes simply because the event is not of sufficient significance or duration to allow such structuration processes to run their course—but for major, longer-term acute events such as the Arab Spring protests or the Sendai earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown they can lead to the emergence of a number of clearly recognised leading voices. This emergence resembles the formation of heterarchical leadership groups in produsage projects (Bruns 2008), and is a sign of a similar recognition of important contributors to the collective effort by virtue of their continued constructive engagement.

Especially because, in the context of acute news events, the merit of individual participants is based on their ability to evaluate and frame information as part of an unfolding news story, such processes can constitute a competitive struggle between different contributors over the most plausible interpretation of the available information; they can therefore also enable "users who possess nonelite status offline to gain influential status" in the emerging social media curation community (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 142). Journalists and other traditional elites are not necessarily in a position of greater interpretive power in such contexts, and in this sense social media can carry over into this new environment some of the alternative, activist ethos of the first wave of citizen media that responded directly to the perceived shortcomings and lack of multiperspectival diversity in the established mainstream media. This is not to claim that elite actors' contributions are inherently dismissed as biased and untrustworthy, of course—but they, like other participants, must prove to be insightful and reasonable contributors to the collective task of making sense of the acute news event.

In this context, important distinctions between those users engaging primarily as information sources and those who act predominantly as social media curators also emerge. As Papacharissi reports it for the case of #egypt, "while

media elites frequently dominated blocks of the feed through constant tagged updates, they were only awarded leader status through retweets or mentions. Even though prominent, these actors occupied a peripheral position in the stream" (Papacharissi 2014: 46). By contrast, other participants from outside of the mainstream media engaged more directly in the discussion and evaluation of events as they unfolded: "a second, parallel and more vocal stream of opinion leaders emerged, consisting of bloggers, activists, and intellectuals with some prior involvement with online activism that was associated with the uprisings" (46).

This does not mean that journalists and other media professionals are inherently shut out from contributing as social media curators, and are relegated *a priori* to a role as mere news sources for the social media stream. Across several major breaking news events, professional journalists have risen to prominence not (or not primarily) for their first-hand reporting, but because they positioned themselves as curators of incoming information from a variety of conventional and unconventional sources on *Twitter* and other social media platforms. During several political leadership changes in Australia, for instance, journalists Latika Bourke and Annabel Crabb helped facilitate the *Twitter*-based evaluation of developments (Posetti 2010; Bruns and Burgess 2011); after the arrest of Paralympic sprinter Oscar Pistorius for the killing of Reeva Steenkamp in 2013, South African journalist Barry Bateman became a crucial conduit for information as it came to hand (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 110); "journalists Paul Lewis and Ravi Somaiya made extensive use of Twitter" during the London and U.K. riots in 2011 (Vis 2013: 43); and perhaps most famously of all, Andy Carvin—a social media strategist for National Public Radio in the United States—became one of the leading news curators during the protests of the Arab Spring: "Carvin engaged in gatewatching by pointing his followers to source material provided by a diverse set of actors online, contributing to a 'real-time verification system'" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494).

As a result of these breakthrough events, but also of a series of less groundbreaking incremental developments in how professional journalists and ordinary citizens engage on social media platforms during breaking news stories, "the word 'curation' has become a buzzword among many bloggers and social technologists as one of the next big technology trends" (Liu 2010: 19–20). How this idea of the social curation of emerging news stories on social media platforms is defined continues to vary across different studies of the phenomenon, however. Perhaps most usefully, Thorson and Wells state that "cu-

rators are active selectors and shapers of content working under conditions of content abundance. Curators do not only receive messages or filter them out. They may search out content and engage in reframing and remixing" (2015: 31). This is also in line with Hermida's point that "the curator is distilling an abundance of data on the fly" (Hermida 2012: 665), and reflects the underlying observation that the social news curator role responds to a fundamental challenge arising from the informational environment of social media and the wider Web, in which gatekeeping is no longer effective and information flows are unruly and unpredictable. As a result,

> eyewitness journalism in social media often lacks a clear storyline which calls for … someone to make sense out of the flow of information, to find the best content and to give credit to the right sources and at the same time to preserve unique information provided through social media. (Stanoevska-Slabeva *et al.* 2012: 12)

The curators who emerge to prominence in major breaking news events are no longer necessarily prominent journalists, experts, activists, or others with a pre-existing and recognised track record in reporting on the issue or topic at hand, however. They instead also include "organically emerging leaders" (Papacharissi 2014: 47) whose contributions are largely judged on their own merits, as demonstrated in the current context, rather than on the basis of past track records or institutional imprints. Indeed, this leads Lotan *et al.* to suggest that journalists operating their individual social media accounts may be in a better position to establish themselves as recognised social curators than would be possible for impersonal, institutional news accounts: "it may be more effective to let journalists control their individual Twitter accounts and build audiences through them, than to disseminate information through official accounts with organizational identities" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1400). The case of NPR's Andy Carvin, whose curational activities arguably outperformed those of major, much better-resourced news organisations, certainly lends support to this view, and we will explore these questions further when we examine professional journalists' adoption of social media in Chapter 5.

In fact, it is even possible for new social media accounts, created on the fly to address a current acute event, to play a substantial role in news discussion and curation, in spite of the complete lack of a track record for such an account. This was the case for instance in the U.K. riots of 2011, when "'riots accounts' … were specifically set up to tweet the riots, provide information or, in the case of 'riotcleanup', encourage cleaning activities in the aftermath of the riots." Vis reports that in her study "the @riotcleanup account is the most

mentioned account … and had a significant reach as well as high newsworthiness during a short period of time" (Vis 2013: 35). Individual journalists as well as news organisations, both of whom have a long-term interest in building an audience for their social media accounts, are not especially likely to set up such event-specific accounts, however—by contrast, ordinary social media users with sufficient motivation to become citizen curators for the duration of an event will be significantly more likely to do so.

The role played by Andy Carvin as a social media-based curator of news during the Arab Spring protests indicates that under the right circumstances media professionals can rise to substantial prominence, however. "Carvin … emerged as a key broker of information on Twitter during the Arab Spring": as events in Egypt and elsewhere unfolded, he "would often link to images from demonstrators, curate a range of discussion and opinion about events, and frequently ask his followers (then about 50,000 strong) to help him make sense of the bits of information he encountered" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 479). Indeed, Carvin appears to have made a deliberate choice to draw on a diverse range of sources, perhaps in reaction to the uncertain and fast-moving nature of the events he was tracking:

> while Carvin was in contact with a considerable number of journalists, our analysis indicated that he favored nonelite sources, particularly in Egypt. Tweets by nonelite sources accounted for just under 50% of all the messages in our sample, meaning that alternative voices had a greater influence over the content flowing through Carvin's Twitter stream than journalists or other elite sources. (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 492)

This breaks with a number of long-standing practices in conventional journalism, by using unverified information originating from non-standard sources; focussing on opinion rather than fact; and involving ordinary social media users in the interpretation and analysis of unfolding events—and in doing so draws substantially more on social media than news media logic, to the point that it can be described as a "turn against the paradigm of new media normalization" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494). Alternatively, we might say that here journalism is being normalised by social media, reversing the prevalent dynamics of normalisation.

Such emergent practices, largely developed *ad hoc* by Carvin and the journalists assuming similar roles in other breaking news events, therefore "highlight the emergence of new journalistic conventions, which a focus on established journalistic norms alone may fail to identify" (Vis 2013: 43); in such contexts journalism instead becomes a much more fluid and malleable

activity, "flowing and developing between tweets, Live Blogs, other online content and print" (43). Ultimately, in fact, Vis suggests that we might question whether the professional identity of such leading curators as journalists is especially relevant here: it may be more important to focus instead on the journalist's more immediate role "as citizen, bearing witness." The U.K. riots journalists she studied, for instance, acted much like other citizens observing the events and sharing their observations through social media, rather than assuming an inherently unique role as journalists: "they negotiated dangerous situations" and "made themselves less visible as journalists", which enabled "the taking of pictures on small and discrete camera phones" (Vis 2013: 43). And even when journalists and other citizens are not in a position to bear first-hand witness to unfolding acute events, the social curation of event information still retains a significant dimension of "monitory citizenship" (Postill 2015; cf. Keane 2009 on "monitory democracy"): news professionals engaging in an acute event from a distance, like Carvin, arguably do so as concerned citizens at least as much as they do in their formal roles.

It is self-evident that many of the social news curation activities performed by citizens and news professionals during such acute events consist of gatewatching the outputs of a wide variety of news sources, tagging such outputs to enhance their discoverability by attaching hashtags, keywords, and other forms of commentary, and thus publicising these items in order to amplify their visibility and enhance their circulation. Such processes are selective at the level of the individual participant (where we might still speak of each on-sharing choice as representing an act of gatekeeping, too), but these individual information selections result in substantive effects only in aggregate, as larger numbers of participants act *en masse* to validate or counteract each other's selection choices. If in doing so they persistently follow the selections made by specific participating curators, then these curators are thus elevated to greater prominence and influence.

Social News Curation, Social News Framing

The act of selecting, at an individual or collective level, the informational items to be publicised and amplified through sharing and commenting necessarily also represents an assessment of their value to an unfolding news story. This application of news value frameworks may confirm or counteract the value systems utilised by the mainstream media outlets from which a substantial amount of the information circulating through social media continues to

be sourced: social media curators may follow their judgment, or choose instead to highlight alternative perspectives on and interpretations of the same news story; they might also introduce information from non-news sources that extends or contradicts the details covered in mainstream news stories. This contributes to what Papacharissi describes as the emergence of "hybrid news values" that combine "new perspectives on what should be news and how it should be reported with remediations, or reinventions, of typical journalistic practices" (Papacharissi 2014: 43).

Any divergences in the perspectives on a given news event that emerge in the mainstream media and in the social curation processes unfolding on social media ultimately represent disputes over the appropriate framing of the news event, then. "The practice of framing is a persistent feature of social media", as Hogan and Quan-Haase suggest, because "social media allow people to reinterpret culture on the fly" (2010: 312). Such reinterpretation occurs as users find and share information relating to a given issue or topic, and as they observe and reinforce or reject each other's selection choices: what individual users do "carries a signal to their audience" (Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010: 313). Whether such signals rise to prominence depends on their uptake by other participants: in the case of #egypt, for instance, "tweets that were not reproduced in some form drifted into oblivion. By contrast, other tweets were gradually repeated through the processes of subjective pluralism, frequently supported by affective gestures" (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 155). For the most part, Papacharissi suggests, this "subjective pluralism" represented "a process of negotiating frames that was not antagonistic" (Papacharissi 2014: 54). This is perhaps due to the highly distributed and uncoordinated nature of social media streams around major events, where all participants have an equal opportunity to make their contributions, even if only few of these contributions are ever crowdsourced to greater prominence through the repetition and amplification afforded by social curation.

Warner describes very similar dynamics in his reflection on the nature of publics, well before the emergence of the current generation of social media platforms. He suggests that

> public discourse says not only: "Let a public exist," but: "Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way." It then goes out in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success—success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world-understanding it articulates. Run it up the flagpole, and see who salutes. Put on a show, and see who shows up. (Warner 2002: 82)

The community of social news curators that emerges around a specific acute event, together with those social media users who simply follow the active social news curation activities of the community and observe the stream of updates that results from them without actively contributing to the curation process, can therefore also be understood as a social media *public* for the event—and it is likely to represent a certain framing of the event, and a certain view of the world in which the event takes place. (We will explore the different possible configurations of social media publics further in Chapter 8.) There are clear parallels here to the first wave of citizen media as we have encountered it in Chapter 2: there, too, specific publics existed around individual citizen journalism sites and news blogs, and around their framing of events from the Seattle WTO summit to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—yet these publics were substantially smaller and more fragmented due to their attachment to individual sites, compared to the potential platform-wide membership base for social media publics.

This more networked and more diverse reservoir of potential participants in the acute event publics and communities that exist in social media spaces also serves to make the processes by which the public's shared frames for the interpretation of news events are developed even more visible, moving them further to the frontstage. As Papacharissi notes, in "conventional newsroom framing practices … backstage negotiation between sources, reporters, editors, and other stakeholders [is] largely not visible to the audience." In #egypt, however, a diverse group of participants interacted "to discursively elevate dominant frames. Ad hoc, emergent framing enabled salient frames to gain stickiness through the networked actions of both elite and crowd" (Papacharissi 2014: 52). Social curation of information around breaking news events can also be described as the social framing of these news events, therefore.

Dominant frames that influence public perceptions of the nature of a breaking news event can certainly emerge from these social framing processes; this is exemplified at the simplest level even just by the hashtags that *Twitter* users might apply to tweets relating to the event:

> hashtags that gain popularity in this bottom-up manner function as a public signal for the ad hoc framing of the event, and as a shorthand cue for enabling the public to understand the thematic frames of an issue as it unfolds in a dynamic fashion. These hashtags that gain widespread adoption thus enact, enable, and sustain the framing of select interpretations, aspects, or frames, to an event over time. (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013: 144)

Such hashtag selection processes can be disputed, as we have already seen, and may in extreme cases lead to the bifurcation of the publics that gather around a breaking news event into different subsets with widely divergent interpretations of the event, and similarly divergent underlying worldviews, even if continued overlaps between such different publics (for instance through the use of multiple hashtags or the retweeting from one group to the other) are also very likely.

In other cases, especially where the hashtag used remains merely descriptive (as in #egypt or #syria), multiple competing frames may continue to coexist within the same space, thereby enhancing the diversity of frames and interpretations that social media users are exposed to. Katzenbach describes this as a significant benefit: "conversations in simple publics experience an enhancement through their shift into the mediated space, by placing themselves as alternative options for the interpretation of reality immediately next to journalistic constructions" (Katzenbach 2016: 10, my translation). In concert with the increase in source diversity that we have already encountered as a result of social curation—not least in the curation work of Andy Carvin during the Arab Spring—this increase in frame diversity as a result of social framing substantially increases the multiperspectivality of the news that social media users will encounter as they track breaking news events on *Twitter* or *Facebook*, therefore.

A Cycle of Interaction between Journalistic Reporting and Social Curation

As Heinrich points out, in covering the Arab Spring "Carvin's Twitter reporting is an example of how to maneuver through the sphere of network journalism. Social media, here, are used not only to distribute news, but to gather information, to verify and to knit together many large and small nodes" (Heinrich 2012a: 772). Carvin's ability to position himself as a credible professional voice curating information on the breaking news events of the Arab Spring—in spite of the structural disadvantages that arose from having to track a multitude of divergent sources and views, and from having to do so from a U.S.-based office located far away from the scene of these events—offers an encouraging case study of the influential role that news professionals can continue to play even in an unfamiliar and rapidly transforming media and technological environment. The challenges to journalism that arise from social media—especially in the context of evolving, complex, still unsettled

acute events—are nonetheless profound: "social media allow for new relations that potentially disrupt hierarchical structures and erode the traditional distinction between the producer and consumer of news and information" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 481).

There are a number of elements to this disruption. First, as the examples of Carvin and other news professionals who have become central to social curation efforts during acute events demonstrate, there is a trend towards the recognition of such actors as themselves, rather than as representatives of a larger news organisation. Social media therefore contribute to what Verweij and van Noort describe as a process of individualisation; as a consequence, they suggest, "in public debates and discussion within society the role of the media could decrease in favour of the increasing centrality of individual journalists who have the skills to tell a story on Twitter" (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 110). As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, the journalism industry's response to these developments remains conflicted and contradictory, with some journalists actively pursuing the development of personal brands while elsewhere in the industry strict organisational social media guidelines seek to maintain the primacy of the organisational imprint.

In principle, this development may appear to merely continue a process that began with 24-hour news channels, which afforded increasingly greater visibility and personal recognition to journalists (and other elite actors) acting as commentators and pundits, partly in order to fill the abundant airtime now available with relatively cheap content. From this perspective, the elevation of the social media journalist to the status of a personal brand merely perpetuates "the 'star' system … where news anchors and Pulitzer prize winners can compete for high pay and get considerable autonomy" (Phillips 2015: 80). And indeed, much as the coverage of breaking news in 24-hour news channels often tends to involve journalists interviewing other journalists for their immediate (and often largely fact-free) instant assessment of an event, so too during the Arab Spring did "journalists appear to have a strong preference for retweeting other journalists' content over content from other actor types" (Lotan *et al.* 2011: 1391). However, it is equally notable that those journalists emerging to prominence as social curators during breaking news events are usually exactly those who engage with a much greater diversity of voices.

A second major element to the disruption from social media, in addition to this effect on the internal hierarchy of the news industry, is how it changes the hierarchy of sources. Social media, with their diverse constituency of active participants, are ill-suited as platforms for the perpetuation of exclusive

elite debates; rather, as we have seen, they offer an open space in which any user is able to state their views, and in which the reach of those views results from a collective but largely uncoordinated process of evaluation and amplification. By contrast, as one of Verweij and van Noort's interviewees in the news industry put it, "in the mainstream media 'you can't allow for debates like this, in which so many different groups of people are heard'" (Verweij and van Noort 2014: 111). This much more diverse mix of expert and inexpert, elite and ordinary sources being compiled in social news curation processes challenges the conventional source selection approaches employed by professional journalists, many of whom prefer to stick with a more exclusive set of elite sources. Again, Andy Carvin serves as a useful counter-example here, and it may be no accident in this context that he did not come from a conventional journalism background himself: "the professional background of the NPR social media strategist is far from the path followed by the traditional foreign correspondent" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 494), thus perhaps enabling him to accept unconventional sources more readily as he covered the Arab Spring.

News professionals engaging with a diversity of sources in this way clearly follow Dan Gillmor's mantra that "my readers know more than I do", which we have already encountered in Chapter 2 (Gillmor 2003); "Carvin, himself, has described his Twitter network as 'my editors, researchers & fact-checkers. You're my news room' .... He has said his work is 'another flavor of journalism,' seeing himself as 'another flavor of journalist'" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 495). But as more of the responsibility for the fact-checking, the analysis and evaluation, and ultimately also the framing of a breaking news event is thus passed on from news professionals to the social news curation community—as social media become platforms for the "coconstruction of news by journalists and activists" (483)—, this may also mean that the coverage of acute events on social media platforms moves away from traditional journalistic ideals of objectivity and impartiality. Analysis suggests, for instance, that "in his coverage, Carvin gave a higher priority to the messages from citizens who were expressing their demands for social change, recording and sharing their experiences on Twitter" (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 493) than would be expected in ordinary news reporting.

This is a third element to the disruption of journalistic practices in social media contexts, then: as journalists are no longer in control of the framing applied to major breaking news events, the frames that do emerge through social news framing processes may represent a very different perspective on the news. As "news frames are negotiated through crowdsourced practices on

Twitter" (Hermida 2013: 305), in a process that Meraz and Papacharissi describe as "networked framing" (2013: 159), these perspectives may crucially also incorporate a considerably greater affective dimension than mainstream journalistic coverage has traditionally displayed: "we may understand and further interpret collaborative discourses … on Twitter as structures of feeling, comprising an organically developed pattern of impulses, restraints, and tonality" (Papacharissi 2014: 116).

Such greater levels of affect should not be misunderstood as an increase in mere emotion and irrationality, however: an affective connection to the matters at hand may also lead participants to take greater care in constructing the framing of an event, and in testing the assumptions that underlie specific news frames. Indeed, it must be noted, of course, that professional journalists themselves are never entirely free from affect, either, and that this can have both positive and negative consequences:

> when the attacks in the government quarter of Oslo and on the island of Utøya took place [in 2011], Norwegian journalists such as Rune Thomas Ege (@rtege) or Rune Håkonsen (@runehak) curated information on Twitter by using their professional and personal source network—and … some (foreign) journalists might have been better off particularly in the first hours … to rely on these Twitter feeds instead of consulting so-called 'terror-experts' who at times rushed to hasty conclusions about an alleged Al Qaeda attack. (Heinrich 2012a: 773)

The political economy and technical infrastructure of the different media platforms comes to play an important role here: in legacy news media, especially live radio and television, a knee-jerk response to a breaking news story by a leading outlet—for instance, the instant interpretation of a mass killing as Islamist terrorism by a CNN pundit—can set the mainstream media news frame for hours and even days to come, as many other channels will report and adopt this framing by an apparently reputable actor. On social media, on the other hand, the hierarchies of channel and source authority are considerably less fixed and compelling, and it is therefore a great deal more likely that a variety of diverging frames will compete for support while the full facts of the matter are still unclear. Although this "fragmented and pluralized storytelling by crowd-sourcing" (Papacharissi 2014: 48) can be seen as perpetuating uncertainty, such uncertainty is nonetheless actually *preferable* to the false certainty of the TV expert, especially in the early stages of an acute event.

Indeed, the diverse and disputed nature of the coconstructed news frames as they emerge through social framing processes on *Twitter* and *Facebook* is

often also in direct response to the rush to judgment that social media participants observe in the mainstream media—their offers of alternative interpretations and frames for the same news event seek to challenge the emerging journalistic consensus. This underlines that such social media platforms "should be seen as part of a complex ecosystem in which journalism takes place" (Vis 2013: 44): through their gatewatching activities social media participants constantly draw into their own debates the reports and interpretations of the acute event that are gradually becoming available in the mainstream media. Increasingly, however, information also flows in the opposite direction, not least because of the role that news professionals now also play in social news curation activities related to acute events. In this way, social media news coverage and framing processes now also reach back into the mainstream media, and may come to affect how these media cover an event: "their impact may reach well beyond the participants themselves" (Smith *et al.* 2014: 1).

This is the fourth disruption to conventional journalistic practices that social media-based curation of breaking news introduces. Acting again as a second-tier corrective to the first-tier mainstream media in the sense described by Herbert Gans (1980: 322), social media accompany the mainstream media reporting of the event, incorporate its stories into their own information feeds, but also critique and juxtapose these stories with other available facts; the news picture and frames that emerge from this collective curation process in turn also increasingly find their way again into the mainstream, where they are becoming more and more difficult to ignore. Where there are substantial differences between the professional and citizen journalistic interpretations of the facts of the story, therefore, mainstream news outlets are now forced to defend or adjust their analysis and framing: they can no longer ignore the curation processes that take place in social media platforms, nor dismiss the participants in such social news curation as amateurs and partisans—not least also because their own journalists are now often also themselves engaged in those curation efforts.

This further demonstrates the considerable interconnections between mainstream and social media, which facilitate increasingly voluminous information flows between the two sides, unfolding in several cycles across the same breaking news event. We have already seen how social media content from citizens acting as eyewitnesses is now regularly incorporated into news coverage as news about acute events breaks—"the news itself may emerge first via Twitter, but it is the mass media that pick it up and package it for a mass audience" (Newman 2011: 56). Even as early as the Mumbai attacks in 2008,

tweets from witnesses were thus widely reported in the mainstream media, and "photos from the scene filled Flickr and showed up on newspaper sites and TV screens" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.). But there is also a kind of secondary eyewitnessing that emerges in response to the first mainstream media reports: as the Mumbai attacks were reported, for instance, "on Flickr we also saw screenshots from TV screens" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.).

Similar phenomena have been observed in many other breaking news events since then; in the view of Vis *et al.*, "this image production suggests the value of this simultaneous, removed eyewitnessing" (Vis *et al.* 2014: 395) as a mechanism through which even those social media users who are not physically present on the scene may demonstrate their immediate involvement:

> what is documented in the photograph is partly the status of the image-maker as a media spectator. Here, the eyewitness is both a spectator of mainstream media news and an image-maker who utilises the camera phone as a communication-connection device to produce images and distribute them through Twitter. (Vis *et al.* 2014: 395)

The sharing of mainstream media screenshots also represents a first step in the gatewatching of mainstream media reports relating to the news story; indeed, the sharing of such screenshots from live TV through social media platforms could also be interpreted as the only option available to would-be gatewatchers in the very early stages of a breaking news event, when more easily shareable news stories have not been published online yet. More conventional forms of gatewatching—finding, commenting on, and sharing links to online news content, and re-sharing the content posted by other social media users—then commence as news content become available online.

As such more standard gatewatching begins, and as social curation processes emerge, social media users constantly draw in additional material from the media (as well as from other original sources), evaluate that content and engage in their own social framing activities, which—as we have seen—may result in very different perspectives on the news than those presented in the mainstream media. In turn, also because of the growing involvement of mainstream journalists in such processes, the outcomes from such ongoing social curation processes are then also likely to find their way again into the mainstream media, so that a potentially continuous back-and-forth process of cross-platform interactions begins to unfold. However, this interaction should not necessarily be understood as a process of agenda-setting, in either direction: "it is not that the journalists see that a story is 'big on Twitter' and then mechanically produce additional stories for the wire or broadcast", as Neuman

et al. point out. Rather, both social media "crowds and … professional journalists are reacting to a shared perception that an event is significant and each [are] responding according to [their] own natural dynamic" (2014: 204).

For all the justified attention to the role of social media in breaking news situations, then, such platforms are not necessarily undermining the mainstream media in the context of acute events; rather, they are interweaving with them. As Newman notes, "even Keith Urbahn, who posted that first tweet [about the killing of Osama Bin Laden], was moved to defend the role of mainstream media when he later revealed via Twitter that his source was actually a well-connected TV producer from the mainstream media—not a political insider" (Newman 2011: 32). Commonly, then, as news breaks social media are "getting the ball rolling and stimulating interest", but key aspects of the news are "still delivered in a fairly traditional way" (32b). At the same time, however, that role in rapidly disseminating the first information about a breaking news event—and in so doing reaching social networks that otherwise may not yet have been aware of the fact that a major acute event has occurred—should not be underestimated: "it is likely that Twitter users serve as important *multipliers for spreading information* communicated via the network to other channels" (Neuberger, vom Hofe, and Nuernbergk 2014: 346).

Reintermediating the News: A First Draft of the Present

Throughout this chapter, what we have observed is the role of *Twitter* in rapidly assembling *ad hoc* publics around breaking news stories—publics which are defined by their shared efforts to gather, evaluate, selectively amplify, and in so doing curate the picture of a breaking news event as it emerges in real time. Hermida describes this as a "disintermediation of news", which in the process is also "undermining the gatekeeping function of journalists" (Hermida 2010b: 300). Especially as acute events unfold, it is becoming evident that journalism is no longer in control of the news stories it is attempting to tell, but that professional journalists, much like ordinary social media users, are now forced merely to hang on during the twists and turns delivered by an ever more dynamic news environment in which a wide array of sources, news outlets, and other news actors are contributing information. Social media, and especially *Twitter*, are now commonly the core space through which all of these actors interconnect: this is not exactly a process of complete *disintermediation*, as these

platforms are also media and through their affordances affect how information may flow, but it is an important form of *reintermediation* that diverts important news processes away from the conventional channels of the mainstream media—a point which we will address further in the next chapter.

In this changing environment, this reintermediation means that journalism no longer holds the unchallenged privilege of presenting "a first rough draft of history", as the old saying goes (see Shafer 2010): that is, a first working interpretation of news events and their relevance to the public. The real-time coverage and curation of acute events on social media, which outdoes conventional journalism in its speed and its ability to present a number of immediate reflections on the impact of unfolding events, instead positions it as what we might describe as "a first draft of the present" (Bruns and Weller 2016). The informational record created in this process may come to be of a historical importance that is as great as that of conventional news reports has proven to be: "now, for the most time in recorded history, witnesses to news events are able to post their unmediated testimonies as events unfold, in real time. These will remain permanently accessible to anyone, anywhere with uncontrolled Internet access" (Ahmad 2010: 152), at least as long as the social media platforms and their archives remain operational.

Viewed from this angle, the social curation of information about acute events that is performed by social media users as these events unfold also holds significance well beyond the present moment. In #egypt and elsewhere, "as individuals tweeted and retweeted observations, events instantly turned into stories" (Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012: 274), and these stories become a window on the world in which the events unfolded that is invaluable not only for making sense of the news at the time, but also for future historians looking back on how affected locals and the wider world reacted to what was taking place. This bigger, longer-term perspective underlines just how apt the term social news curation is as a description for the activities undertaken by social media users: "engaging in curatorial activities is a way of being a steward of our history by deciding what and how to preserve this history for posterity's sake" (Liu 2010: 22). In compiling their first rough draft of history, journalists have long played a powerful role in defining current events for future audiences; now, the collective responses of social media publics (to the extent that they are preserved for posterity) generate a similar and even more rich and immediate historical resource.

Overall, then, in this transformed media environment the work of professional, industrial journalists is now thoroughly interleaved with the activities

of a wide array of other actors. What emerges from this reintermediation are a range of journalism practices (performed by professional journalists, expert para-journalists, and self-selecting citizen journalists alike) that take advantage of this interconnected, networked informational space itself—practices that Beckett has described as networked journalism:

> Networked Journalism allows the public to be involved in every aspect of journalism production through crowd-sourcing, interactivity, hyper-linking, user-generated content and forums. It changes the creation of news from being linear and top-down to a collaborative process. (Beckett 2010: 1)

Such changes are by no means universally accepted, as we will see over the coming chapters: in particular, there are concerns "that new practices undermine traditional journalistic values, such as accuracy and objectivity" (Gulyas 2013: 272). A range of significant journalistic errors related to the difficulties in balancing the speed of social media reporting with the need for the thorough verification of information, in particular, have led some journalists and journalism scholars to sound an important note of caution about the impact of this reintermediation of the news through social media (see e.g. Neuberger, vom Hofe, and Nuernbergk 2014: 346). As Hermida has pointed out, "there are few signs that journalism has, as a profession, embraced the notion of sharing jurisdiction over the news and over the process of verification"; instead, journalists and news organisations continue to use social media in "opportunistic" fashion, drawing on the information circulated through social media without fully embracing the more participatory, networked logics of social media (Hermida 2012: 664).

In part this is because journalists—already stretched in their work because of the increasing pressures of working in an industry that is struggling to remain economically viable—are simply overwhelmed by the added demands of incorporating social media into their work practices: "for journalists working with Twitter, the velocity at which information is circulated creates significant demands in the realm of verification" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1196; cf. Heinrich 2012b: 61). Social media could be part of the solution as much as they are part of the problem here, however: as journalists become more familiar with the social media environments in which they work, they might also begin to develop a stronger sense of the important voices on which they might draw, and of the collective curation processes that could help them verify emerging information. This, too, would be a process of normalisation, though—in contrast to how the citizen media of

the first wave were normalised by the industry—not simply on the terms of the journalists. It would mean a shift from the opportunistic, tactical use of social media in breaking news contexts to a more persistent, strategic utilisation of social media as a media environment that enables journalists to constantly keep an eye on current events in the world, thus using social media as what Hermida describes as an ambient "awareness system" for the news (Hermida 2010b: 300).

As we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, a growing number of individual journalists and news organisations are now beginning to explore these opportunities. Yet even while that adoption of social media into journalistic practice still continues to unfold, it has already become obvious that in the context of acute events social media enable the engagement of a much wider range of actors in the immediate eyewitnessing, selective repetition, and social curation of news and information that may variously be sourced from affected bystanders, original sources, journalistic reportage, or social media platforms themselves. Gatewatching (both of external sources whose content is injected into the spaces of social media, and of existing social media content that is further amplified through reposting) is crucial to these processes: on the one hand, the collective efforts by hundreds and thousands of social media users to share the news and information from a variety of sources that they deem to be relevant to a current acute event means that

> Twitter becomes a system where news is reported, disseminated and shared online in short, fast and frequent messages. It creates an ambient media system that displays abstracted information in a space occupied by the user. In this system, … the value does not lie in each individual fragment of news and information, but rather in the mental portrait created by a number of messages over a period of time. (Hermida 2010b: 301)

On the other hand, the constant recirculating of available information by retweeting and sharing past messages, performed especially by the majority of participating users who do not have privileged access to new first-hand news and information from external sources, ensures that such material remains visible once posted. This is crucial in the context of the interface design of *Twitter* and similar platforms: "unlike horizontal stock or sports tickers that communicate incremental changes in prices and scores in a constant loop, Twitter's vertical ticker relies upon friends and contacts to actively repost or 'retweet' a post back to the top of its vertical-ticker interface" (Elmer 2013: 19). Each individual act of gatewatching, however small, makes the pieces of information it highlights a little less ambient, and instead serves to

bring them further to the conscious attention of social media users who follow these streams of social news curation.

We might ask whether such activity can thus be understood as a form of citizen journalism, echoing "similar debates around blogs and whether blogging was journalism" (Hermida 2013: 296) that unfolded during the first wave of citizen media. Certainly, there is now a very broad citizen involvement in the coverage of acute events on social media, and that involvement is crucial as only this large-scale engagement ensures that breaking news events are amplified enough to become reliably visible to a large range of social media users, as well as to the trending topics algorithms that also help to alert users to important topics. Such citizen involvement is aided by the fact that social media have further lowered the barriers for ordinary users to participate in breaking news events, to a significant degree: basic involvement may now simply mean pressing the retweet button on *Twitter*, or a 'Share This' button on a mainstream news site, but in aggregate even—and *especially*—such simple actions contribute substantially to the collective social curation process, and result in a crowdsourced evaluation of the importance of the overall story and its individual informational components. This bears out Benkler's point that

> granularity … sets the smallest possible individual investment necessary to participate in a project. … If the finest-grained contributions are relatively large and would require a large investment of time and effort, the universe of potential contributors decreases. A successful large-scale peer-production project must therefore have a predominate portion of its modules be relatively finegrained. (2006: 101)

Twitter, and most other social media platforms, render the available options for user participation in breaking news engagement very fine-grained indeed.

Arguably, this means that—even if we consider only the special case of public engagement in breaking news events, rather than a broader range of news—user engagement in this second wave of citizen media is already shaping up to be considerably more widespread than it was during the first wave. If user involvement starts with the click of a share or retweet button and progresses in comparatively small increments towards more persistent and original activity, such greater ease of access and participation may in turn also mean that a larger and more diverse range of users are now able and prepared to contribute, well beyond the 'political junkies' of the heyday of blogging. This broader range of participants may no longer consider themselves to be citizen journalists, however; they may not be driven by a profound desire to 'become the media' in order to address significant shortcomings in the ex-

isting mainstream news industry. Instead, they simply share the news, more or less attentively, as acute events occur that attract their attention—but it is precisely in this broadening of the contributor base for gatewatching and newssharing that the second wave of citizen media advances substantially beyond the first.

At the same time, "excited claims about technology-driven 'revolutions' risk obscuring what is really happening, especially where the impact of technological change is overstated as a sudden, prodigious departure from previous convention" (Allan 2013: 170). In spite of the widespread recognition of *Twitter*, in particular, as well as of other social media platforms as increasingly crucial tools in the coverage of breaking news events, they do also simply constitute the next step in an evolution that can be traced back at least to *Indymedia*'s 'Battle of Seattle', and from there through the role of blogs in covering major natural disasters, political scandals, national elections, and other important news events to the present moment. Central throughout this evolution has been the practice of gatewatching, as we have seen—the current generation of social media have merely made this practice available to an even greater constituency of users, who are now able to engage in it in real time, and bring to it an even broader set of perspectives. As Jarvis put it in the immediate aftermath of the Mumbai attacks, then, "such will be our new view of news: urgent, live, direct, emotional, personal" (Jarvis 2008: n.p.).

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· 4 ·

RANDOM ACTS OF GATEWATCHING

Everyday Newssharing Practices

"All media carry the same major events, but Twitter continues to be the preferred medium for breaking news, almost consistently leading Facebook" (Osborne and Dredze 2014: 611). In Chapter 3 we have already explored the role that the hashtag as a coordinating mechanism for the exchange of news and information, and as a rallying point for *ad hoc* publics (Bruns and Burgess 2015), plays on *Twitter* once an acute event has been recognised as breaking news. However, even before hashtags emerge to name and frame an event that has just occurred, the first reports from eyewitnesses and others about the event will already be circulating through the Twittersphere: the network composed of all follower/followee connections between *Twitter* accounts. To follow another user means in the first place to see the user's tweets show up in one's own timeline, and the centrality of this relationship logic to the platform means that for almost all users "it is impossible … to be on Twitter and not to be aware of other residents of this virtual place" (Gruzd *et al.* 2011: 1298). By continually monitoring one's timeline it is therefore possible to remain aware of the activities and interests of the accounts one follows, and the information gatewatching choices made by those accounts determine the view of the world that the user is exposed to. This is not necessarily limited to *Twitter*, of course, but the specific structural settings of the *Twitter* platform mean that

users may easily follow a wider and more diverse range of other accounts, from world leaders and celebrities to friends and family, and that they may therefore encounter a broader and more multiperspectival selection of news and information than they do on *Facebook* and other social media platforms.

As Crawford points out, therefore, "social media powerfully invoke an efficient listening subject" (2009: 526), following the communicative contributions of others. Such listening to the conversations about the news events, issues, and topics that are reintermediated by social media, even if it does not result in a user posting their own views about the event, is a fundamental prerequisite for any more active engagement; "it is an embedded part of networked engagement—a necessary corollary to having a 'voice'" (2009: 527). Social media users have been shown to value such listening to the ambient news feeds provided by social media to an increasing extent; as the Reuters Institute's *Digital News Report* of 2015 points out, for instance, users under 35 years of age find "social media … particularly valuable for alerting [them] to stories they didn't know about" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 53; also see Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2014: 636). Such discovery of unknown and unexpected information, driven by the gatewatching choices made by the various accounts that are followed by a given user, may in fact be especially important as a means to counteract fears about the narrowing of information flows to a handful of major sources in the current news environment: "serendipitous news discovery … is essential to forming public opinion and creating informed consensus and stable cohesion around public policy that makes governing possible" (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 29). It is notable that from this perspective, the collective processes of information amplification through gatewatching on social media supplement or supplant the journalist's "occupational role as gatekeeper" which had similarly been seen as "vital to a properly informed electorate" (Singer 2015: 85).

But it is not only ordinary social media users who are able to use these platforms to maintain an ambient awareness of the news, of course: for journalists, too, they provide "more complex ways of understanding and reporting on the subtleties of public communication" (Hermida 2010b: 301). Journalists might take a more strategic approach to using social media by employing *Twitter* and other platforms to keep an eye on current developments in the world; to do so they would need to follow a range of accounts that are relevant to their news beat, and regularly monitor the information posted by these accounts. Hermida describes this approach as "ambient journalism", which "frames Twitter as a social awareness system that delivers a fragmented mix of

information, enlightenment, entertainment, and engagement from a range of sources" and which is used for the explicit purpose of utilising that information as input to journalistic reporting (Hermida *et al.* 2014: 482).

Such ambient journalism potential is also available to ordinary users seeking to engage as para- or citizen journalists, however: "ambient journalism concerns the collection, selection, and dissemination of news by both professional [journalists] and non-professional para-journalists, where users undertake some of the institutional tasks commonly associated with the journalist" (Hermida 2014: 361); because all of these activities are taking place in the shared space of the social media platform, professional and citizen journalists are operating side by side here and cannot necessarily draw on any fundamental competitive advantage that stems from their institutional positioning. "Users become part of the flow of news, reframing or reinterpreting a message through networked platforms that extend the dissemination of news through social interaction, introducing hybridity in news production and news values" (Hermida 2014: 361). This selective gatewatching and redistribution of specific content can therefore be described as "always-on or ambient framing", as Meraz and Papacharissi (2013: 146) put it.

This, then, is the foundation for Hermida's description of *Twitter* (and, by extension, of other, similar social media platforms) as "awareness systems that offer diverse means to collect, communicate, share and display news and information in the periphery of a user's awareness" (2010a: n.p.). He notes that "these systems are always-on and move from the background to the foreground as and when a user feels the need to communicate" (2010b: 301)—or, we might add, the need to listen in to what everyone else is currently talking about—and they are therefore also "ambient", in the sense that they are always available, but not necessarily always at the centre of a user's attention. As Crawford points out, "listening … captures the experience that many Internet users have. It reflects the fact that everyone moves between the states of listening and disclosing online; both are necessary and both are forms of participation" (2009: 527). Arguably, the practice of gatewatching describes specifically the pivot point between listening and posting: from the perspective of the individual participant, when the news stories circulating through social media advance beyond a merely ambient state and—through repetition by other users—become visible and important enough to draw the user's attention, gatewatching takes place, and the user is now confronted with the opportunity to make their own contribution, either by simply resharing an existing message or by posting an original message of their own.

As hundreds or thousands of social media users individually make this decision in the context of the same event, issue, or topic, they are also increasingly likely to become aware of and be influenced by each other's decisions, of course. As a result,

> larger, looser groups can now take … some kinds of coordinated action … that were previously reserved for formal organizations. … One of the main forms of coordination is what the military calls "shared awareness," the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does, too. Social media increase shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks. (Şen 2012: 493)

As such shared awareness of an issue, and of the participants' collective reaction to and engagement in the issue emerges, in fact, the group gradually transforms into a public in the true sense of that term.

The social media publics that are generated through these dynamics are therefore not constituted by members who each have encountered exactly the same identical collection of information; in this they are unlike the publics for conventional media texts (a newspaper, a television broadcast, a book, a movie); rather, they share a general awareness of the unfolding events, but the specific details that they have encountered differ. This imperfect degree of awareness may appear problematic when compared to the ideal picture of a media public that is fully informed, but as Hermida points out, for social media "completeness of awareness is not the goal …. Instead of overwhelming an individual with an endless stream of tweets, Twitter as an always-on, asynchronous awareness system informs but does not overburden" (Hermida 2010b: 303). At the same time, it is also important to point out that even in conventional media complete awareness is nothing more than an unachievable ideal: the widely differing levels of attention paid to the news media by individual citizens also mean that different individuals will be more or less fully aware of current news events and issues. The use of social media as news sources simply results in a different distribution of news knowledge across the wider public, and in different dynamics of information dissemination, but not inherently and inevitably in worse (or better) levels of awareness. Indeed, more research is still necessary to explore "the extent to which such systems of ambient journalism allow citizens to maintain an awareness of the news events", as Hermida points out (2010b: 303).

From Acute Events to Everyday Engagement

In the previous chapter, we encountered the emerging patterns of news consumption that are now commonly established in the context of acute news events, when potentially large publics accumulate around major breaking news stories—and we saw how such events are now often driven on social media platforms both by the immediate eyewitness reporting that accidental bystanders engage in, and by the collective curation efforts of diverse communities of social media users, including some journalists, who are potentially more distant from the scene of the events. We have even encountered the phenomenon of secondary eyewitnessing, where users are re-sharing screenshots of mainstream media reporting through social media; this demonstrates the deep and complex interlinkages between social and mainstream media that exist in our contemporary, hybrid mediasphere.

But self-evidently, news engagement is not limited to the context of major breaking news stories, in social media any more than in the conventional mainstream media. Hermida's idea of ambient news imagines social media as an always-on background murmur of news updates, and demands greater user attention and engagement when acute event information begins to circulate at ever higher volumes and thus pushes into the foreground. But so far we have focussed on what happens after this move from ambient to acute, after what Lehmann *et al.* (2013b) call "transient news crowds" accumulate around the hashtags associated with breaking news stories from terrorist attacks to television awards. Arguably, such acute events have also been studied in considerably greater detail by existing research—we understand better how social media contribute to the circulation and evaluation of the news when stories are no longer ambient than how they are being used in news-related contexts before that point. This chapter therefore addresses this second question, and examines everyday newssharing and news engagement practices.

By analogy with physics, we might say that the study of social media news practices during acute events observes these platforms in their excited state, when there is enough energy in the system to reduce the barriers that resist the rapid flow of information. In their ordinary, ambient mode, on the other hand, social media exist in their ground state, where the mechanisms that can rapidly connect *ad hoc* publics (such as *Twitter*'s hashtags functionality, for instance) are used less prominently, and less effectively, and other, more fundamental platform features play a considerably more important role in determining how news and information flow across the network. During such

times, "a major and most convenient usage pattern is to read only content from people the user has selected to follow" (Himelboim *et al.* 2013: 158), and exposure to the news "is based on foraging and opportunism. [Users] seem to access news when the spirit moves them or they have a chance to check up on headlines" (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 2).

In contrast to the context of breaking news, where *Twitter* is widely recognised as playing a particularly prominent role—due especially to its flat and public network structures, and the importance of its hashtags in rapidly providing a rallying point for interested news followers—in everyday newssharing both *Facebook* and *Twitter*, along with a range of other social media platforms, are both relevant platforms; given its vastly larger userbase *Facebook* may in fact be considered to be the most important network here. However, "choosing to follow news organizations, reporters or commentators … is more common on Twitter (46% of users) than Facebook (28%)" (Pew Research Center 2015: 14), and this means that *Twitter* users are more likely than their *Facebook* counterparts to come across news reports on a number of key topics (Pew Research Center 2015: 3). As a result, *Twitter* is "seen much more as an active destination for news by an audience that is deeply interested in latest developments" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 14); or as Ju *et al.* put it somewhat more succinctly, "Twitter is more newsful" (2014: 12). Yet in spite of these differences, even the less 'newsful' *Facebook* still reaches—and engages—a vast population, especially in its key markets: "Facebook is by far the largest social networking site, reaching 67% of U.S. adults. The two-thirds of Facebook users who get news there … amount to 44% of the general population" (Gottfried and Shearer 2016: 4). There is also considerable overlap between the two, of course: in 2015, "one-in-five Facebook news users also get news on Twitter, and fully 78% of the smaller population of Twitter news users also get news on Facebook" (Pew Research Center 2015: 6).

In each of these platforms, everyday engagement with the news begins with an individual user's choice to share a news item (of whatever provenance) with their network connections; this in itself is an act of gatewatching as we have defined it in Chapter 2, of course, and in itself is not dissimilar to the gatewatching choices made by news bloggers and citizen journalists during the first wave of citizen media. The initial contributor's connections (the gatewatcher's *Facebook* friends or *Twitter* followers) may in turn decide to engage further with the news item, for instance by liking, sharing, or commenting on it in the *Facebook* environment, by retweeting it on *Twitter*, or also by crossposting it from here into another social network altogether. Each

of these actions distributes the news item horizontally, making it available to a new set of network connections that are different from the first user's, and thereby increasing the reach of the initial news story.

In addition to such horizontal sharing at what Bruns & Moe (2014) have described as the meso-level of the social network—made up of the individual, overlapping friend and follower networks that surround each social media account, which in their totality constitute the network's social graph—subsequent newssharers may also decide to share the news item in a more vertical direction, either by decreasing its visibility and circulating it less publicly through direct messages, @replies, personal chats, or closed groups (the micro-level of the network), or by increasing its reach with the addition of a prominent hashtag or the posting on a public page (the macro-level). Such choices are made on an individual basis by each subsequent sharer (but are potentially also influenced by the choices of others that are already visible in the sharer's network), and the range of options available here demonstrates that such "networked digital media technologies are extending the ability of news consumers to both create and receive personalized social news streams" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 821).

The material being shared here is inherently diverse; each act of sharing is the result of an individual user's decision about what information triggers their personal interest, and what they think may also be of interest to their network connections. For the most part, such interests are unlikely to relate only to the issues addressed by breaking news stories or trending topics; instead, they will represent the whole gamut of social media users' personal and professional information practices. Many such practices may address niche interests that are unlikely to attract a wide audience; as a result, Chadwick notes, they may "have previously fallen beneath the radar of studies of news, in both old and new media environments" (2011: 8).

Indeed, as Purcell *et al.* report from a U.S.-based study, news has always had a social dimension:

> getting news is often an important social act. Some 72% of American news consumers say they follow the news because they enjoy talking with others about what is happening in the world and 69% say keeping up with the news is a social or civic obligation. And 50% of American news consumers say they rely to some degree on people around them to tell them the news they need to know. (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 4)

In light of such attitudes, it is no surprise that everyday newssharing on social media is now a major practice in its own right. "The overall ubiquity of social

media means that they are not just something people 'visit' on occasion in order to seek something special, [but that] they form increasingly a central terrain of our daily lives" (Dahlgren 2014: 196); if news engagement is already inherently social, and if important elements of our day-to-day social activities are shifting to social media, social media must thus necessarily become important platforms for the everyday engagement with the news.

There is growing empirical evidence, therefore, that social media "sharing is becoming central to the way people experience the news" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 821). The Reuters Institute's annual *Digital News Report* for 2015, for instance, reports "a sharp increase in the use of social media for finding, sharing, and discussing the news" (Pew Research Center 2015: 5), and another study from the same year reports that "nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults who use Twitter get news on the platform" (Barthel and Shearer 2015: n.p.). Some such sharing activities already look back on a long history in previous more or less social media channels, in fact—for instance, one 2010 study found that "more than 8 in 10 online news consumers get or share links in emails" (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 2)—, but the widespread adoption of the current generation of social media platforms has turned such newssharing into a more visible and more communal practice.

The impact of these shifts has been profound, for users themselves as well as for the news outlets and other sources whose news they share. In 2012, for instance, Newman *et al.* reported that "the raw numbers" of users coming to news sites as a result of social media sharing "are still relatively low compared to traffic driven by search" (2012: 11); by 2015, however, the picture had shifted considerably: "social media traffic has grown significantly in the past year and for some publishers has become more important than search" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 15). This is a remarkable turnaround, given the significant and growing influence over Web users' information access practices that search engines had enjoyed for most of the new millennium: "if searching for news was the most important development of the last decade, sharing news may be among the most important of the next" (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 10).

These patterns appear to be repeated in many developed and developing nations. For instance, U.K. "traffic to the BBC from Facebook and Twitter has more than tripled between 2009 and 2011" (Newman *et al.* 2012: 10); in 2012, "two out of five Canadians … who use social networking sites said they received news and information on a daily basis from family, friends and acquaintances they follow on social networks" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 818); in 2014, Dutch users "check (46 percent), share (30 percent), and discuss (27 percent) news"

on *Twitter* (Groot Kormelink and Costera Meijer 2014: 637); and in 2015, "clear majorities of Twitter (63%) and Facebook users (63%)" in the United States "now say each platform serves as a source for news about events and issues outside the realm of friends and family" (Pew Research Center 2015: 2). Recent years have seen especially significant growth in these numbers; in the U.S., between 2013 and 2015

> the rise in the share of social media users getting news on Facebook or Twitter cuts across nearly every demographic group. Use of Twitter for news, for example, grew among both users under 35 (55% to 67%) and those ages 35 and older (47% to 59%). And on Facebook, news use grew among both men (44% to 61%) and women (49% to 65%). (Pew Research Center 2015: 3)

At the time of writing, the multi-national *Digital News Report* for 2016, produced by the Oxford-based Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, offers the most comprehensive overview of current social media news engagement practices. It reports that over half of the Internet users across its 26-country representative survey "say they use social media as a source of news each week"; perhaps even more remarkably, "around one in ten (12%) say it is their main source" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 8a). The latter percentage is even greater in countries such as in Australia (18%) and Greece (27%) (Newman *et al.* 2016: 9), perhaps because of the comparative lack of diversity in the two countries' respective mainstream news media markets.

It should also be noted in this context that responses to questions about the role of social media as news sources may indeed still underestimate the extent to which social media serve as conduits to the news. As the 2015 *Digital News Report* pointed out, "social media are not seen as a destination for accurate and reliable journalism but more as a way of getting access to it" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 11); a better question to ask, therefore—and one that could result in even higher results—is "how many people actually use social media … to find news?" (Nielsen and Schrøder 2014: 483).

Random, Serendipitous, Habitual News Engagement

The sharing of news, by users and for users, is an important element here. News reports are increasingly also posted on social media by the official accounts of news outlets and journalists, of course, "and while news media ac-

counts [make] up a relatively small proportion of the accounts a Twitter user … follow[s], tweets from this type of account [make] up a significant portion of a user's feed" (Barthel and Shearer 2015: n.p.)—but it is the on-sharing of such posts by ordinary users' accounts that considerably amplifies their reach across the social network.

Indeed, there may well be a kind of trajectory from following to sharing here: as the *Digital News Report 2016* notes, "most of those [who] have recently started using social media as a source of news are doing so as passive consumers" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 99), yet to advance from here to active on-sharing requires little more than the click of a 'share' or 'retweet' button, as we noted in the previous chapter. Compared to previous forms of newssharing—from sharing news via email to news blogging, both of which required the user to author a new post from scratch—the move to such on-sharing is a considerably smaller step to make. From this perspective, then, "the act of news sharing can be described as a new phenomenon that lies somewhere in between news creation and news reception" (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 2).

Indeed, we might well consider such low-involvement forms of on-sharing, which simply pass on an existing post from a more active contributor (perhaps from an official, institutional account), as akin to the "random acts of journalism" that JD Lasica had envisaged in 2003: representing a gatewatching decision that is internal to the social media platform and affects the likelihood that the on-sharing user's followers will encounter a given piece of news, each individual act of on-sharing may indeed be relatively random, and is likely to be affected by the user's current levels of attention, distraction, or boredom as much as by their long-term commitment to the news topic. Nonetheless, they do directly affect the public circulation of journalistic content, in the sense envisaged by Lasica (2003).

This comparative randomness of the many acts of everyday gatewatching committed by social media users also results in a very different news media logic (Klinger and Svensson 2016) that applies on these platforms. "Twitter is very much a stream of many consciousnesses uttering messages" (Gruzd *et al.* 2011: 1303), but the same goes for *Facebook*: here, too, "news … is just something that happens", as one of the Pew Research Center's respondents put it (2013: 5); it "is a common but incidental experience" (1). *Facebook* and *Twitter* users may be active on these platforms for a wide range of reasons, few of which are to do predominantly with following the news or seeking out information on specific news events—but nonetheless on these platforms the news finds them, serendipitously, because of the work of news organisations,

journalists, and fellow social media users in posting and sharing news items. "The vast majority of Facebook news consumers, 78%, get news when they are on Facebook for other reasons" (Pew Research Center 2013: 1).

But even if the specific news items that users feel motivated enough to share remain somewhat random and unpredictable, the fact that many of them do indeed share news is anything but. More than half of the U.S.-based *Twitter* users in Barthel and Shearer's study for the Pew Research Center tweeted about news, for instance (Barthel and Shearer 2015: n.p.), with many of them opting especially for retweets of other users' posts. Researchers at the Reuters Institute have pursued this line of inquiry even further, to classify the news users in its representative multi-country study across three major categories:

> we define proactive participators as those [who] have made an original or public contribution to news coverage. Reactive participators are those [who] have contributed by disseminating existing news coverage or leaving feedback. Finally, passive consumers—who make up just under half (48%) of our whole sample—are those [who] do not actively participate in news coverage at all. (Newman *et al.* 2016: 100)

Using these categories, they find that during an average week, more than half of all users are actively engaged in sharing: fully 31% are classified as proactive sharers, and another 21% are reactive sharers (Newman *et al.* 2016: 101).

In light of these substantial percentages, it is somewhat surprising that the *Digital News Report 2016* authors themselves suggest that "sharing and commenting on the news is still largely the province of a small group of dedicated and highly motivated users" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 100), and that, in the previous year's report, they similarly accentuate the negative: "a quarter of us (25%) may comment about news online each week but three-quarters don't" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 84). Some longer-term historical perspective, as we have established it in the previous chapters, may be valuable here: the combined 52% of users who each week are proactive or reactive 'participators', in the Reuters Institute's terms, and even the 25% of weekly active news commenters seen in 2015, undoubtedly represent a vastly larger—and almost certainly also significantly more diverse—population of social media users committing random or not-so-random acts of journalism than the first wave of citizen media ever managed to attract.

Viewed in this way, then, we must conclude that the social media platforms of the current generation also represent a second wave of citizen media that has pervaded news engagement practices well beyond the acute, breaking news context: ambient, serendipitous, everyday news discovery, sharing, and

discussion, random though it may be, is now a fundamental practice within and across these sites. Further, the very serendipity of news discovery through social media platforms, and especially the social filtering which their networked structures offer, is seen by many users as a major advantage of this form of news engagement: "a significant number of social media users value their personal network as a way to filter the news, rather than solely relying on the professional judgment of a news organization or journalist" (Hermida *et al*. 2012: 815–16).

In light of such developments, Newman suggests that "big media haven't just lost their monopoly of the creation of news; they are also in a fight to maintain their control of distribution, as social media offer alternative ways to find and discover news" (2011: 10). Yet at the same time the very random and serendipitous nature of news discovery that is prevalent in social media environments may also be criticised for resulting in a disorganised, chaotic, and downright incomprehensible mélange of unrelated news items all flowing through a given user's feed. From this perspective, the use of social media simply intensifies some of the problems already identified during the first wave of citizen media:

> citizen journalists may engage in news-making and news-use processes such as issue selecting, collecting, reporting, disseminating, and sharing for the purpose of informing others of knowledge and information; however, these processes are often unsystematic, as they lack widely agreed-upon principles and guidelines for practice. (Kim and Lowrey 2015: 300)

It is at this point that we must advance beyond the old idea of *random* acts of journalism. Much as during the first wave of citizen media, what individual users decide to select, share, and comment up on may be a matter of personal choice that will appear random to an outside observer—but the fact that all of these apparently random acts now take place within the standardised global networking environments of a handful of major social media platforms and not across a loose network of individual sites means that there is a much greater potential for common approaches to emerge. As Castells puts it, "in the new world of mass self-communication and highly segmented audiences, there are few instances of simultaneous mass sharing of media messages; instead, what is broadly shared is the culture of sharing messages from multiple senders-receivers" (2011: 780), and the universal technical infrastructure upon which that culture is built. Indeed, this is another dimension of what Hermida has described as the ambient "awareness system" of social media:

"broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on communication systems such as Twitter are enabling citizens to maintain a mental model of news and events around them" (2010b: 301), by observing the individual acts of newssharing in aggregate.

If in the current social media environment it is therefore the case that the majority of users are engaged as both proactive and reactive newssharers; if the networked structure and ambient affordances of these platforms make it increasingly likely that users observe and learn from each other's sharing practices; if these practices in aggregate result in the potential for widespread serendipitous news discovery; and if such news discovery is now overtaking search engines as the major driver of traffic to leading mainstream news sites—then these processes can no longer be regarded as merely random. Instead, it is more appropriate to describe them instead as *habitual acts of newssharing*—and it becomes important to fully understand the typical motivations, practices, and consequences of habitual newssharing through social media platforms.

Newssharing

Newssharing of any form is in the first place a product of the sharers' interest in a given news topic; sharers "are people who tend to be passionate about subjects like politics, business, technology, or the environment. The super sharers tend to be heavy news users, often using multiple devices and a significant proportion use the smartphone as a main device" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 11). How users engage in such sharing is different from user to user, however: many users will simply pass on pointers to news articles on mainstream sites without engaging in substantial further commentary (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 82), while Lehmann *et al.* suggest that

> there is a small but important group of users [who] devote a substantial amount of effort and care to this activity. These users monitor a large variety of sources on a topic or around a story, carefully select interesting material on this topic, and disseminate it to an interested audience ranging from thousands to millions. These users are *news curators*. (Lehmann *et al.* 2013a: 863)

But while the work of such 'super sharers' acting as news curators on social media platforms is clearly important and influential, at the same time we should not dismiss the less committed but nonetheless frequent activities of ordinary newssharers as inconsequential. The news content that ordinary us-

ers share may be seen in the first place only by their friends and followers—the "personal public" surrounding each account, as Schmidt (2014) describes it—but the sharing activities that occur in these individual publics overlap and build up to a widespread, aggregate, and powerful collective and communal judgment on what current news reports and media articles are interesting and important. In this sense, "personal publics are one of the most important characteristics of the social Web" (Schmidt 2014: 4), and Schmidt outlines three crucial aspects that govern how news and information circulates through the networks created by these publics:

> in personal publics, information is
>
> 1. Being selected and displayed according to criteria of personal relevance (rather than following journalistic news factors),
> 2. Being addressed to an audience which consists of network ties made explicit (rather than being broadcast to a dispersed, unknown mass audience), and finally, communication in personal publics is
> 3. Being conducted mainly in a conversational mode (rather than in the one-way mode of "publishing"). (Schmidt 2014: 4)

Motivations for Newssharing

Several recent studies have investigated why, how, and what social media users are sharing with their networks, and in combination their findings point again to the conclusion that these acts of gatewatching and newssharing are anything but random—that instead a range of widespread habits have become well established. Holton *et al.*, for instance, find "six motivations for posting links on Twitter: information sharing, interpersonal utility, passing time, convenience and entertainment, information seeking, and control and promoting work" (2014: 36); Kümpel *et al.* further suggest that "the motivations that drive [sharing] behavior … can be divided into self-serving motives, altruistic motives, and social motives" (2015: 6). Trilling *et al.*, finally, point out that the combination of these motivations for newssharing "does not result in some kind of unpredictable news flow in which only people's personal interests determine whether they share a news item or not. In contrast, characteristics inherent to the news items seem to be good predictors of sharing" (2016: 18). Against this, however, Thorsen and Wells also warn that the specific "logics of curation … are much less well understood than those of journalists, leaving a broad theoretical gap in our

understanding of the way message flows are shaped" (2015: 31); beyond the motivations and habits of individual newssharers it will therefore also be important to ask how such personal motives interact when they come in contact with each other.

A first motivation for newssharing is highly personal and self-serving (but may nonetheless also be beneficial to the sharer's personal public: to share a news story (and subsequently also to see that story be liked, re-shared, and commented upon by one's followers) provides the sharer with a sense of personal achievement and self-worth. "Although they are not the original sources of information, by breaking a news story to their contacts, these individuals may be viewed as sources by their networks and could receive important psychological benefits" (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 241). First experiences of such attainment may in fact lead the sharer to engage more frequently and consistently in newssharing activities—in other words, to develop a regular habit of sharing the news—in order to further develop their (actual or perceived) personal standing amongst their followers. From this perspective, "first of all, people share news to gain reputation (and/or followers), to draw people's attention, and thus to attain status among peers or other users" (Kümpel *et al.* 2015: 6). The fact that most current social media platforms provide the tools to quantify and track such personal status—by counting one's friends or followers, and by tracking the reach and engagement of one's posts—only encourages such activities further.

However, such newssharing for direct or indirect personal gain and gratification represents only one side of the picture, and it has been suggested instead that "information sharing—as the central altruistic motive—… seems to be one of the main drivers" of sharing practices (Kümpel *et al.* 2015: 6). As followers of the news with specific thematic and intellectual interests, in other words, most newssharers genuinely want their friends and followers to know more about the topics that exercise their own interests; they are not simply positioning themselves as sharers and curators of the news on particular issues for purely self-serving reasons, but because they think these issues are important. Studying the motivations of users who share news on *Facebook*, for instance, the Pew Research Center found that

> the most common reason why [they] post news links is to pass along information they think is important for people to know. A vast majority, 89%, indicates that this is a major reason why they post or share news. The next most common reason is to create

> a discussion among friends around an issue or event (70%), closely followed by the desire to make a statement (67%). (Pew Research Center 2013: 16–17)

Such altruistic motivations are perhaps heightened by the explicitly social, networked nature of contemporary platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, compared to the more individualistic setup of citizen journalism sites and news blogs during the first wave of citizen media. Social media are standardised platforms containing networks, whereas the first wave of citizen media consisted of a loose network of diverse sites and platforms; social media therefore establish much tighter and more overt feedback loops between users, and in doing so also encourage expectations of greater reciprocity between users. As a result, there is therefore also a strong element of *do ut des* to the altruism of newssharers: they share interesting news content in order to encourage their network contacts to do likewise, thus improving the circulation of 'interesting' news items (as judged by some unspoken, shared criteria) across the overall network. As Holton *et al.* have found, therefore, "those who have a higher level of motivation for seeking information were more likely to post links on Twitter" (2014: 36).

The implications of this observation are fascinating, and point again to the enhanced *social* aspects of social media as one of the crucial differences between the first and second waves of citizen media. "Even in the seemingly simple act of posting a link on Twitter, users may be both relying on a web of trust and reciprocation and helping build that web for others" (Holton *et al.* 2014: 39). This is not to suggest that contributors to citizen journalism sites and news blogs in earlier phases were not also driven at least in part by altruistic motives, of course—but the web of interconnections and interactions between users was a great deal less formalised and explicit as it is in the platform spaces provided by *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other social media, which meant that it was much easier even for meaningful individual contributions to be overlooked and ignored. In contemporary social media environments, by contrast, users with sufficient commitment to a given topic "may post links to spark conversations with followers or to find links to similar information. In other words, users may be both sharing and seeking information at the same time, facilitating a gathering and sorting of information" (Holton *et al.* 2014: 40) that may eventually result in concerted, collaborative efforts amongst larger groups and communities of users to curate such news and information.

This makes possible a relatively rapid progression from news usage to news produsage, "from traditional forms of news consumption to the productive use of information" (Picone 2011: 102), for individual social media users. As Papacharissi points out, many of the initial actions that social media users may take as they engage with news stories are simple and present negligible barriers that must be negotiated:

> the ambient, hybrid, and *prodused* practices of liking, retweeting, liveblogging, endorsing, and opining that are frequently blended into social reactions to news events are … liminal. They present personal and temporary content injections that play their own … part in turning a news event into a story. As such, they are inspired by the potential of what the *prodused* story might look like, however temporary the lasting effect of these subjective content interpolations may be. (Papacharissi 2014: 125)

Newssharing Practices

Initially, such liminal actions are simply about helping conventional news stories to circulate through social networks, and the major social media platforms have actively partnered with news providers to facilitate such sharing. For instance, "Facebook itself says that the average news organisation has increased referrals by 300 per cent in the year to June 2011, driven largely by the introduction of a simple sharing button (Facebook Like)" (Newman 2011: 15; cf. Zuckerberg in O'Connor 2009: n.p.). *Twitter* has implemented a similar on-site button for news providers, enabling users to share articles directly from news sites, and a variety of further third-party services offer such functionality across all major social media platforms. As a result, in many Web traffic analyses these "'share' tools that appear alongside most news stories rank among the most clicked-on links" through which users depart from news sites (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 2). More recently, similar functionality has also been embedded at the operating system level into the content sharing tools offered by most smartphones and tablets, further encouraging the user-driven circulation of news and information through social media. "While these are technically clicks away from the site, they are positive clicks away, likely multiplying additional traffic to that story" (Olmstead *et al.* 2011: 18).

As a result of these developments, it can now be stated without fear of contradiction that in the contemporary mediasphere "news consumption is a socially-engaging and socially-driven activity, especially online. The public is clearly part of the news process now. Participation comes more through sharing than through contributing news themselves" (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 4). How-

ever, although in principle this may be seen as a step back from the ultimate 'become the media' ideals espoused by the original citizen journalists—what is circulated now is more likely to be mainstream media content, rather than the products of alternative sources—our observations in the previous chapter also point us to the conclusion that ordinary social media users are very well able to take yet further steps towards outright content production under the right circumstances, for instance: when they are caught up in breaking news events, and/or when an issue or topic becomes important enough for them to add their own views and comments rather than 'merely' passing on original content from somewhere else.

It becomes important in this context to take a dynamic rather than static perspective, and to consider what Wall describes as "the influence of *platform socialization*. How do both (1) social media and (2) their communities of users school others in logics specific to those forms" (2015: 806)? Here again the enhanced observability and encouraged reciprocity that are amongst the core features of contemporary social media play an important role: ordinary users may not start out by joining a social media platform with the explicit aim to share the news, but as they develop their networks on a given platform they are increasingly likely to encounter others who are doing so, to observe the benefits in social interaction and status that those others may experience as a result of their newssharing, and to feel the gentle encouragement to reciprocate by sharing some news items themselves. They may also encounter some proactive 'super sharers' who are no longer simply reactively passing along mainstream news articles to their followers, but are seeking out a broader range of sources, are adding their own commentary and analysis, and are helping to collaboratively curate the information about a specific event or issue.

Any such practices may readily be observed in most social media users' networks, on any given day—and it is therefore highly likely that this experience would also serve to socialise these users into an understanding of newssharing as a practice that is socially accepted and even valued. Not all such users will eventually advance to the highest-involvement levels of newssharing, of course, but the substantial percentages of reactive and proactive 'participators', in the Reuters Institute's terminology, clearly document the fact that newssharing is now a widespread practice.

Whether we should also consider such habitual newssharing across social networks as a form of citizen journalism depends ultimately on how we might define 'citizen journalism' itself, in the contemporary environment. Kim and Lowrey suggest that "the public is engaging in citizen journalism to the de-

gree that the public participates in gathering, providing, and using publicly relevant information" (2015: 301), and the forms of newssharing we have discussed here would seem to fall under this umbrella. But this may be too simplistic an assessment; citizen journalism as we have encountered it is a considerably more productive practice that not only circulates existing but also generates new information, even if only in the form of new assessments and analyses of existing news stories, and it often also takes an explicitly critical perspective on the outputs of the mainstream news industry. We have yet to establish the extent to which habitual newssharing and curation practices also incorporate such productive and critical elements. There are at least some indications that they may indeed be present, however: as the 2015 *Digital News Report* points out, "in most countries there was no significant difference in sharing news between those who trusted their news and those who distrusted it. This may point to the use of news sharing for the purposes of both criticism and 'collaborative verification'" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 84). We will explore these questions later in this chapter.

For the moment, however, it is already possible to state with certainty that the habitual newssharing we have encountered here is the immediate result of gatewatching practices that are now in operation right across the vast userbases of contemporary social media platforms—and thus, in most developed nations, at an essentially societal scale. Such gatewatching is trained in the first place on the gates of the conventional news media in their various forms and formats, but—not least also since sharing practices are not confined to the news alone—also observes new material being published by a myriad of other information sources, across all sectors of society. As a result,

> the traditional gatekeeping function of the media is weakened as a significant proportion of news consumers turn to family, friends and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest. Essentially, a person's social circle takes on the role of news editor, deciding whether a story, video or other piece of content is important, interesting or entertaining enough to recommend. (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 821)

Importantly, this information *push* through gatewatching and newssharing, which has increased the circulation of a diverse range of news items across our social media networks, is also complemented by a simultaneous information *pull*, as Thorson and Wells point out: "among some audiences" there is now also "a news omnivorousness, exemplified by gathering public affairs content from an ever-expanding array of content providers and delivery platforms and at all times of day" (2015: 26).

As we have already seen, such gatewatching occurs both externally, identifying new news items from a wide range of sources and circulating them (perhaps also with the help of *Facebook* and *Twitter* sharing buttons on the Websites of such source outlets) on social media platforms, and internally, as users observe each other's newssharing choices and select from these the information they find sufficiently interesting to re-circulate to their own networks. The user-to-user connection choices (made through friending and following) therefore also crucially affect the gatewatching process: "when connecting to like-minded others and peers on social media platforms, users indirectly tailor what information will reach them. In other words, users increasingly construct and organise their social realities through their online social networks" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 33).

Networks of Newssharing

In addition to users' underlying motivations and practices for sharing the news through social media, their specific connection and sharing choices should also be examined, therefore. At their most extreme, such choices may enable the "near complete avoidance of news content … or (at the most) occasional, incidental encounters …, which raises new questions about the role of personal agency and circumstances in determining a person's information diet" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 27); even if newssharing does play a greater role in a social media user's day-to-day participation experience, too, it is still possible that "networked audiences are exposed to news that is popular rather than important, and [that] social recommendation limits exposure to a variety of news sources" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 822).

Recent research on such crucial questions has found a mixed and complex picture to date. As Klinger and Svensson report,

> in many occasions, network media logic and mass media logic overlap. Often, users share content from mass media, such as online newspaper articles or TV videos, in their networks. In these cases, users have selected the content according to their personal tastes and interests and at the same time reproduced the selection criteria of journalists. (2016: 29)

In addition, network effects also mean that "articles that are placed more prominently have a higher chance to be shared" (Kümpel *et al.* 2015: 6); this is true both for article placement on mainstream news sites, where such placement may be determined by the conventional news values that have guided

the spatial and temporal composition of newspapers and broadcast bulletins for many decades, or also by a measurement of the aggregate preferences of a given Website's readership, and for the placement of shared stories in a user's newsfeed, which is the product of a complex interaction between the activities of other actors in the user's network and the organising and display algorithms in use at a given social media platform.

But at the same time it is also evident that many social media users are well aware of the presence of such network effects, and of the role of platform algorithms in surfacing some stories over others, and are taking deliberate steps to counteract these dynamics and in essence trick the system into displaying 'their' stories more prominently. There appears to be a preference for sharing content that is not already evidently in wide circulation; for instance, Holton *et al.*'s "respondents indicated that they post links, at least in part, to find information quickly and to reach hard-to-find content" (2014: 39). This is supported by Trilling *et al.*'s analysis, which shows that on *Twitter* "topics that were very present in the media received [fewer] shares than topics that did not belong to the top issues" (2016: 16)—put succinctly, "higher topic popularity … will lead to fewer shares" (7). The same study also finds "an opposite effect" on *Facebook*, however: "one interpretation would be that sharing on Facebook centers more around few dominant issues, whereas on Twitter there is more variation" (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 16).

Additionally, users of both platforms seem to prefer circulating news articles that are distinctive and do not originate simply from a generic news agency: agency pieces "receive only two thirds of the Twitter shares of other articles …. An even sharper decline is observed on Facebook, where agency-written articles can expect only 0.28 times as many interactions compared with nonagency articles" (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 16). This is in line with the more anecdotal and site-specific observations made by particular news outlets that their most widely shared articles frequently "include more distinctive and unusual content—often content that is not showcased on the front page of the website" (Newman 2011: 23) as well as "content exclusive to that news organisation" (22). Newman reports observations made by magazine *The Economist*, for instance, for which "certain types of distinctive content perform particularly well in blogs and social networks. The Economist Daily Chart is a case in point because it tells an unusual story every day in a visually compelling way" (25). Many news outlets are therefore now deliberately taking steps to enhance the distinctiveness of their original content, in order to

ensure its broad circulation, through gatewatching and newssharing, across social media networks.

Even if there is a tendency amongst social media users, especially on *Twitter*, to direct attention to specific articles that are not already in wide circulation, the overall themes of the content being shared by social media users largely reflect long-standing news values, however. "There is a marked dominance of subjects and authors with a close relationship to 'hard' journalism. Thus, we cannot conclude … that Twitter is generating a fundamentally new structure of relevance which diverges from the traditional news values established by mainstream journalism" (Neuberger *et al.* 2014: 356). On *Twitter*, such values have tended to privilege stories addressing disasters and deaths, breaking news, quirky stories, provocative analysis, and distinctive content (Newman 2011: 22); additionally, even within today's global social media networks geographic proximity still matters at least to some degree: "articles covering domestic issues are shared 1.29 as many times as nondomestic issues on Twitter, and 1.80 as many times as nondomestic issues on Facebook. … Stories about non-Western countries receive only 0.83 (Twitter) and 0.69 (Facebook) times as many shares" (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 14). On other news values, the leading platforms once again diverge, however: on *Twitter*, "the presence of a human interest angle is basically irrelevant …. However, this is different on Facebook, where human interest has a strong influence, and articles may expect the number of shares to go up by a third" (15–16).

In light of these patterns, which replicate many conventional newsworthiness judgments but also take into account (and in part seek to counteract) the specific attention economies of social media platforms, Trilling *et al.* suggest that "the concept of newsworthiness—once developed to explain news selection at the production stage, later also used to explain audience choices—can form a fruitful starting point to develop a concept of shareworthiness" (2016: 16). Overall, and combining the findings from a number of recent studies of newssharing patterns online, shareworthiness appears to build on many of the well-established news value judgments commonly made by journalists and audiences alike, but exercises such judgments against the backdrop of an understanding of the specific affordances of social media platforms, where such judgments are no longer merely individual, but come to have a much greater effect in aggregate.

Put differently, although there is usually no formal coordination between newssharers as they make their judgments about what news to share, they are more or less explicitly aware of the fact that their individual choices contrib-

ute to network-wide effects on the visibility and circulation of a given news story, and this awareness may intensify or counteract the news judgments they would have made if conventional newsworthiness rather than social media shareworthiness criteria had been applied. Although mainstream news outlets continue to be popular and prominent in social media newssharing overall, this shifts attention away at least to some extent from those outlets and stories that are already widely visible in other news media channels, and instead benefits those sources that are situated further down the long tail of the attention economy.

This shift beyond the core of the mainstream has both spatial and temporal dimensions, in fact: on the one hand, "social media users [are] more likely to access websites from international news outlets, websites that mix news and commentary such as the *Huffington Post* and the website of an individual blogger not affiliated with a major news outlet" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 820; cf. Himelboim *et al.* 2013: 169); on the other, even in spite of the real-time focus of social media platforms such as *Twitter* "news articles continue to circulate on social networks on average [for] two days after they are published by the news outlets" (Bastos 2015: 311). In thus shifting from conventional newsworthiness to contemporary shareworthiness judgments, social media users overall display a remarkable level of digital media literacy: implicitly or explicitly, such shareworthiness judgments appear designed to adjust and counteract the gatekeeping choices made by mainstream news media, by exploiting the affordances of social media platforms and their networks.

Newssharing as Performance

So far, we have described the newssharing practices of any given user as resulting from a combination of internal and external factors. A user may identify genuinely new information through gatewatching, and share it because of an intrinsic interest in the topic and to encourage others to reciprocate; the same user may also observe the gatewatching and newssharing choices made by others and choose to amplify or counteract them in their own sharing. However, it must also be noted that—especially for users with a larger following—"social network spaces are not simply representational spaces: they are performance spaces. They are constructed social and relational spaces where identity is created, and where, above all, 'we act'" (Mazali 2011: 290). Newssharing is part of that performance of identity:

> when a person shares content on social media, the nature of the shared content reflects on the individual's identity. Unlike a journalist, who acts in a professional role, and unlike an individual's decision to *read* a news piece, the individual's decision to share it can be seen as a part of a manifestation of their online identity. (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 6)

This observation has a number of important implications. First, the need for social media users to perform an identity to their friends and followers may in fact encourage them to engage in newssharing, as a relatively simple practice that can help to generate a steady stream of updates in the user's profile feed. This strategic use of newssharing to anchor a social media identity is possible because social media users exist as visible entities only by virtue of their communicative activity: "it is not that networks do not exist without information sharing, but it is the act of information sharing that renders them visible. In this sense, actor nodes materialize digitally as they share information" (Papacharissi 2014: 126).

From this perspective, posting (anything) regularly is a crucial prerequisite to establishing a social media identity, and sharing news items is one core practice alongside the sharing of life updates, photos, videos, and other material. But the nature of the content being shared also directly affects the nature of the online persona that such sharing creates; it is therefore also likely that users will make strategic judgments about the news they share, and that these judgments may diverge somewhat from their actual news interests and preferences. Such biases may be responsible for observations that quality news content is generally shared on social media somewhat more often than the overall market positioning of quality news sites would suggest (Bruns 2017; Larsson 2016: 13), and that even within those quality news sources particular forms of content are preferred over others: "the audience of social networking sites engaging with the content published by *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* is slightly in favor of hard news over soft news, particularly opinion pieces, when compared to the news editors' choices" (Bastos 2015: 321).

In other words, "social network site users select 'markers of cool' based on an imagined audience of friends and peers" (Marwick and boyd 2011: 116)—or in our present context, select news content that makes them appear in what they hope to be a favourable light. Interviews with users have shown, in fact, that "people have multiple imagined audiences, which may change each post" (Litt and Hargittai 2016: 8); yet at the same time "the difficulty is that on the other side of the screen, there are actual people forming impressions—and the imagined audience may not always align with the actual audience" (2).

What emerges here, then, is a complex process of trial and error by which social media users explore how best to present a consistent online persona to their imagined audience, with constant recalibrations of their presentation strategies based on the feedback that they receive explicitly (in the form of peer responses) or implicitly (through the engagement metrics provided by the platform). Over the longer term, this reinforces particular newssharing choices and strategies which are believed by the user to help them in building social capital within their network (Kim and Lowrey 2015: 302).

Positive feedback on newssharing activity may initiate an iterative process of engagement, then: "by acting as a source of information in one's network, an individual gains a sense of responsibility over this content and is likely to become more involved in that information" (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 242), but the extent to which one has achieved such status within the wider network is evident only from the responses received by others in the network. There are also important differences between the different affordances for peer feedback that the various social media platforms provide:

> immediately after sharing content, individuals do not yet have a sense of how that content will be perceived, and receiving likes or comments that do not add value does not provide the validation desired. Only feedback that is perceived as relevant, thoughtful, and engaging can drive continued involvement in the content and a sense that one has influenced one's network. (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 246)

At the same time, however, the lack of such feedback can also lead to certain topics gradually being abandoned as unproductive, as

> even relatively small differences in sharing behavior can lead to a spiraling process: If … a hardcore politic[al] topic or a foreign topic is slightly less likely to be shared, there will be a few people less who see it as a result of the sharing, out of which slightly less [*sic*] reshare it, and so on. In extreme cases, this could lead to the disappearance of topics (like, for example, foreign news) from the public agenda. (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 18)

More problematically still, in addition to topics gradually falling out of favour because of a lack of interest in a user's network they might also be actively abandoned in response to (or for fear of) negative feedback from peers. In line with the well-established 'spiral of silence' theory (Noelle-Neumann 1974), where dissenters choose to remain silent in order to avoid social sanctions from their peers, the users of social media could similarly "choose to conform

to others and reverse their own opinions in order to restore their sense of belonging and self-esteem" (Zhu and Huberman 2014: 1330). In our present context, this may mean choosing not to circulate a news item otherwise deemed to be of interest, in order to avoid criticism from one's social media friends and followers.

Indeed, Vos suggests that such spiral-of-silence processes were at play in the lead-up to the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, when voices warning of impending problems failed to circulate widely because their views were seen by many as extreme. As a result, "the truth did not go viral. The truth remained locked behind the gates" (2015: 8). Although the structure of national and global mediaspheres has changed considerably during subsequent years (and still continues to transform rapidly), and newssharing processes are now more widely established than they were at the time, there is nonetheless no guarantee that a similar failure to take the warning voices seriously and circulate their views widely could not occur again today, or in the near future. It therefore remains important to understand "what kinds of information make it through what kinds of channels if we are to understand the broader news ecology and its significance for the public information environment" (2015: 10).

Newssharing as a Demotic Practice

The observations we have outlined here lead some researchers to suggest that "the ideal of the news sharing user as an *altruistic democratizer* is to some extent also backed up by empirical studies" (Kümpel *et al.* 2015: 8), but in light of the promises of democratisation that surrounded the first wave of citizen media and were never fully realised we should treat such statements with a certain degree of caution. It is possible to state, however, that compared to this earlier phase gatewatching and newssharing are now both truly widespread, mass participation practices, and even that "many active internet users now see *themselves* as editors—balancing and comparing multiple sources, multiple editorial judgements, and even multiple algorithms" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 13). This does not inherently imply a democratisation of the news—the content that is shared here still represents the work of a number of non-representative groups including professional journalists, alternative media producers, experts, pundits, activists, eyewitnesses, and others—but it does represent a *demoticisation* of newssharing practices: to find, share, and comment on the news is no longer

the domain of news and political junkies only, but a fundamental everyday activity on social media.

What keeps such demotic activities from becoming truly democratic is that the social media platforms that are being used for those activities do not guarantee—and in their current structures perhaps even work against—a potential for all users' contributions to become equally visible, or a possibility for their debates to be conducted right across entire societies. "Individuals may interact with others who do not share their political ideology. But … this potential does not lead to meaningful cross-ideological interaction" (Himelboim *et al.* 2013: 171) with reliable frequency; the fact that users often establish their social media connections on the basis of shared interests and identities may mean that they are more likely to encounter content with which they have at least a basic affinity, and that their social media environments thus resemble self-reinforcing "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" (Sunstein 2009; Pariser 2012). At the same time (and we will return to such considerations in greater detail in Chapter 8),

> while there may be concerns that social networks may limit the breadth of information people receive, … news consumers have a different perspective. A majority of social media users believe their social circles provide them with a broader range of news and information than if they relied solely on traditional media. (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 820)

If such beliefs are borne out in reality—and the studies cited here appear to do so—, the complex, networked, massively multi-user nature of contemporary social media platforms means that the net effect of gatewatching and newssharing via social media is to increase the source and content diversity experienced by news users as they participate in social media platforms, and that "the situation is not as bleak as [the] pessimistic view suggests" (Trilling *et al.* 2016: 18).

Conversely, however, this demoticisation of newssharing does inherently affect the standing of the mainstream news media as a component of the changing media environment through which news now circulates: "instead of being dependent on the authority of mass media, news consumers can increasingly construct their own truth-claims and representations of social reality with greater ease and individualization" (Broersma 2013: 43). Some of the more pessimistic voices that foresee deeply negative repercussions from the growing influence of newssharing on how citizens encounter the news may be motivated more by their concerns about the loss of this institutional author-

ity than by any empirically observable problems; much of the public debate about the role of social media in enabling the rise of 'post-factual' political propaganda that emerged in 2016 in the wake of the Brexit referendum in the U.K. and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President also served to deflect attention away from the decisive failure of the mainstream media in each country to hold populist political leaders to account, for instance.

From Demotic Newssharing to Habitual News Curation

If, as recent surveys demonstrate, the majority of ordinary social media users now engage in habitual newssharing activities, then those activities must be seen as part of their everyday "social media practice"—a term proposed by Hogan and Quan-Haase "as a means to overcome the transient nature of the phenomena encountered on social media and identify practices that are stable and universal" (2010: 309). But sharing the news is also inherently a first step towards curating the news, at least at a personal level: "in personal curation, it just happens to be the end user who is doing the curation for himself or herself" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 33). Such personal curatorial activities, in turn, add up to aggregate and possibly coordinated collective curation—and we might therefore argue that the curation of news and related information, too, has now become a habitual activity for social media users, well beyond the collective curation activities that we observed in the context of acute events in the previous chapter.

Personal Curation

In the first place, each individual user curates their own streams of updates, perhaps simply as a way of keeping track of interesting information but most likely also with a view towards their imagined audience of friends or followers. This may happen more or less consistently; Lehmann *et al.*, for instance, distinguish between "two types of users that are intensely engaged with news content in social media. We call them *focused curators* and *unfocused curators*" (2013a: 864). However, even an unfocussed curator, who skips between a variety of news topics in the course of their everyday newssharing activities, still serves as a "a news provider of sorts, disseminating news articles about breaking news and top stories" (864); this is the case even more obviously

for a topic-focussed curator who consistently shares news that relates to their special areas of expertise. Fundamental to this news provision in both types of personal curation, of course, remains the practice of gatewatching through which shareworthy news and information is identified by the curating user. Through their activities, then, the news curator is placed in the role of opinion leader for their friends or followers, at least potentially and temporarily: they are "passing along information that is already available elsewhere and making it personally relevant to their social network" (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 241).

In theory, consistently active, topic-focussed social media news curators could therefore also become *persistently* important news sources and opinion leaders for their personal publics. However, in practice this is unlikely for all but a handful of exceptional social media users: to achieve such consistency would require a quasi-professional commitment to newssharing that few social media users will be able to maintain. (Those few users who do are likely to be in the same 'news junkie' category as the leading citizen journalists of the first wave of citizen media, and indeed as many professional journalists.) Additionally, the users in a news curator's personal public are likely to follow a number of other accounts that are actively sharing news via social media: "the discursive density of the web environment in the contemporary media landscape results in an intense and incessant competition for attention" (Dahlgren 2014: 197), and consistent and persistent opinion leadership is therefore difficult to attain for any one of these users.

Although from the point of view of the individual newssharer their sharing activities may constitute simply a personal curation practice, therefore, the ordinary social media user is exposed to the combined results of several such personal curation activities, which may amplify or counteract one another. Further, the specific design and affordances of particular platforms mean that social media users will rarely or never encounter the totality of all posts made by accounts in their network: for instance,

> at any given time, Twitter users are exposed only to the most recent information posted. Previous messages are not only pushed down (which is the case in almost any social media, such as blogs and Facebook), but simply disappear. Beyond a rather short period of time, these messages cannot be searched. Implications vary across users. Those who frequently read their stream of tweets can build over time a more complex understanding of the opinions of users who post them. Others are limited to only the most recent tweets, lacking of background of the issues and the users who commented about them. (Himelboim *et al.* 2013: 170)

The interweaving of multiple social media users' curation activities is therefore playing a crucial role in creating the necessary repetition and redundancy that ensures that specific news stories are shared widely enough to be visible to a large number of recipients. Single exchanges "can thus be connected into larger communicative relations and enable the perception of individual experiences and views as communal knowledge and opinions" (Katzenbach 2016: 15; my translation). In other words, if enough users make the personal curation choice to post a given news item (or to re-share a news item already posted by another user in their network), then it becomes more probable that this item reaches a larger audience; if in posting or sharing this item they choose a common framing of the news, then it becomes more likely that their followers may also adopt that framing as their own. The specific design choices made in the development of each platform, but also the following or friending choices made by each user, and the overall level of attention they play to the platform, determine just how frequently and over what timeframe a news item must appear in their incoming feed of social media updates in order for it to move beyond a merely ambient awareness. The ten-minute time window proposed by Elmer (2013: 18) represents only a rough and generalised approximation of the full visibility dynamics here.

Social Recommendations

"Users thus experience a logic in which content is produced reflexively with regard to personalisation and attention maximisation rather than professional codes, such as news values" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 29)—and yet, as we have also already seen, individual assessments of a given news item's shareworthiness also affect whether and how widely the story will travel across the social network. Although this may introduce a new kind of systemic randomness, where the visibility of a given news item to a given user could be calculated using a complex probabilistic function, those messages that are seen by others may in turn carry a considerably greater impact than conventional news reports. This is due to the *social* dimension of social networks: "each user on Twitter has followers, who themselves have followers. Thus each tweet has a social graph attached to it, as does each message that is retweeted (forwarded to other users). Accordingly, social graphs offer a means to infer reputation and trust" (Hermida 2010a: n.p.).

This does not mean that every news item shared in one's social media network will be regarded as more trustworthy than the news reports received

through conventional online and offline media, of course; we are likely to connect with social media users for a range of reasons, not all of which are related to how knowledgeable they are about the news. But in a social media environment that is used to a considerable extent every day, users are likely to be particularly well-placed to assess which of their connections are reliable sources of valuable news items, and on which specific topics; although the exact processes through which we assess the credibility of incoming posts are not yet fully understood (and are likely to change as social media platforms evolve and as our own social media literacy matures; cf. Thorson and Wells 2015: 37), it is already well understood that personal recommendations made via social media—whether they relate to products, services, or the news—are highly persuasive: as Facebook's former Director of Market Development Randi Zuckerberg has put it, "when you get a news clip from a friend, they are putting their own personal brand on the line, saying 'I recommend THIS piece of content to you out of all the content that is out there,'—just as they would recommend a restaurant, or a movie" (Zuckerberg qtd. in O'Connor 2009: n.p.).

As Newman *et al.* point out, this increased reliance on social recommendations is also related to the declining dominance of search as the preferred way of accessing information (including news). "In search we tend to be looking for very specific information—whereas default behaviour in a social network is to browse a complex multi-subject news feed. Users will be more receptive to signals around quality and trust to help them make that choice" (2015: 78). However, it is important to note that such signals will now relate both to the quality and trustworthiness of the original news source (the mainstream news organisation, alternative news site, government, commercial, or non-government organisation, or other source whose content is being shared) as well as to the quality and trustworthiness of the social media user sharing the content, or the utility of the specific social media platform through which it is received; a news item originating from a non-standard, little-known source may still be regarded as valid and worthy of attention if it is shared by a trusted contact in the recipient's network. This is especially likely when the sharing user has an established track record in gatewatching for information on a specific topic; for this reason, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a contributor like Andy Carvin, who through his consistency in sharing valuable information had earnt his audience's trust on matters relating to the Arab Spring, and was able to draw his followers' attention to local sources whose trustworthiness they might otherwise have doubted. By contrast, other par-

ticipants in the social media conversations relating to the Arab Spring—including even mainstream news organisations and journalists—would not have been able to impart their sources with as much referred authority, because they did not have the same track record of sustained engagement with North African and Middle Eastern affairs.

Topical Clustering

As multiple social media users share information about related events, issues, and topics, then, and as follower and friendship relations on social media platforms develop at least in part on the basis of shared thematic interests, the users engaging with specific topics over the longer term will begin to form network clusters around these shared interests. Such clustering tendencies can be observed in many large-scale network analyses of user relationships on leading social media platforms (e.g. Kelly and Etling 2008; Bruns *et al.* 2014; Smith *et al.* 2014); thematic interests are not the only driver of clustering (others include personal or professional relationships or shared geographic location, for instance), but they are one particularly important element. This clustering also means that those users who are regularly active on a platform—whether as listeners or as content contributors—will be exposed to the topical content posted by their network connections, and are thus also likely to adjust their own posting activities in response. "On Twitter, such processes of social negotiation of the meaning of news happen right away, because the messages diffusing the news may already include interpretation. Twitter users often connect current events to personal experiences, opinions, and world views: they explain, classify, interpret, and reinterpret what they have received" (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014: 310). This process of reciprocal adjustment could variously lead to greater conformity with the content choices made by others, but also to greater divergence as users seek to distinguish their own contributions from those made by others, or aim to counteract a perceived bias by sharing information in support of alternative perspectives.

But whether conformist or contrarian, and whether explicitly paying attention to the activities of others or just peripherally aware of the other content circulating through the network, the inherently networked nature of users' newssharing activities in such thematic clusters means that the individual, personal curation activities that hundreds and thousands of social media users may engage in for any given topic also combine into a broader process of collective news curation. Such collective curation of the information relating

to specific topic will be deliberate only for the most active and most connected of these newssharers, who do pay constant attention to the activities of other users; others' contributions are likely to be a great deal more random. As a result, the number, origins, and range of news items being shared through such collective curation processes are going to be rather diverse; this positions collective social media news curation as a highly multiperspectival, second-tier process of sharing, reviewing, and evaluating the news that exhibits many of the features first outlined by Gans (1980).

As such, this social, collective, and very loosely organised form of news curation contributes to its publics' understanding of the news in ways that differ very significantly from the news insights provided by mainstream news media. Mainstream news continues to be presented as the end product of expert evaluation, and as the result of an institutional process claims to offer a complete and unified picture of the news; by contrast, the news circulating through social curation processes remains incomplete, unfinished, and contestable. Where the editorial curation of the news by journalists and editors takes place backstage, out of sight of audiences, so that only its end results become visible to ordinary users, social news curation is a frontstage activity and represents first and foremost "the social negotiation of the meaning of news" (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014: 310), in full public view. As such collective negotiation unfolds, it enables the emergence of one or more shared frames through which significant subsets of the total social media userbase perceive and interpret the news.

Ultimately, every act of engaging with a specific news topic—of sharing a new article, of liking, re-sharing, retweeting, replying to or commenting on it—contributes to this process of collective curation, because each such act directly or indirectly alters the metrics for the shared article that are gathered by each social media platform, and thereby makes the article more or less visible, and leads it to appear in new contexts and frames. "By framing the links, users introduced certain schemata to perceive the objects linked to, reinterpreting their meaning and negotiating their position within the networked public discourses" (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014: 313). Not every such user intervention is made with the explicit aim of contributing to the collective curation process, however; topic-unfocussed curators (in Lehmann *et al.*'s definition), in particular, may not even be aware of the curatorial activities that they are contributing to, in fact. Such less involved participants are unlikely, therefore, to engage in newssharing with an explicit expectation to thereby become part of an interpretive community, unlike those participants

in acute events hashtags whom we have encountered in the previous chapter. Topic-focussed curators, on the other hand, could be seen as acting in a para-journalistic role; since "it has been argued that journalists come together as a community to make sense of events and interpret their importance", we might therefore suggest that their sustained attention to their core topics shows that these users similarly "have the expectation of being considered … part of that interpretive community" (Lehmann *et al.* 2013a: 863).

These social news curators are likely to be considerably more central to the network clusters that exist around such topics, and to be linked via friending and following connections to other users with similar thematic interests. For them, consistent participation in such interpretive, curatorial news and information communities is also an important form of civic engagement; they will define their social media personas in part through such community membership. In these cases, such participation can therefore also be a source of social capital—but such social capital is accumulated not simply by active participation in newssharing itself, but only when a user's newssharing activities are acknowledged as valuable by other users in their network. "Receiving comments … can evoke responses from the original poster and from the following posters, sparking a discussion that causes users to feel that they are part of a community of involved friends and readers" (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 242). Importantly, such acknowledgment may be received both from already established connections in one's social media network (from strong ties) and from new or not yet fully actualised connections (from weak ties); the social capital that can emerge here therefore represents both bonding and bridging capital (Kim and Lowrey 2015: 303).

Much as the small and more or less random endorsements of specific news items by a wide range of newssharers acting independently of each other may eventually result in a specific news item being featured prominently on a social media platform, so the many small points of feedback received by a given newssharer from both strong and weak ties in their network will gradually influence their further social media activities; if the user realises that specific types of news items generate particularly strong positive (or negative) responses, they may adjust their sharing activities to feature more (or fewer) such items, for instance. This suggests that many social media users will experience a process of gradual socialisation into their chosen platforms; over time, as they become more familiar with the social network neighbourhood into which their personal profile has settled, they will adjust their online behaviours to what is acceptable in that neighbourhood. Indeed, several large-scale,

diachronic studies of social media platforms such as *Twitter* have shown that many users experience a transition from using their platform as an information network to engaging with it as a social network, almost certainly as a result of that socialisation. As Myers *et al.* suggest, it may well be the case that "from an individual user's perspective, Twitter starts off more like an information network, but evolves to behave more like a social network" (2014: 497–98).

The Emergence of Niche Authorities

In our present context, for users with a sustained interest in specific news topics such socialisation—which can be understood as an increasing knowledge about the network of users that exists around one's own account—results eventually in preferential participation in particular social news curation activities. As such participation becomes habitual, and as more persistent curation collectives and communities form around specific topics, the most consistently valuable contributors emerge as "niche authorities" (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013: 305) within these communities. Such users are "experts in a particular field (for example, usability engineering or parenting) who locate, organize, and distribute links to relevant, high-quality content online, voluntarily assuming a quality filtering role that traditional publishers once held" (Lowry 2010: 3); they are likely to be those who invest the greatest amount of energy into regularly sharing topical news information, display the best curatorial instincts in selecting quality news items, and/or offer the most insightful interpretation and evaluation of the news items they share. As all such assessments of the quality of a user's contributions are inherently subjective, this role of niche authority cannot simply be assumed by a newssharer who makes the effort to contribute regularly and consistently, however; rather, it is assigned only by implicit or explicit crowd acclaim—that is, a newssharer emerges as an authority on their topic only if their contributions are regularly liked, shared on, replied to, or commented upon by a substantial number of fellow users with an interest in the same issue or topic, and/or if their account is subsequently friended or followed by many such peers, and the newssharer retains that authority role only as long as such acclaim continues. This way, "ordinary users can gain influence by focusing on a single topic and posting creative and insightful tweets that are perceived as valuable by others, as opposed to simply conversing with others" (Cha *et al.* 2010: 11).

The participants in newssharing who emerge as niche authorities in this way may be ordinary social media users as well as journalists, activists, experts,

or other contributors with an external claim to enhanced topical expertise; however, it is important to note that in a social media context they gain their authority not primarily because of such external factors, but predominantly due to their track record as contributors to the collective curatorial work. We have already seen this in the context of acute events in the previous chapter: Andy Carvin, for instance, did not inherently emerge as a prominent authority on the Arab Spring because of his position with U.S. National Public Radio, but mainly because of his proven ability to source a valuable and distinct range of first-hand insights from the region. Outside of breaking news contexts, similar patterns still apply: here, too, newssharers of all backgrounds are able to establish themselves as acknowledged voices of authority if they manage to contribute constructively and consistently. (To do so, however, may well be easier for participants with an existing professional or semi-professional interest in the news topic than it is for other, ordinary users.)

Perceptions of a social media user's authority and influence on a given topic may also have spill-over effects into offline contexts, in fact. Recent research indicates that the niche authorities emerging in relation to specific topics on social media are also likely to exert direct or indirect influence on journalists covering news topics that they are unfamiliar with; such journalists may explore relevant discussions on social media in order to gain a better understanding of an issue, identify the leading social media authorities on that issue, and follow those users' information sourcing choices, for example, or may even end up interviewing these social media authorities directly. For instance, one of the journalists interviewed by Parmelee acknowledged that social news curation activities unfolding around the hashtag #SSM were "'very, very important' as he covered same-sex marriage legislation that was pending. 'It enabled me to filter out a lot of noise and hunt for the information or feedback that was important to me at that time for that issue', he said" (2014: 444). Additionally, the newssharers experiencing crowd acclaim as niche authorities on specific topics may feel encouraged by such acclaim to extend their engagement in the topic beyond the social media platform itself, too:

> specific news sharing behaviors (e.g., posting more publicly) have a significant effect on one's sense of influence in one's network, which may be vital to encouraging civic participation in that network. These same behaviors could further translate to offline forms of civic engagement, and could be encouraged by organizations seeking support for campaigns or community events. (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2015: 247)

It is important in this context to highlight the dynamic nature of engagement in social media news curation, too: the relative attention paid to specific news issues and topics naturally waxes and wanes both in line with the prominence of the news topic as part of the overall day-to-day newshole, and as a result of the competing demands on participating newssharers' time in their everyday lives. As a result, the active news curation collectives and communities that form on social media platforms may grow and dissolve again over time, rather than remaining stable over longer periods; at the same time, however, the experiences made in the context of specific issues and topics will also not be forgotten completely, and the associations made between participants will remain latent and ready to be reactivated when the topic rises to renewed prominence in the daily news. "Just as the majority of crowds simply disperse over time, parts of some crowds come together again around new newsworthy events" (Lehmann *et al.* 2013b: 359). Importantly, in particular, the new friending and following connections made at the height of an active collaborative news curation process are unlikely to all be severed as that process concludes; this makes it even more likely that such connections are going to be reactivated again once renewed interest in the same news topic demands it.

Beyond the Political

In our discussion so far, we may have used political issues and topics from time to time as a means of illustrating the practices and dynamics of social media newssharing, as does the majority of scholarly research on these phenomena. However, as the widespread, demotic take-up of newssharing as a habitual practice by social media users already indicates, newssharing extends well beyond narrowly 'political' topics—or, viewed another way, almost all issues and topics for which social media users may be motivated to share news are *political* in a much broader sense.

That newssharing has become habitual for the majority of social media users is a result of the fact that any and all social media users will be interested in some issue or topic beyond themselves—from politics to sports, from activism to the arts—and will monitor, more or less actively and attentively, the latest developments in those fields. Although, as we have seen, such interests may be strictly casual for all but the most committed followers of such topics, many now nonetheless re-share and retweet the information about such topics that circulates through their social networks, and will perhaps even add their own

comments and responses from time to time. For the most part these activities may represent only a form of gatewatching that remains internal to the social media platform itself—in order words, users select information to share from within their on-site social networks, rather than actively introducing new information from external sources—but this, too, makes an important contribution to amplifying the visibility and influencing the framing of each shared news item.

Such casual, day-to-day engagement with the news that interests them may appear to outsiders to address a comparatively random range of topics, but is nonetheless clearly meaningful to the users who share the news items (it is at least meaningful enough to have led them to become active in this way); given the fact that friending and following connections are made at least in part on the basis of similarities in topical interests, these choices are therefore also likely to be intelligible and meaningful to the newssharers' immediate personal publics. In this sense, therefore, it is also likely to contribute to everyday "political talk" in Wright *et al.*'s definition:

> we define political talk as something that (a) emerges in the process of everyday talk, often interweaved [*sic*] with conversations that do not have a political character; (b) includes mundane reflections upon power, its uses and ramifications; and (c) possesses qualities that enable it to contribute to meaningful public action. (2016: 74)

Importantly, recent research has shown that such newssharing, and such political talk, also often reaches social media audiences that are commonly not strongly engaged with conventional news sources: the demographics of such groups vary from country to country, but they commonly include women, younger users, and retirees (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 818). Survey-based, representative studies across a number of countries indicate that newssharing through social media platforms is fast becoming an important source of the news for these groups: one "key point about social news discovery is that it reaches different demographics—and not just the young. Those who visit news sites regularly, sign up for email, or receive mobile notifications are heavily male skewed. Search is more even but social is the only discovery mechanism that appeals more to female users" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 77). This is also correlated with users' overall interest in following mainstream news: notably, "Facebook exposes some people to news who otherwise might not get it. While only 38% of heavy news followers who get news on Facebook say the site is an important way they get news, that figure rises to 47% among those who follow the news less often" (Pew Research Center 2013: 1).

Very obviously, the specific role played by social media even within such groups will differ from individual to individual: "users who are immersed in social media are likely to be more open to receiving news and information via their networked circles, from both peers and journalists" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 821). Nonetheless, both the use of socially shared news items and the active sharing of such news now extends well beyond a narrow group of news or "political junkies" (Coleman 2003), and the considerable distinctions between active gatewatchers and news junkies on the one hand, and ordinary news users on the other, that existed during the first wave of citizen media have eroded to a considerable extent. As a result, there is now less of a hard distinction between those who participate in citizen media and those who do not, and more of a sliding scale in the extent to which ordinary users incorporate social media into their everyday news diet, and to which they engage in reactive or proactive newssharing themselves. Picone describes this as a continuum extending from a merely "casual" to a dedicated "structural produsage" of the news (Picone 2011: 103).

An individual user's position on this continuum determines the extent to which they constitute merely a net recipient of news information via social media, or also an active redistributor of such information. This points to the existence of what we might understand as a cascading, multi-step flow of information across multiple newssharers:

> just a third, 34%, of Facebook news consumers … include news organizations or individual journalists and commentators directly in their feed by "liking" or following them. That means, then, that two-thirds of people who get news on Facebook have it passed along to them second, third or twentieth hand from their Facebook friends—rather than directly from news organizations. (Pew Research Center 2013: 12)

This is not to suggest that all social media users will persistently and consistently engage in newssharing via social media, of course; their placement on the continuum from structural to casual news produsage (and beyond to non-participation) will necessarily vary from topic to topic, and from time to time, as a result of a wide range of contextual factors. "Users do not always feel like contributing. Especially when online news is used between times or to quickly catch up with the news, participants seemed not willing to react extensively on it. Also work stress, domestic tasks, and other time-consuming activities shape a user's mood for produsage" (Picone 2011: 112). However, the available data suggest that a substantial number of social media users do engage in newssharing as part of their everyday social media practice. Additional-

ly, there is also considerable evidence that such engagement extends beyond mere sharing and on-sharing and towards active discussion of the news; the *social* aspects of social media may make this discursive engagement especially likely. As the Pew Research Center reports, on *Facebook* "liking or commenting on news stories occurs almost as frequently as clicking on links" (2013: 2).

Mass media researchers have long painted a dystopian picture in which a substantial divide between a small number of highly engaged news junkies and a large mass of far less connected citizens undermines societal information flows and, ultimately, threatens democratic processes. Writing in 1992, for instance, Hallin outlined the likelihood of

> a division of the audience into one part, mostly wealthier and better educated, that "consumes" news of perhaps a higher quality than we have yet seen, and a large part—poorer, less educated, and substantially drawn from minority ethnic groups—that consumes nothing but "A Current Affair" and a sort of soft tabloid style of local news. And this would mean not only a widening of cultural barriers, but also an intensification of the knowledge gap. (Hallin 1992: 24)

Although such fears remain valid in general, and some evidence for a societal polarisation along the faultlines of mass media consumption choices does exist in a number of developed nations—most obviously perhaps in the United States—, the considerably more complex picture of news and information flows across social networks that emerges from our present discussion points to the possibility that newssharing via social media might even serve to counteract such audience segmentation processes (we will pick up this discussion thread again in Chapter 8). Because of the individually random, and collectively aggregate and probabilistic nature of news flows through the many unterwoven publics that exist on social media platforms it is considerably more difficult for social media users to hermetically insulate themselves from a diversity of viewpoints and consume only a homogenous, monoperspectival newsfeed; instead, one of the fundamental features of social media news is serendipitous news discovery, as we have already seen. Although such exposure to opposing perspectives on the news may at times also lead to heated arguments over the 'correct' interpretation of the news, these may still be preferable to the disintegration of society into several separate interpretive communities that no longer speak to each other.

In this context it is especially encouraging that news engagement through social media is no longer simply an unexpected side effect of social media use, but increasingly also a major attraction in its own right: as Hermida *et al.*

report from a representative survey of Canadian Internet users, "keeping up with the news emerged as a strong driver for the use of social media. More than two-thirds of social media users (71 per cent) said that getting news and views was one of the main reasons for taking part in sites like Facebook" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 819). If such patterns persist over time and across different national contexts, social media may therefore actively redress societal tendencies to disengage from the news—and the potential to actively engage in sharing and discussing the news in with one's social network, and to draw on that network's newssharing activities as a form of social curation that filters the newshole into a more focussed, personally relevant subset of all news, are likely to represent important factors attracting users to social media.

Demotic. Democratic?

We have already noted the widespread adoption of gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation—by both proactive and reactive participants—as habitual rather than merely occasional and random practices. This is true both at the level of personal curation, for one's imagined audience(s) of followers, and in the form or more collective efforts in concert with other users. Given the broad and diverse range of users now engaging in such practices, we have therefore also described this phenomenon as the demoticisation of gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation.

This should not be misunderstood simplistically as a democratisation of newssharing and engagement, however. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the democratic hopes for citizen journalism and news blogging during the first wave of citizen media have never been fulfilled: the barriers to entry and the costs of sustained engagement turned out to be too high for would-be citizen journalists beyond a narrow group of news and political junkies. Additionally, "it is of essential importance to recognize that even though the internet gives people the opportunity to make their voices heard, not every citizen has the desire to participate in public conversation" (Hanitzsch 2013: 204). Finally, politics, at least as defined in an orthodox sense that does not include merely occasional engagement with major events, was also too specialised a field to inspire interest from a broader population. This does not mean that ordinary citizens are not genuinely interested in news and politics, especially where current discussions relate to the issues that directly affect their everyday lives,

but many users simply do not have the energy to spare for sustained, constant engagement with such topics.

But citizen journalism and news blogging only ever represented the tip of the iceberg of political participation. Social media have made the politics of everyday life, and their intersection with higher levels of parliamentary and party politics, a great deal more visible, and have thereby shifted the balance between everyday and organised politics. Indeed, they have created a range of spaces ranging from the public (hashtags on *Twitter*, pages on *Facebook*) through the semi-public (personal publics on *Facebook* and *Twitter*) to the private (closed groups and direct messaging) where users are able to share and discuss all aspects of their life-worlds, including news and politics, without necessarily being explicitly aware that this contributes to journalistic and political debate. In this they mimic other, earlier spaces for such engagement—from the family kitchen table to the office watercooler—but substantially increase the potential for the discussions that occur here to connect with and amplify each other, rising eventually to greater visibility beyond the smaller publics where they originate.

As a result, for the ordinary user the process of participation in news and politics has become a great deal easier and more natural; at least until the growing prominence of a given topic leads the user to realise that they are potentially speaking to an audience well beyond their own followers, the steps from gatewatching (identifying interesting news items) through newssharing (disseminating those news items) to news curation (organising the continuing stream of news items) are now simple and present comparatively few major obstacles. Further, as such practices have become habitual, and as user-curated news feeds have become part of the everyday social media experience, social media users have also gradually developed the more advanced literacies required to make sense of complex multi-subject feeds (Newman *et al.* 2015: 78)—borrowing liberally from traditionally journalistic practices such as source comparisons, fact-checking, and verification.

This still does not result in a democratisation of the news, however: first, through effort or authority, some voices continue to speak louder than others, and not every news report or political opinion will receive the attention that it may deserve; and second, while news engagement via social media is evidently now very widespread, levels of interest and literacies for parsing the news remain unevenly distributed. However, the balance between the engaged and the disengaged has shifted considerably, and it is therefore appropriate to describe this as a demoticisation of news engagement. In this con-

text, demoticisation should be understood in its literal meaning as a process of widespread popular adoption across society—in contrast to Turner (2009), who has rightly problematized the "demotic turn" in a number of mainstream media, no value judgment is implied here.

This is because the circumstances of the demotic turn examined by Turner, and the demoticisation examined here, are fundamentally different. Turner's demotic turn is largely driven by media and political interests: although he writes that ordinary people "*turn themselves* into media content through talk radio, citizen journalism, news blogs, reality TV, celebrity culture and the like" (2009: 390; my emphasis), for the most part this transformation still remains something that is *done to* everyday citizens, as examples such as talk radio or reality TV imply. The producers and hosts of such programming formats—which are largely disseminated through conventional broadcast media—remain fully in control, and ordinary people are simply positioned as a supposedly representative (and therefore irrefutable) *vox populi*, the voice of 'the people'. In Turner's analysis, this provides a justification for populist politics and shallow content; he notes that "among the casualties of the demotic turn is the professional production of journalism" (2009: 390).

But while social media are self-evidently not free from the influence of media interests, and especially not from interference by the platform providers themselves, here the logic of demoticisation is different. Very importantly, the remarkable year-on-year growth in newssharing and news engagement that Pew Center and Reuters Institute have documented is not due to the concerted efforts of media companies to enlist social media users in disseminating their news products: as we will see in Chapters 5 and 6, the belated, confused, and contradictory responses by journalists and news outlets to the emerging demotic practices of social media news engagement, as well as the often divergent and critical framing of mainstream news adopted by social media users, clearly document the fact that the demoticisation of newssharing and news curation is not orchestrated by media for corporate and political gain in the way that Turner's 'demotic turn' was.

Rather, the demoticisation of news engagement in social media has occurred because social media platforms have provided new and previously unavailable mechanisms for users' pre-existing everyday news and political interests to be expressed, individually and in aggregate. This phenomenon has certainly been harnessed for commercial gain—in the first place by the platform providers themselves, for whom any user practices that generate substantial and sustained traffic are commercially valuable, and who have therefore

implemented additional mechanisms to encourage the further demoticisation of these practices; and more recently also by some (but certainly not all) news organisations, if they have come to understand user-driven newssharing as beneficial to the circulation of their content rather than as a threat to the integrity of their news products. Notably, however, many news outlets and platform operators are on record as stating that the rapid uptake of social media for sharing and engaging with the news has surprised them. As we have already seen, even *Twitter* co-founder Biz Stone has admitted that "the news applications surprised us" (qtd. in O'Connor 2009: n.p.).

The net result of this demoticisation of news engagement from below, driven by ordinary users, is a challenge to conventional journalism that is possibly even more profound than that posed by the first wave of citizen media, precisely because everyday users' news engagement practices have now become habitual. "The boundaries of journalism as a cultural field of production are questioned when acts usually associated with professions can be performed by others. … Twitter is emerging as a hybrid space for the cultural production of journalism, with citizens involved in the flow, framing and interpretation of news" (Hermida 2013: 304), and the same is true for other platforms such as *Facebook* as well—especially when we look beyond the context of breaking news events.

As a consequence, the pre-existing everyday politics of ordinary people have become more visible, more networked, and therefore also more potentially powerful. As Wright notes, in past research into online political engagement "scholars have largely ignored the spaces where the vast majority of (everyday) political talk between 'ordinary' citizens online is most likely to occur" (2012: 3). The demoticisation of newssharing habits instead points us to a considerably "more expansive notion of political talk: one that embraces the vernacular, expressive, and porous characteristics of everyday public speech" (Wright *et al.* 2016: 74). The study of newssharing on social media, then—especially when it examines everyday sharing practices, rather than focussing only on exceptional acute events as marked, for instance, by trending hashtags—can provide important new insights into everyday political debate.

The results of such study may potentially be instrumentalised by populist political interests, however, especially where they are misunderstood and misrepresented as straightforwardly indicating popular attitudes. It bears repeating that social media, and the activity patterns that can be observed here, are not simply democratic spaces, for a number of reasons: in spite of their vast user communities, *Facebook* and *Twitter* are not directly representative for the

wider public; user activities on these and other platforms span a broad range of interests and practices, and have a range of affective as well as rational dimensions, not all of which intersect with public debates; and the inherently and explicitly social nature of these platforms, which is accentuated not least by the on-site follower and friendship networks that most users are at least generally aware of, is likely to engender powerful socialisation dynamics that make some topics and issues a great deal easier to address than others.

But overall, the concerns that Turner has expressed about the demotic turn in talk radio and elsewhere do not translate easily to the observations we have made here about the demoticisation of news engagement in social media. This is fundamentally because mediation works differently here: there is no explicit moderation of user contributions beyond a comparatively laissez-fair and reactive enforcement of (controversial, but not narrowly political) 'community norms'; instead, users are free to express their political and other views as they see fit, guided only by their own judgments of what is acceptable to their imagined audiences. The strong focus on liveness—especially on *Twitter*—further contributes to a reliance on the algorithmic rather than manual shaping of update feeds; such algorithmic and other technical mechanisms as employed by social media platforms are problematic in many ways, as much recent research has pointed out, but the content visibility and amplification choices that algorithms make are usually not overtly party-political. In all, therefore, the mediation and publication frameworks that underlie social media affect the range and diversity of views that are able to be expressed by ordinary users far less than the production and mediation processes of talk radio and other audience-involvement formats in conventional media channels constrain the expression of ordinary audience members.

As a result, therefore, expression and debate on social media platforms remains considerably more diverse, open, and independent than they are on most other media forms. Even in spite of the evident controlling presence of platform providers, and of the technologies they implement to shape user activities, social media platforms do remain premier vehicles for what Castells has described as "mass self-communication" (Castells 2007: 239).

Industry Responses to Habitual Newssharing

Although news outlets and their journalists are now increasingly active on social media, not least also to provide content that is ready-made for on-sharing,

for the most part their relationship to newssharing has been a reactive rather than proactive one—not unlike the social media platform operators themselves, they have been surprised by the evident popularity of newssharing and engagement on platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. As we will see in the following chapters, they have only gradually developed strategies for operating effectively in social media spaces.

However, the effects of the demoticisation of newssharing as a habitual practice that the majority of social media users engage in are already profound. They have contributed in the first place to the further atomisation of the news, and of news flows, further intensifying such tendencies that had already emerged during the first wave of citizen media. Then, and even more so now, what gatewatchers identify as shareworthy content are almost always individual stories, rather than entire news sites. In social media spaces, these are then shared usually in the form of headlines and links to the full article; in the case of newssharing on *Twitter*, the 140-character limitations that apply to individual tweets enforce a particular brevity, of course.

As an entry point to mainstream and alternative news sites, and to other sources being identified by gatewatching and circulated by newssharing, this promotes the practice of direct or 'deep' linking: these links encourage users to go directly to a specific news article (or, using available page anchors, even to a specific part of an article page), rather than to enter the site's main page and navigate from there to the shared article in the way that the site's designers may have envisaged. This shortcutting of navigational pathways from external links to news articles has traditionally been disliked by online news outlets, however, not least because it reduces the number of pages viewed by a visiting user and thereby both undermines the potential for brand recognition and (more importantly) the number of revenue-generating on-site ads being served to the user. Indeed, in the past some news sites have even attempted to use the legal system to prohibit deep linking, with predictably limited success (Cullen 2003).

Especially in the context of a financially stressed news industry, the habitual circulation of links to online news content also conflicts with attempts to increase online news revenues by implementing access restrictions for non-subscribers. These paywalls have been implemented in a number of different configurations over the past 10 years, from hard paywalls that exclude any users without a current paid subscription to softer models that allow a limited number of free article visits before a subscription becomes necessary. Some sites also distinguish between free (non-paywalled) and premium (paywalled)

content types: here, generic news reporting—much of which is likely to be sourced from news agencies and can be found in identical or equivalent form on competing news sites—often remains in the 'free' category, while original articles by the news outlet's own reporters, and opinion pieces by its commentators, are classified as 'premium'. Unsurprisingly, especially more restrictive forms of paywalls tend to have a strongly negative effect on the volume of news articles that are shared on social media: paid subscribers—as well as the outlet's own organisational accounts and journalists—may well share links to paywalled articles, but users who due to paywall restrictions cannot gain access to such content are unlikely to amplify the visibility of these articles by sharing them on any further.

More recently, some sites have complemented their paywall strategies by implementing a somewhat softer form of exclusion: they now refuse to serve articles to users who use one of a number of popular ad-blocking extensions for their browsers to prevent the display of in-page advertisements. The intention of this approach is to continue to provide free news content, but to ensure at least that such free viewing of articles results in online ad impressions and thereby generates revenue to the news site. However, even this much gentler encouragement to users to enter into a *quid pro quo* relationship with news sites still affects newssharing rates: long-term observations of the sharing of links to articles published in the leading German tabloid *Bild*, for instance, show that the monthly volume of tweets sharing *Bild* links declined by one third after the site implemented its ad-blocker ban (Bruns *et al.* 2016). Again this can be explained by the fact that especially casual users who are not frequent visitors to this site may be reluctant to turn off their ad-blockers just to view a single shared article—and will therefore also not share the article on any further.

Finally, some sites also deliberately limit the shareability of their articles through social media for explicitly ideological reasons. For instance, the staunchly right-wing newspaper *The Australian*—which we have already seen feuding with blogging opinion poll analysts during the 2007 'blog wars' in Australia—has more recently directed its attacks towards the Australian Twittersphere, based on its (empirically unfounded) assumption that the political *Twitter* community in Australia is dominated by left-wing activists. Having already constructed a partial paywall, which allows non-paying users a limited level of free access, around its 'premium' content, *The Australian* further implemented a distinction between the different pathways by which such non-paying users arrived on its site: while users who find *The Australian*'s

articles through Google searches can read a number of paywalled articles for free before being required to pay, users arriving from links shared on *Twitter* are immediately excluded and must pay in order to gain access. (If this two-class system was designed to prevent *The Australian*'s articles from circulating on *Twitter*—and, in the editors' fears, from being critiqued and criticised—, however, it has failed: enterprising *Twitter* users now often share the Google search links that point indirectly to the articles in question, rather than linking to the articles directly.)

Although news outlets' implementation of such strange, contorted bottlenecks to user access and newssharing is perhaps understandable from a commercial perspective (as well as, with considerable charity, from an ideological point of view), it is nonetheless clearly hindering the sharing of news content through social media: the more restrictive the paywall approach taken by a given site, the more it thereby removes itself from the social media news flow. This may ultimately create more new problems than it solves: sites that excise themselves from social media debate in this way reduce their own visibility and reach, and thereby also further limit the number of ad impressions and paywall subscriptions they are likely to achieve.

Former G*uardian* editor Alan Rusbridger has suggested that "newspapers should want to be open and collaborative in what they do. Because that's the way the Internet works. And so I think it is a very profound statement journalistically to want to put a universal barrier between you and the way the rest of the world is going to work" (2010: n.p.). The alternative perspective to such self-exclusion from public circulation that has emerged in recent years—but notably has been espoused especially vocally by public service media organisations that receive government or licence fee funding, as well as by news outlets such as *The Guardian* that are sustained by trust funding and thus somewhat more insulated from a declining news market—therefore holds that news organisations must strive to be thoroughly open. "News … needs to become more *interoperable*: capable of being usefully reused by multiple sites and services so that stories and their elements can be discovered, integrated into other sites and content, and redistributed by its users" (Weinberger 2015: n.p.). Some news sites have even experimented with providing their own Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), in order to make their content even more discoverable and shareable, through social media and other platforms. *The Economist*, for instance, has backed away again from a more exclusionary approach as a consequence of coming to understand how important social media now are as drivers of user traffic to the site, and has instead "introduced

a more flexible paywall, partly to ensure that social traffic does not get driven away" (Newman 2011: 17). Across the industry, "this approach is gathering favour as new evidence has emerged which shows that social media traffic tends to be stickier and more valuable than drive-by search referrals" (50).

These more proactive approaches that openly embrace and encourage newssharing as a demotic practice, as well as the substantial negative effects of paywalls and ad-blocker bans that have become increasingly obvious, demonstrate again how central social media have now become as a mechanism for the discovery and circulation of, and engagement with, news and news-related information. Other mechanisms that the industry had hoped would establish captive (and ideally, paying) audiences elsewhere, away from the social media platforms that remain outside of their immediate control, have failed to deliver: the initial enthusiasm for dedicated news apps on smartphones and tablets has dissipated, for instance (and some such apps have been criticised for not providing built-in functionality to share their content via social media); and micropayment solutions that would enable users to reward the journalistic content they share by contributing a very small amount of money on the fly are available but not widely used (Newman *et al.* 2016: 36).

Conversely, social media platform operators as well as the companies designing leading mobile operating systems have continued to implement serendipitous news discovery and social news curation functionality into their platforms. Such functionality draws on the collective but usually uncoordinated efforts of millions of habitual newssharers to surface and present currently leading news stories across a wide range of topics and issues; it further cements the role of social media platforms as the go-to destinations for users seeking to discover current news, and in doing so diverts traffic away from the front pages of major news outlets, as well as from the leading search engines, both of which had previously fulfilled this role.

The net effect of this shift in how and where Internet users get their news is that specific news imprints no longer matter especially much. The loyalty of users to individual brands is now much reduced; only 20% of the U.S. users surveyed by the Pew Research Center clicked on shared links because "the link came from a news organization they preferred", for instance (2013: 3). This decline is especially pronounced, unsurprisingly, amongst users who predominantly source their news online rather than through other, offline channels. For the most part, given the atomisation of the news into individual articles circulating separately from each other, and considering the brevity of posts that leading social media sites encourage, it is the punchiness of the

article headline itself, rather than the eminence of the news brand behind it, that now attracts users to read and share a particular article (Newman *et al.* 2015: 78). Indeed, as *Buzzfeed*'s Jonah Peretti has put it,

> headlines are generated on Twitter and all these different places and it is something that we think a lot about. What do people add to a story when they share it? In some cases it's better than the headline that our team wrote and in some cases shows why content matters to them. Because you say, "I'm sharing this" and explain why you're sharing it. (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

As a result, there are now many more new pathways to the news; news access is no longer bundled by brands and imprints, but follows a range of considerably more complex and potentially unpredictable paths that emerge from the aggregate of user-driven newssharing activities. In consequence, it is not unexpected that, as Olmstead *et al.* reported as early as 2011, occasional visitors now account for the majority of visits to most mainstream online news sites: "on average, 77% of the traffic to the top 25 news sites [in the U.S.] came from users who visited just one or two times" (2011: 14). This raises critical questions, as Funt *et al.* point out: "if readers are finding stories in every corner of the Web, and may not even remember where they first read them, how can publishers build a loyal audience? Do brands even matter anymore" (2016: n.p.)?

This is not to say that brands are now entirely irrelevant, of course: given the choice between two articles on the same topic that circulate on social media, or in assessing the veracity of conflicting news reports from different sources, it is quite likely that social media users will continue to select the news imprint which has the better long-term reputation (in general, and/or in its coverage of the topic at hand), but this nonetheless means that the quality of the imprint is now a secondary or tertiary concern in the news judgments applied by social media users, when previously news audiences chose the imprint (the newspaper, the TV channel, the Website) first, before selecting those of the imprint's stories that they felt were of interest to them.

And yet, in spite of the overall decline in news brand loyalty amongst social media users, this also provides a new opportunity for news outlets: "information flows tend not to stop at borders" (Heinrich 2013: 91), and their content is now accessible to a potentially global audience. For example, "social media have helped UK newspapers and broadcasters gain traction around the world and especially in the United States"—but at the same time, "news organisations with paywalls are in danger of missing out on the benefits" (New-

man 2011: 6) of this shift. If brand loyalty in the sense of user attention to the news published by one outlet to the exclusion of all others has disappeared, then, brand recognition does remain even in the considerably more open, multi-channel spaces of social media platforms, and can be reinforced by the collective processes of social filtering and social curation. "For news outlets operating under the traditional model of building a loyal, perhaps paying audience, obtaining referrals so that users think of the outlet as the first place to turn is critical" (Pew Research Center 2014: 5).

Developing an active presence, at institutional and individual levels, is therefore crucial for news organisations and their journalists, as we will see in more detail in the following chapters. Social media users do still follow the *Twitter* accounts and *Facebook* pages of news outlets and individual news workers, of course (Pew Research Center 2013: 3)—in spite of everything, "people still want, value, and identify with traditional news brands" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 29). But most likely they have also established a more diverse repertoire of accounts (cf. Schmidt 2016) that in combination contribute the social media component of their overall news diet: "the impact of online [news consumption] is to significantly increase the number of brands used for news each week" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 50). In addition to the voices from the journalism industry this repertoire may also include news aggregators and retweet bots (cf. Newman 2011: 29), as well as non-professional curators of news feeds on specific topics and issues, and individual sources and experts from those areas of interest. As Thorson and Wells point out, "a central story emerging from the digital media era has been the growing capacity for strategic actors—politicians, corporations, governments, interest groups—to address publics directly, in many cases bypassing the curation choices of the news gatekeepers" (2015: 34). Finally, the specific composition of the repertoire of sources utilised by any given social media user will also vary widely across different topics and issues, as different sources become more relevant (Orellana-Rodriguez *et al.* 2016).

In this context, then, where they are certainly still prominent, but increasingly simply one source amongst many others in a given user's social media repertoire, it is becoming increasingly difficult for news organisations set the news agenda, establish dominant news frames, and lead the public debate of the news, in the same way that they had been able to when they controlled the means of publishing and disseminating the news almost exclusively; rather, what now ensues is a more open-ended interaction between conventional and social media, between professional journalists and habitual newssharers,

between the mainstream and social media news agendas. Comparative studies of the dynamics of mainstream and social media news agendas therefore now commonly "see a complex and dynamic pattern of leading and lagging indicators among the social and traditional media rather than a dominance of traditional media agenda setting in the electronic public sphere" (Neuman *et al.* 2014: 209). In these bidirectional intermedia agenda-setting processes, the leading outlets of the news industry are far from guaranteed to retain their accustomed hegemony on each and every issue and topic.

However, as we have seen, this changed environment also provides an opportunity for new news outlets and journalists to make a name for themselves. In particular, "individuals may be replacing institutions as the fundamental unit of the profession" (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 226), as we will see in the next chapter. They can do so especially if they overcome any remaining fears of engaging with social media, and become active in gatewatching, news-sharing, and social curation themselves—and if they do so, like Andy Carvin and other leading proponents of this approach, in a consistent and sustained fashion and on particular issues and topics that clearly relate to their areas of established expertise. "News correspondents and columnists are gaining new authority and influence through their expert use of social media. Some are becoming 'network nodes' attracting significant audiences of their own—independently of their parent brands" (Newman 2011: 6).

As Hermida puts it, then, "the question is whether Carvin is a heretic outside the orthodoxy of journalism, or whether he is the precursor to a proto-journalist immersed in social awareness streams that serve simultaneously as newswire, newsroom and new outlet" (2013: 304). In the following chapters, we will explore the various ways in which individual journalism professionals have explored the new opportunities that have become available to them in recent times, and how news organisations have responded to these tendencies at an institutional level—and in Chapter 7 we explore a particular new journalistic publication format that has gained increasing popularity in the industry, the liveblog, as a novel approach to embedding some of the practices and processes from social media news curation back into conventional journalistic publication contexts.

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· 5 ·

MEET THE AUDIENCE

How Journalists Adapt to Social Media

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Towards the Normalisation of Social Media

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Journalistic Uses of Social Media

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

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

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

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

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

Promoting Stories

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

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

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

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

Curating Content

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Personal Branding

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Connecting with Sources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Monitoring Developments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Engaging with Audiences

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social Media and Journalistic Disclosure Transparency

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MANAGEMENT AND METRICS

The News Industry and Social Media

The previous chapter has explored the active, communicative uses of social media that have now emerged in the news industry, with a focus especially on uses by individual journalists as they attempt to incorporate social media into their day-to-day professional practices. But there are also a number of more institutional responses to the challenges and opportunities provided by contemporary social media platforms—which ultimately require a substantial rethinking of the relationships between news organisations and their (former) audiences. This chapter addresses these responses at the institutional level.

First, the emergence of social media as spaces for following and discussing the news can be seen to have had an unexpectedly positive side effect. Almost since they were first implemented, journalists as well as audiences have been critical of the reader commentary functions provided by most news Websites: while audiences have been disappointed by the lack of post-publication engagement in such comment threads by journalists and columnists, news professionals in turn have frequently dismissed such commentary spaces as overly belligerent and ill-informed; additionally, many news organisations have struggled with the additional work required to oversee and moderate these comment sections. Over time, therefore, such sections have largely been treated as unwanted extensions of news Websites, with little attention paid

to the technical and social interventions that could be made to improve the quality of engagement and commentary there; by now, many such comment spaces are either virtually dead or populated only by a remnant of incorrigible trolls and ideologues.

The emergence of social media such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* as third-party platforms where substantial discussion of news content takes place has therefore provided a welcome opportunity for news organisations to transition and outsource such commentary functions to these platforms, to the point where "this trend towards more conversations happening off-platform has led some news websites to close their message boards and forums" since 2014 (Newman *et al.* 2015: 83). This frees up considerable staff time for news outlets, as it no longer requires maintenance or development work, or the presence of dedicated moderators "playing chaperone to the users they have invited in" to their own sites (Braun and Gillespie 2011: 384); notably, however, some such moderation may still be required in social media platforms such as *Facebook* where user feedback and comments on the news headlines posted to an organisational *Facebook* page will also appear to other visitors of that page (Larsson and Ihlebæk 2016: 5).

In addition to shutting down on-site comment sections altogether, some sites have also experimented with the embedding of *Facebook*'s commenting functions on their own pages, replacing comment systems developed in-house. Whether embedding *Facebook* into the news site in this way, or outsourcing commenting to *Facebook*, one underlying hope associated with such strategies is that the direct association of comments with the commenters' personal *Facebook* profiles that is created by such mechanisms will lead contributors to moderate their language and behaviour: although dedicated trolls would certainly be able to set up fake profiles in order to protect themselves from immediate repercussions, to do so might constitute more effort than many disruptive commentators are willing to endure.

At the same time, the outsourcing of commenting to *Facebook*—especially through the creation of institutional *Facebook* pages that post all or selected news headlines and ledes as starting points for user liking, sharing, and commentary—might also mean a reduction in actual user visits to the news outlet's core Website itself: there is a danger that *Facebook* users could simply visit the institutional page on the platform in order to keep track of current headlines, but click through to the full articles only on rare occasions (the organisation's *Facebook* page would then have a similar, but this time self-inflicted effect to the consequences reported for *Google News* or third-party newsreader apps). The limited data that are currently publicly available on

user behaviours around institutional *Facebook* pages paint a mixed picture in this context: "the coveted 'click back' from links inside Facebook posts to full stories on a news website is fairly common. Two-thirds of Facebook news consumers, 64%, say that they at least sometimes click on links to news stories. Still, just 16% do this often" (Pew Research Center 2013: 11). Although far from the ideal situation that news organisations might envisage, then, their development of institutional *Facebook* pages may at least not have worsened the already limited click-through rates that news outlets have experienced from other news digests outside of their control.

Much of this discussion has been in the first place about *Facebook*, which—because of its more fully developed, semi-threaded commenting functions and branded institutional pages functionality—enables a more straightforward transition from existing on-site, in-house commentary sections to outsourced social media commenting. *Twitter*, by contrast, represents an even more arm's-length option: except for the news organisation's overall profile page, it does not allow for the creation of dedicated institutional pages, and the responses posted by ordinary users in the form of @replies to the posts made by a news organisation are not as immediately visible (nor organised as effectively in the form of comment threads) as they are on *Facebook*. For this reason, news outlets posting their headlines to *Twitter* neither need to concern themselves with the moderation of subsequent user comments, nor is there the functionality on *Twitter* to do so even if they wanted to.

In turn, finally, the user comments to institutional news stories posted to *Facebook* or *Twitter* may also be pulled back into 'official' institutional content by incorporating them into follow-up reporting. Especially important in this context is the liveblog format, which we will explore in greater detail in the following chapter: here, having already outsourced commenting functionality to the relevant social media platforms, the journalist in control of the liveblog now has the opportunity to select especially valuable comments for inclusion in the unfolding blog text.

Standardising Social Media Activities

The outsourcing of user commentary to social media platforms must ultimately be seen as an attempt to control user engagement activities and protect the news organisation against any negative repercussions for its public image and reputation that may result from especially negative and belligerent user

discussions on its pages. News outlets are similarly concerned about the impact that the social media activities of their own journalists and newsroom staff may have on the organisation's reputation, and they have therefore also begun to at least attempt to standardise professional uses of social media by instituting their own official guidelines for social media use. These guidelines have been examined especially in an important article by Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck (2014), which reviews the tenor of such guidelines as they have been implemented in a number of leading news organisations and interviews a range of Flemish journalists about their perceptions of such guidelines.

Acknowledging the increasing importance of social media as tools for sourcing, dissemination, and engagement, most such guidelines deal in the first place with a number of key aspects of journalistic practice: "recommendations and guidelines are formulated about how journalists must deal with, *inter alia*, checking sources, plagiarism, breaking news, insults, etc., within social media" (Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014: 729). The focus here is not simply on safeguarding the individual journalist from making mistakes, however: importantly, where such mistakes do occur, the guidelines also seek to ensure that they impact only on the individual, and not on the news outlet as a whole. Therefore, they frequently encourage or require the journalist to implement clear disclaimers that distance their personal account and brand from that of the news organisation they work for: for instance, at the Reuters news agency

> one of the recommendations encourages journalists to mention Reuters in their account name or biography and to declare that they speak for themselves, not for Thomson Reuters. Staff may present themselves personally, but details about their private lives do not belong on the account. Furthermore, it must at all times be clear that the journalist in question works for Reuters and the tweets must not have any possible adverse effect on the press agency. (Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014: 729)

Such concerns are especially prominent, on *Twitter*, in the context of journalists' retweeting practices, reflecting fears that the retweeting of political and other statements could be seen as an implicit endorsement of these positions. Indeed, Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck report that one news outlet, the U.K.-based *Sky News*, has even attempted to implement "a guideline … that its journalists were not allowed to retweet any message originating from someone who is not affiliated" with *Sky News* itself (2014: 730). There are, however, significant questions about whether such comprehensive bans of social media activities that are otherwise extremely common on these platforms can be

effectively enforced, as they would severely limit journalists' ability to use social media in a way that is compatible with the practices of ordinary users, and comprehensible to these users.

Journalists are therefore also often critical of such institutional social media guidelines, especially where they clearly overreach in their attempts to ward off negative repercussions for the organisation. Indeed, this raises the broader question of the extent to which employers can control the social media practices of their employees by instituting official guidelines, especially where such social media use occurs in the context of the employee's personal profile and is clearly demarcated from the employer's corporate social media presence. Such questions exist in similar form well beyond the journalism industry itself, and have yet to be tested comprehensively (and across diverse jurisdictions) in court; some journalists themselves, at any rate, point out that they would be opposed to giving their employers too much control over what is at least in part a personal social media presence: "I would find that unfortunate. Precisely because in part I really use Twitter personally as a sort of way to vent my thoughts" (anonymous journalist qtd. in Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014: 734).

At the same time, however, it must also be noted that some journalists are themselves still deeply unsure about the 'correct' use of social media for professional or at least semi-professional purposes. They are therefore usually not inherently opposed to the social media advice provide by their employers, as long as it is formulated in the form of useful guidelines rather than restrictive rules (Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014: 737). In the first place, in fact the mere existence of such guidelines is also seen as an explicit statement of a news organisation's embrace of social media as a legitimate element of professional newswork practices: "if there were no guidelines for us, then that would mean that the company has not yet realized that social media really constitutes a part of the news" (anonymous journalist qtd. in Opgenhaffen and Scheerlinck 2014: 733). In some news organisations, therefore, institutional guidelines for journalistic social media use have been developed not on the initiative of management concerned about reputational damage from uncontrolled individual activities, but on the request and with the input of journalists themselves (733). This can be seen as a sign of the normalisation of what Hedman (2015) has described as 'j-tweeting', and of other social media activities, as part of everyday journalistic practice; such normalisation—especially if it occurs too soon after the introduction of new technologies and associated practices—may also end up prematurely curtailing the transforma-

tive potential of these new developments, however: "instead of experimenting with how audience participation might change the journalism conversation, news institutions have tended to retrofit yet another reporting tool" (Lewis and Usher 2013: 609).

Addressing Personal Branding

In the previous chapter, we have already explored the practice of direct audience engagement and personal branding from the perspective of individual journalists, not least also as a mechanism of accumulating valuable social capital that boosts the individual news worker's job prospects in a stressed and shrinking industry. Corporate responses to such practices remain mixed and contradictory. On the one hand, there is a perception that—much as in broadcast news—the development of strong personal brands by leading journalists enhances audience engagement with and trust in the news produced by the journalists' organisation, and thereby perhaps also increases its circulation across social networks; as Newman points out, "individuals are often more effective as 'network nodes' than brands … because the currency of social media is people, and because of the extra trust involved in receiving news or information from people you know" (2011: 48).

On the other hand, however, there is also a concern that such personal branding alters the balance of power between journalists and their employers, and mainly benefits the journalists themselves. As the U.K. *Daily Telegraph*'s social media editor Kate Day reports, "if you have reporters tweeting and building up their profiles, that is great for them but there are some editors who struggle to understand how that is great for the Telegraph" (qtd. in Newman 2011: 48). Perhaps the key concern here is that such social media stars amongst journalists might eventually move on to another organisation, taking their strong established social media following with them as they do so (much as might happen when a popular broadcast news anchor moves from one station to another); the social capital built up by the journalist in the course of their employment, drawing on the resources of their employer, remains necessarily associated with the individual and benefits the employer only as long as the association between journalist and employer continues.

Short of outlawing the operation of personal social media accounts by journalists altogether, or of stipulating as part of employment contracts that the social media account operated by the journalist remains the property of

the news organisation at the termination of employment—neither of which are practicable options in the current environment—, however, news organisations appear unable to address this shift in the balance of power between them and their news workers; their relationship now resembles that between sports clubs and professional sportspeople more than that between ordinary employers and employees. Similar developments are occurring also in other professions where the accumulation of social status and capital through social media has elevated individuals from being ordinary team members to becoming recognised as distinct personalities.

This personal recognition, in turn, can also have strongly negative effects, however. The development of a personal brand, with all that it entails, necessarily also limits the individual journalist's ability to maintain their privacy; in their study of Irish journalists attitudes towards social media, Heravi and Harrower cite personal privacy issues as a deterrent to professional social media use that is named by nearly two fifths of their respondents, for instance. Such concerns are especially notable "given that the most-used platform, Twitter, comprises almost entirely public content" (Heravi and Harrower 2016: 1205). In addition to the need for individual journalists to choose what level of privacy or disclosure they are comfortable with, this also has important institutional consequences, of course, not the least of which are the chilling effects that may arise from personal exposure:

> journalists acting as individuals exposes them to personal attacks, the fear of which may restrain what they are willing to cover. In other words, journalists' desire to please their audiences may have the undesirable side effect of limiting their interest in covering controversial or potentially sensitive story subjects. (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 237)

News organisations requiring their journalists to cover highly controversial topics—from anthropogenic climate change through refugee policy to the election campaigns of populist candidates—may already be exposing these journalists to considerable attacks and hatred from extremist participants in these debates. News organisations that do so while at the same time also encouraging (or requiring) their journalists to be present with a personal profile on social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* may go even further in placing such journalists in harm's way—and will need to very carefully consider the implications of such corporate policies, as well as to put in place the support mechanisms that ensure the personal integrity and safety of their staff.

Measuring Audience Engagement

In spite of such concerns, it is now nonetheless true that "the individual journalist's activity in social media becomes part of a corporate brand, and editors and managers can put pressure on journalists to be active social media users" (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 371). A further consequence of this incorporation of social media into institutional audience engagement strategies is also that the returns on such investments of staff time and other resources are increasingly closely measured and evaluated, with social media strategies being constantly refined as part of overall competitive behaviour in an already highly competitive marketplace.

"News organisations all over the world have in recent years increased their use of analytics—systematic analysis of quantitative data on various aspects of audience behaviour aimed at growing audiences, increasing engagement, and improving newsroom workflows" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 7). This extends (and to some extent transforms) previous strategies for search engine optimisation (SEO)—which were designed to ensure that a given outlet's news stories on a particular topic appeared high in the ranking of relevant search results on that topic—towards social media optimisation (SMO; cf. Newman 2011: 53), where the central aim is to promote the widest possible circulation of stories through social media platforms, thereby amplifying their visibility and readership. "All of this activity demonstrates how closely editorial teams now need to work with marketing and business development—in real time" (Newman 2011: 54)—, but such growing interconnections between editorial and marketing imperatives are also the cause of substantial concern in the industry.

Several leading news organisations have now deployed sophisticated in-house analytics toolkits that enable a close observation and analysis of the performance of their content across various social media platforms and the wider Web; this also enables them to "collect and analyze the footprints that news users leave behind, offering immediate access to an unprecedented wealth of information about audience behavior" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 560). Less well-resourced outlets rely on a range of more generic Web and social media analytics tools that do not provide insights at a comparable level of detail, but here, too, there is a growing push to gather real-time information on how well individual news articles and overall sections and publications within the news organisation are performing.

Such performance indicators are now also often provided directly to the editors and journalists responsible for the news content. The aim behind *The Guardian*'s development of its in-house analytics suite Ophan, for instance, "was to create a 'feedback loop' to make it easier for journalists to see in real time how changes made to headlines, for example, might affect search traffic to stories" (Edge 2014: n.p.); such fine-tuning of story headlines and presentation after publication in order to optimise their visibility and circulation is now common across much of the industry, at least in comparatively well-resourced news organisations.

It should be noted here, however, that such optimisation processes did not emerge only with the adoption of social media as a content promotion mechanism: online content adjustment strategies were previously implemented when search engines first appeared as a major source of traffic to news Websites, and even in pre-digital times subeditors worked to ensure that article headlines were clear and attractive to readers, of course. However, the very immediate online and social media response to such changes that can now be measured and evaluated further intensifies these content dynamics: "in many ways Twitter is just speeding-up a process that has always occurred behind closed doors. Now it is possible to see a networked map of how a news story spreads—and how that draws people back to find out more" (Newman 2011: 20). This is due particularly to the increasing technological sophistication of the platforms on which digital content is published, and through which audiences engage with it, as Helmond points out: "the practice of link sharing on social media platforms automatically … renders the link, and to a certain extent the user, into a traceable object" (Helmond 2013: n.p.).

Such growing technological sophistication, however, does not necessarily also translate into a markedly improved understanding of the analytics data that can now be gathered. As Cherubini and Nielsen note in their major study of the rise of social media optimisation in the news industry,

> in many cases, analytics are organised in ways that reflect inherited workflows and the incremental accumulation of new tools and techniques over time more than any thought-through approach. Real-time analysis may be carried out by a homepage editor, social media insights are monitored by a social media editor, and deeper, longer term analysis only on the commercial side or in the media research department and not in the newsroom. Search engine optimisation is sometimes streamlined across the whole online newsroom, sometimes the province of a SEO editor, sometimes an afterthought. (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 30–31)

This affects especially the most recent and most sophisticated measurements of social media activity around news stories and sites, which remain inconsistently implemented and poorly understood; as a result, Cherubini and Nielsen's report concludes that in 2016, "basically, contemporary forms of analytics are very good at understanding the main ways in which people used digital media in 2010" (2016: 39). This view is echoed by *The Guardian*'s director of architecture Graham Tackley, who reports that "when I've talked to people about … more [complex] metrics than page views they … really genuinely have no idea about what they actually mean" (qtd. in Edge 2014: n.p.).

Even when—as at *The Guardian*—more sophisticated and in-depth online and social media metrics are available to editors and journalists, therefore, they are often still treated more as an impenetrable fetish object rather than a genuine tool for attracting and engaging with audiences. Indeed, one of Tandoc Jr.'s informants—the managing editor of a newsroom—

> compared using web analytics with getting hooked on drugs. "It's like crack," he said, grinning. "You can sit here and watch it, popping all night." Online editors would have their analytics program open all day, and the numbers on the analytics dashboards would change all the time. (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 567)

In this context, the adoption of social media *analytics* into newsroom practices may follow similar paths to the preceding adoption of social media themselves, in fact: it is driven in good part by individual enthusiasts, and often becomes the domain of younger newsroom staff who—as 'digital natives'—are rightly or wrongly assumed to know more about social media (and social media analytics) than their more senior colleagues (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 567).

Such widespread deployment of analytics tools without a matching growth in analytics literacies amongst newsroom staff—and similar problems exist also in many other industries where social media play an increasingly important role—can create systemic structural problems that have been highlighted by Nielsen in none-too-subtle terms:

> many actors, some of them powerful, feel impelled to act upon, engage with, and have views of social media, even though they may know little about them. This demand underpins a highly generative *political economy* for the production of statements about social media. … [It] is likely to also produce a lot of bullshit. (Nielsen 2015: 2)

This continued lack of understanding of social media analytics, coupled in some cases with a wilful ignorance of and deliberate resistance to social media, serves to heighten the conflicts between traditional and emerging journalistic

practices, particularly in relation to audience engagement. It is broadly true that "journalists used to ignore, if not reject, feedback from the audience" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 563) and make their gatekeeping choices by means of 'gut feel' and professional routines; some—especially more senior—journalists may well wish to continue to do so still. To them, it may now appear that "the gatekeeping role is being centralized—editors, armed with audience analytics, maintain iron discipline .... The gatekeeper is now computer operated" (Phillips 2015: 80). However, at the same time the increasingly competitive struggle for audience attention also means that "many journalists ... *want analytics*, as an earlier period of scepticism seems to have given way to interest in how data and metrics can help newsrooms reach their target audiences and do better journalism" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 7). This clash of journalistic worldviews remains as yet unresolved.

Shaping News Content

However, institutional imperatives are now pushing editors and journalists towards a deeper engagement with their content metrics with increasingly irresistible force; "in most online newsrooms, audience preferences have become omnipresent through web analytics and ignoring the online audience has become difficult" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 560). Napoli also sees this as a sign of a fundamentally changing understanding of news audiences within the industry, and suggests that such "audience evolution" can only occur "when both: a) the dynamics of audiences' media usage are changing in ways that undermine traditional approaches to audience measurement and valuation; and b) affordable and acceptable new analytical approaches are available" (Napoli 2013: 4).

Again, in this reconceptualisation of news audiences as more active *users*, and this redevelopment of institutional strategies for reaching and engaging with them, industry leaders are necessarily a great deal more advanced than more minor players (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 7). Amongst the leading news outlets, Cherubini and Nielsen therefore now see the emergence of "distinct forms of ... editorial analytics" that advance well beyond mere audience metrics: such "editorial analytics aim to help journalists and news organisations become more data-informed, not to replace editorial judgement with the tyranny of numbers" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 9).

Such editorial analytics affect the shape and structure of the content published on news outlets' Websites and through their social media accounts in

a number of ways. First, in a further extension of practices that emerged in full with the rise of search engine optimisation, but trace their history back to pre-digital times, the headlines of news stories are now often systematically optimised for attractiveness to various online audiences. Indeed, some leading news outlets even engage in real-time A/B testing of headlines to determine which version draws more audience engagement. Tandoc Jr. observed this in action in one of the newsrooms he observed, which used the *Visual Revenue* analytics suite:

> a web editor wrote two headlines for the same story. *Visual Revenue* randomly exposed readers to one of the two headlines. His first version got a 9% rating while his second version got 42%. The ratings were based on how many readers clicked on the story after reading the headline. He decided to go with the second headline based on *Visual Revenue*'s recommendation. (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 568)

Second, the visual elements accompanying each story can be similarly optimised by testing audience engagement with different configurations; in addition to the visuals posted to the news outlet's site itself, this is especially important in the light of studies that show that *Facebook* and *Twitter* posts that are accompanied by visual elements receive a greater level of user engagement (e.g. Sabate *et al.* 2014). In one of Tandoc Jr.'s newsrooms, for instance,

> a web editor was updating a news story about a homicide when he suddenly came up with an idea. Having the suspect's photo next to a story is common, but readers would also want to see the photo of the victim. So he thought of putting the two photos side by side. "I kind of favor that," he said. "We need her face [the victim's] out there for it to perform well so I'm gonna talk to photo." Then, he walked toward the photo section, came back to his workstation, and said, "So they're producing that." (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 568)

Such content strategies may be deeply problematic especially in the context of crime and disaster coverage, of course: images showing victims, especially when they are used to promote news stories on social media platforms and thus widely circulated, could be seen as insensitive and exploitative; they might also prejudice the eventual court case. Several cases of substantial user backlash against the use of such images to promote news content have gradually led to a more cautious approach to image use, at least amongst quality news outlets.

Third, the analysis of audience engagement metrics both on news sites, through search engines, and on social media platforms now also influences the

story line-up displayed on the frontpages of news outlets' Websites. There is an imperative for the stories on such news sites to remain 'fresh' in order to reward repeat visitors; as a result, when click-through numbers to individual stories "start to dip, web editors take that as being the right time to update the homepage by moving around stories or adding new ones to replace those that have stagnated based on traffic" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 568). Conversely, stories that show signs of growing real-time audience engagement especially via social media, even though they are not prominently featured on the frontpage, might be promoted to better visibility in order to fully exploit such interest.

These selection and deselection processes may be understood from the perspective of gatekeeping theory: having already made it through one set of gates—initial story selection by the journalist or editor, leading to the development of the news article itself—these stories now make it through a secondary gate that controls access to the frontpage. But such an opening of the gates may also be reversed again once audience interest in a given article wanes, and result in a subsequent closing of the gates. Complicating this picture, however, is the fact that the audience metrics upon which such gate opening and gate closing events are based are in turn reflective—if they are drawn from the activities of social media users—of the *gatewatching* practices of these users, which crucially influence the visibility and circulation of news stories across social media platforms.

There is, however, also a more fundamental question about the extent to which such attention to the story line-up on the frontpage of a news outlet's Website is still particularly relevant. As we have already seen in Chapter 4, newssharing as a habitual, demotic practice contributes substantially to an atomisation of the news—where direct, deep links to individual news articles rather than generic links to a news organisation's frontpage are the predominant unit of currency. Many users arriving at a mainstream news site through a process of serendipitous news discovery in their social media network may never encounter the site's frontpage at all, unless they click through to that page from the specific article they came to read (and the available statistics on such frontpage click-throughs are mixed at best). The more traffic arrives at such sites through deep links from social media platforms, therefore, the less important may this rearranging of frontpage news items turn out to be.

However, as a fourth element of metrics utilisation, audience engagement analytics are now also often reflected back more or less directly at news audiences themselves, beyond the structuration of the news frontpage. Starting as early as the mid-2000s,

> online news platforms now incorporate collaborative filtering cues, such as *most e-mailed*, number of *page views*, and *average … rating* associated with specific articles. The social functions of news may be even more salient when cues of collaborative filtering are present and indicate what other news readers appreciate and consume. (Knobloch-Westerwick *et al.* 2005: 297)

In addition to view counts, many sites therefore now also show their visitors how often a story has been tweeted, liked, or shared, and generate ranked lists of such ratings that are prominently displayed in sidebars alongside articles. In essence, this brings elements of the frontpage—chiefly, an ordered list of headlines—to individual article pages, and therefore to those pages that news users are now most likely to encounter. To the extent that such lists are based on the collective activities of social media users, they can therefore be understood as essentially embedding the aggregate results of the habitual social news curation activities taking place on *Twitter* and *Facebook* into the pages of mainstream news sites, ceding some control over the structure of such sites to news users.

Although "it appears likely that online news readers will orient their news consumption" relative to the story rankings that result from such analytics (Knobloch-Westerwick *et al.* 2005: 299), it is notable that this does not always happen in the way that the designers of these analytics may have envisaged. Building on an experimental study, Knobloch-Westerwick *et al.* point out that the lowest-ranked stories sometimes receive the greatest number of readers, and offer a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon: users may have "believed that the articles with fewer readers were more recently posted", or may have been "looking for a 'rare gem' [that] could add to news consumers' self-uniqueness experience" (2005: 310); additionally, we might also speculate that some users may have been reading against the grain deliberately because they sought to reject the popularity rankings apparently foisted on them by the news site. Whatever the explanation in each case, however, users do not just appear to blindly follow the content choices and rankings presented to them on a news site.

From Metrics of Popularity to the Populism of Metrics?

Nonetheless, as Heinderyckx warns us, "we must … be wary about conflating relevance with popularity": as audience engagement metrics are still used by many actors in the news industry, "the most read and best-rated articles

or most watched videos gain prominence and are implicitly considered as more important and hence more relevant, while they're just more *popular*" (2015: 260). If this influences further news reporting choices, then it may well result in news coverage that is more popular with general audiences, but does not necessarily serve to inform them more effectively. As Newman summarises this concern, "has a more responsive news organisation changed its values over what it writes and where it seeds its content? Is there a danger that the agenda is being narrowed by a race for popularity" (2011: 25)?

Such questions about the balance between quality and populism in news coverage are as old as commercial journalism itself, of course, and have at different times in its history been answered in very different ways; such answers also depend on the institutional mission of the news publication in question, and on the professional self-understanding of its newsroom staff. However, across the industry "most would agree that journalism's purpose cannot be reduced to 'giving the people what they want', while at the same time warning journalism's practitioners not to ignore its audience's preferences" (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 3). Still, in an increasingly metrified digital newsroom environment the apparent audience imperatives emerging from the available news analytics data are perhaps particularly difficult to evade, especially if the corporate understanding of these metrics still remains unsophisticated.

The fundamental question in this context, then, is exactly how audience metrics are operationalised in a given newsroom, and how they are used alongside the various other data points as well as journalistic intuition and routine news judgment that also remain important to the news production process. Clearly, simply to rely "on algorithms that populate the list [of important stories] based on page views takes the control [away from] the journalist" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 569) and would considerably narrow the available news coverage—not least also because the available audience analytics are necessarily most representative of (and most detailed for) those audiences that are most clearly observable: at present, this means online and especially social media audiences (and even here possibly the users of *Twitter* more than those of other, less public platforms). Thus, "one major challenge for journalists is to reconcile the (assumed) demands of the disperse[d] and heterogeneous, yet often silent mass media audience with the (verbalised) demands of the connected audiences they face in comment sections and social media" (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 10).

For better or worse, in many newsrooms the barriers between editorial control and commercial interests have already weakened and perhaps even

disappeared as a result of the increasing utilisation of audience metrics; given the intense and now largely global competition between news outlets, especially online, for audience 'eyeballs', this is seen by many news workers simply as an unwanted, but unavoidable necessity. The response by one of Tandoc Jr.'s informants to a question about the balance between quality and commercialism is likely to be representative of such views: "I don't think that we have the luxury of thinking that way because if the company's not making money then I might get laid off. I mean, that's just the way it is" (qtd. in Tandoc Jr. 2014: 570).

Short of returning the industry to a level of profitability that would allow the interweaving of journalism and commerce to be reduced again, if we do accept that "that's just the way it is" for now it then becomes important to ensure that the increasing use of audience metrics does not mean that journalistic judgment is marginalised altogether. Ideally, this begins with involving practicing journalists in the development of the news metrics themselves, rather than confronting them simply with off-the-shelf metrics that have been created by analysts without journalistic training or affinity. This is crucial because, as Cherubini and Nielsen point out, "analytics and data metrics will continue to evolve, and if journalists are not part of that process, the tools and techniques developed will continue to reflect and empower commercial and technological priorities more than editorial priorities" (2016: 7).

Journalists must similarly be involved in discussions about the use of such metrics to influence news coverage. It is notable in this context that some of the most advanced audience metrics development and deployment in collaboration with journalistic staff has occurred in born-digital news organisations that have not traditionally been associated with quality journalism. *Buzzfeed* founder Jonah Peretti, for instance, recounts how his newsroom does

> a lot of testing and we look at lots of metrics, but ultimately the raw material is people coming up with creative ideas. We have lots of meetings with five or six people sitting in a room brainstorming about what they could create. You have a lot of reporters saying … , "Oh, what stories are we going to cover?" None of that is directly tied to any metrics. Although having seen what people's response is in the past, it actually might give people a gut feeling. (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

Such 'new' news organisations may indeed be benefitting from the fact that they do not look back on long-entrenched organisational structures and cultures that may stifle an open and level exchange of views between newsroom and marketing staff; they are therefore free to take a more flexible and ex-

perimentative approach to their development and operationalisation of user engagement metrics.

Where such open and equitable discussions about the appropriate use of audience metrics occur, then, and where these metrics are not used to institute a transition to the computer-operated gatekeeper that we have seen Phillips (2015) warn of, a different dynamic may emerge: here, journalists are beginning to master the metrics and incorporate them usefully into their routine practices. In this sense, Tandoc Jr. suggests,

> journalists are normalizing web analytics, using audience metrics to inform their traditional gatekeeping functions. But a process of negotiation is also going on, with journalists modifying existing norms to accommodate the increasing influence of new technology. News judgment now includes acute awareness of what stories did well in the past based on traffic. Headlines are now being tested in terms of which version attracts more clicks. (2014: 572)

This may come to resemble the evolution of audience metrics uses that *The Guardian* had in mind in the development of its analytics tool Ophan, whose aim "was … to be useful to everyone working at the outlet, something … referred to as the 'democratisation of data'" (Edge 2014: n.p.). The underlying philosophy here is to offer a broad basket of relevant metrics that can be used for different purposes by different newsroom staff, rather than to settle on a narrow and binding set of metrics that each story, each journalist, or each sectional team within the newsroom must uniformly deliver on. The latter vision is now increasingly being described as a (possibly futile) quest for a "god metric" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 9)—and *Buzzfeed*'s Peretti is openly critical of this all too reductionist approach to news analytics, which invites misuse:

> the natural inclination, if one metric is seen as the important, true metric … is to game it. And then when you game it, you essentially are creating a fake version of that metric. So page views are a metric of how many stories people want to read—and then you split the story in two. You essentially are doubling your pages for that story, or not quite, probably, because not everyone will click. But you create pyrite page views. (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

Such tendencies towards a deliberate subversion of audience metrics would mirror similar patterns of deliberate gaming that have been observed for media metrics ranging from newspaper circulation through TV ratings to music sales.

The great diversity of online and social media-derived news usage metrics, and of the tools and frameworks used to generate them, as well as the continuing absence of any one widely accepted 'god metric', point to the fact that current "new media trends (the rise of distributed content on social media and through messaging apps, the rise of the mobile web, and of online video) require a continuous evolution of new metrics and forms of analysis and changes in the tools, organisation, and culture of analytics" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 42)—this field, and the news industry that has come to base its newsroom decisions increasingly on such metrics, remain far from settled.

The uncertainty and confusion that this unsettled state has created—going back at least to the rise of the first wave of citizen media, but arguably perhaps even to the very beginning of journalism's inevitable transition towards online-first publishing in the early 1990s—has at times been described in dramatic terms: "the high modernism of journalistic professionalization has moved to a liquid modern state … of feverish journalistic differentiation across media genres (including popular, tabloid, and infotainment journalisms), platforms, and industries" (Deuze 2005: 450). Even in spite of the gradual normalisation, into standard journalistic practice, of some of the new platforms and genres that we have already observed, however, this inherent liquidity and the uncertainty it generates continue to exist. This is due most of all to the fact that the fundamental question facing the journalism industry at this stage—how it can ensure its long-term sustainability, if not profitability—has not yet come any closer to being resolved.

This has been framed at first as a question regarding the interrelationship between the online and offline editions of the same news publication: as Ju *et al.* point out,

> the industry's decade-long search for a working business model for the Web edition itself has not been successful. While the number of newspapers' Web visitors has been growing during the past decade, the relationship between the Web edition and its print counterpart has become ambiguous. More and more empirical evidence has suggested that free Web offerings may have eroded print subscriber bases over time. (Ju *et al.* 2014: 11)

Similarly, because of the ready availability of free news content online those Internet users are also unlikely to pay for news delivered via the Web and social media in sufficient numbers; this is true especially for news in English and other major world languages, where a wide variety of news outlets from

a range of countries now compete in a global market. As a result, only some 9% of consumers are willing "to pay for general news online … in the highly competitive English-speaking world …, but in some smaller countries, protected by language, people are twice as likely to pay" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 8).

Meanwhile, the viability of offline media forms continues to decline rapidly in most countries, as a distinct generational change in news access patterns unfolds:

> most people over 45 are using digital news as an additional layer of choice and convenience without abandoning their core habits around television, radio, and print. Younger audiences who have grown up with digital are exhibiting very different behaviours and increasingly expect the news to come to them through online channels and in new formats. (Newman *et al.* 2015: 20)

As these younger audiences have come to play an increasingly important role in the news market, newspaper readership has suffered substantially, to a point where "social media are now considered more important than print in the US, Ireland, Brazil, Italy, France, Spain, and Australia" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 11). But even the previously still relatively stable audience base for television news has now begun to erode: as the 2016 *Digital News Report* observes, "for every group under 45, online news is now more important than television news. For 18–24s social media (28%) comes out ahead of TV (24%) for the first time with print lagging behind at just 6%" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 10).

In light of such transformations, from a commercial perspective the early-1990s decision by most news outlets to offer journalistic content online for free has been described as "one of the most far-reaching collective failures of the media industries" (Hanitzsch 2013: 204). Still worse, it is deeply unlikely that the generation of news users who have since become used to accessing news content online free of charge would come to accept a transition to paid content in the near future; this genie will not be able to be coaxed back into its bottle. Indeed, these same users are now increasingly also rebelling against the second major revenue stream for online news publishers: on-site advertising. As Newman *et al.* report,

> business problems for many publishers have worsened with the rise of ad-blocking, which is running at between 10% (Japan) and 38% (Poland) but much higher amongst under-35s and people who use news the most. The vast majority of those who have ever downloaded a blocker are using them regularly, suggesting that once downloaded people rarely go back. (Newman *et al.* 2016: 8)

In this context, the embrace of social media by the industry as a new mechanism for news dissemination has been questioned by some commentators as further undermining its economic viability: in essence, "are newspapers repeating the same 'mistake' by giving content away for free to SNS users and by granting audience access to aggregators? … Just [as] they did with their Web operations, newspapers seem eager to seek 'eyeballs' through Facebook and Twitter before locating a viable business model" (Ju *et al.* 2014: 11–12).

But it must also be noted here that competition between free and paid news media is hardly new, and predates the rise of the World Wide Web as a mass medium by some decades. Major public service broadcasters such as the BBC have offered 'free' (or more correctly, taxpayer-funded) news content in competition to commercial newspaper and broadcast news outlets for decades, but this has not undermined the profitability of those commercial news organisations; in many countries, newspapers remained profitable operations well into the 1990s, at least. What has changed notably in the current sociotechnical environment is that online content distribution and access practices have contributed to a marked atomisation of news content, as we have already seen: in this context, audiences are no longer prepared to subscribe in large numbers and for the longer term to the packaged news product (the 'online newspaper', the news site, the news app, or the social media feed) offered by a specific news organisation, but are instead considerably more open to discovering their news serendipitously by browsing, searching, and social filtering. "A small number of loyal readers have been persuaded to pay for brands they like but it is proving hard to convert casual readers" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 18). Outside of highly specialised niches (financial news, fan news, etc.), news outlets have largely failed to develop new news packages and services that address the news usage preferences of contemporary audiences.

Atomising the News, Deliberately

It is perhaps unsurprising that a number of relatively young, born-digital news outlets are at the forefront both of the development of comprehensive online news usage and circulation metrics, and of the use of such metrics in making further news coverage decisions. It is interesting in this context, however, to see that even such outlets as *Buzzfeed*, which has made its name as the source of news-related content that is designed to achieve wide social media circulation (that is, to 'go viral'), are now taking a view of audience metrics

as complex and multifaceted, rather than chasing only a small set of virality indicators. Indeed,

> the idea of integrating analytics into daily editorial work and longer term strategic planning has been central to US-based digital news start-ups like gawker, the Huffington Post, and BuzzFeed for years. These companies have from the start been proud of their ability to use a more data-informed and evidence-based approach to digital publishing than many older media, and have drawn extensively on analytics developed in the technology sector, marketing, e-commerce, and advertising. (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 12)

In doing so, sites such as *Buzzfeed* come to embrace a very different concept not just of what is news, but also of how news should be presented and packaged. Contrary to established news outlets, many of which developed in the age of print and broadcast news and only subsequently transitioned to an online and social media news environment, these more recent sites never experienced the necessity of packaging their news in the form of a daily paper or nightly broadcast; in fact, they were established even after the heyday of the institutional Website with its carefully designed frontpage. For instance, "Buzzfeed does not care very much what its homepage looks like because it doesn't expect people to visit it as a 'destination site', but rather to encounter the news through social feeds" (Bell 2015: 89). Such sites are therefore also considerably more open to simply serving a steady stream of individual stories that are shared online—especially through social media—as distinct items rather than as a dedicated effort to cover a defined newsbeat. Thus,

> the strategy of Buzzfeed … is very different from that of traditional news organizations. It is not built around building a loyal, returning audience. Instead, it is built around "being a part of the conversation," says editor-in-chief Ben Smith. The site's writers and editors develop content that people want to share so that a story reaches all those it "should" reach. It may well be a completely different audience from one story to the next. (Pew Research Center 2014: 5)

In this, *Buzzfeed* is different even from the *Huffington Post*, as Peretti notes: "HuffPost, to this day, has a large front page audience. In part, it started it that way. Part of its DNA was thinking of how to build an entry point or front page to the web" (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.). By contrast, "Buzzfeed has been built around the proposition that distribution of journalism will happen primarily through social networks. It has expertise in understanding how social platforms spread news stories, and what formats of journalism work best on the

real-time social web" (Bell 2015: 89). Peretti describes this difference by suggesting that *Huffington Post* content "is both contagious and sticky" (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)—in other words, individual stories travel widely through the social networks and in doing so build up the brand recognition that increasingly draws visitors directly to the site; by contrast, *Buzzfeed* content is "just a little sticky", but this also serves to further increase its circulation well beyond a loyal and committed audience:

> often, television producers would read BuzzFeed, and they'd say, "I'm getting these new trends and I'm always ahead of the curve." People would describe it as a secret. Their friends would say, "How come you always … send me all these interesting stories?" None of them are BuzzFeed stories, but they were finding them on BuzzFeed. (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

This approach to creating news content is almost certainly reactive and opportunist; it might also be described even less charitably as populist and mercenary, as it seeks to rapidly push out search engine- and social media-optimised stories about currently active topics to ride the wave of emerging search and sharing trends (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.). But however we evaluate such approaches, their net effect is to atomise the news by creating a feed of distinct, divergent news items rather than a consistent identity and agenda for the imprint. The core difference from the atomisation of the news that we have already observed in earlier chapters as a result of gatewatching and newssharing, though, is that here it occurs knowingly, deliberately: *Buzzfeed*'s content is specifically designed for the contemporary social media news environment, which is of course why it performs so well there.

In taking this approach, sites such as *Buzzfeed* also expose themselves directly to the vagaries of the social media platforms on which they rely for the circulation of their stories. The growing adoption by more mainstream news outlets of these sites' approaches to using audience metrics to maximise circulation and readership similarly transfers increasing market power to these platform providers: "if Buzzfeed is correct in its strategic direction (and it is already being emulated by many legacy news organisations), then the control of pathways to audiences no longer lies with the organisations which publish news but with the platforms that carry it" (Bell 2015: 89). In an extreme case, a single change of policy or programming within *Twitter* or *Facebook* could undermine the fundamental content dissemination strategy of a site like *Buzzfeed* (and thus also its core business model, which relies on the advertising income generated by serendipitous social media user visits to its viral con-

tent). Whenever *Facebook* notes that "the quality of its News Feed was declining because of too many clickbait stories", and foreshadows "plans to banish clickbait, by filtering out headlines such as: 'You'll never believe …'"—as it did in August 2016 (Battersby 2016: n.p.)—or vows to combat 'fake news' in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Zuckerberg 2016), therefore, such changes could fundamentally affect the viability of many viral content sites.

The point of the present discussion is not to hold up *Buzzfeed* and similar sites as a model for the future of journalism; they are not, or at least not in a straightforward fashion. For many established news operators, to embrace *Buzzfeed*'s approaches to content and distribution would "prove to be not just ineffective, but actively counter-productive because they damage brand and reputation, and point newsrooms at the wrong audience targets and user experiences" (Thompson 2016: 109). Yet *Buzzfeed* and its fellow travellers can be seen as rapid testing labs for new news formats and distribution approaches: as Peretti puts it, they ask

> what would this be if the readers and the publishers were not focused on making something similar to print? … What should this be if mobile is the most important thing; if things can be more visual; if things can be more shareable; if length can be anywhere from 140 characters to 12,000 words? In that kind of world, where things can be interactive, like quizzes—in that kind of a world, what should a media company be? (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.)

Grafström and Windell describe such relatively young sites as "peripheral actors" in the field of journalism, and suggest that their ability to experiment and adjust their content strategies and formats with great agility and speed derives specifically from this peripheral status: as history-less sites that invite few audience expectations and have only limited established routines, *Buzzfeed* and others can quickly reinvent themselves as the socio-technical environment within which they operate changes. "Experimentation with new practices is less costly for these peripheral actors in comparison to dominant field actors, as the latter ones have a vested interest in conventional practices" (Grafström and Windell 2012: 67); nonetheless, demonstrable successes of new practices within such peripheral and unorthodox sites also lead to increasing emulation within the mainstream.

Additionally, the popular (and commercial) success of such sites also enables them to invest in developing more conventional news reporting approaches. Notably, for instance, "BuzzFeed has hired new staff and high-profile

journalists in a number of countries including the UK and Australia, working on subjects like politics and the environment" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 91), and the work of these journalists has gradually earnt the site a grudging respect amongst its peers even in spite of their continuing misgivings over its populist click bait and listicles formats. Peretti describes this as a maturing process: "It was like, 'Okay, the web is growing up. The social web is growing up. We need to grow up. And we need to add capacity to do all kinds of stuff that we're not doing now'" (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.). But at the same time, as more conventional news reporting approaches are thus introduced into an unconventional site such as *Buzzfeed*, its novel strategies for ensuring the viral distribution of its content may thus also be applied to traditionally non-viral 'hard news' stories; while this is unlikely to entirely undo the popularity of the simpler news formats that *Buzzfeed* has been chiefly associated with, this could also serve to significantly boost the visibility of such content across social media platforms.

Mobile News Users, Mobile News Workers

It is therefore clear that the first and second waves of citizen media have contributed to a marked atomisation of the news: the people formerly known as the audience, acting now as news users, sharers, and curators, no longer exhibit a strong loyalty towards specific news organisations, and their habitual newssharing now focusses on content from a much broader range of sources; this then also creates a strong need for news outlets to provide readily shareable, pre-atomised content in order to remain visible in the largely user-driven environments of contemporary social media platforms.

This atomisation of the news—associated with practices of casual and serendipitous "news snacking"—is sometimes described as promoting a shallower form of news engagement than sustained and focussed news reading; however, Newman *et al.* report that "data from news organisations suggests [that] time spent with news and media websites has increased slightly … . Overall, it appears that—for at least some people interested in the news—snippets of information in social networks are stimulating further interest in news events and encouraging further exploration" (2012: 18). This phenomenon may be explained especially by the considerable rise in the use of mobile devices for accessing the news. In the 2016 *Digital News Report*, for instance, "smartphone usage for news is sharply up, reaching half of our global sample (53%), while

computer use is falling and tablet growth is flattening out" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 8); indeed, for a substantial minority the smartphone is fast becoming the main device through which they access the news.

Further, active news engagement functionality—for instance, the ability to tweet links to news stories, or share them on *Facebook*—is usually inherently built into these devices, which means that such casual and serendipitous mobile news usage is also more likely to result in further newssharing activity. As a result, as a Pew Center study reported as early as 2010, "almost half of on-the-go news consumers (46%)", using mobile devices to access the news, "are what we term 'news participators'" (Purcell *et al.* 2010: 38), engaging in activities such as posting and on-sharing links to news stories, or adding their own comments to these stories. As everyday computing continues to transition from desktop to mobile devices, we should therefore expect to see a further growth in such activities.

Overall, then, we must now ask at what point all those multiple instances of news snacking add up to a full meal. "*Mainly digital* users [are] almost three times as likely as traditionalists to access the news more than five times a day. Increased frequency also seem[s] to be related to the growth of new devices—such as mobiles and tablets—which are extending the range of access points. The more devices we have, the more frequently we consume" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 56), and surely at some point all of this additional news consumption, usage, and sharing through various channels and devices results in a considerably greater level of news engagement than would have been experienced by previous generations of news users. Thus, "it appears that snippets of information in social networks are stimulating further interest in news events and encouraging further exploration. The commercial implications of this are more complex and raise more concerns for some news organisations, however" (Newman 2011: 21).

In the first instance, those outlets that have been able to design their news content to maximise its social media shareability have turned out to benefit the most from these developments. So, for instance, "in terms of scale of audience, BuzzFeed reaches more people each month than MTV or Comedy Central or a lot of the big cable networks." At the same time, however, as *Buzzfeed*'s Jonah Peretti points out, "the amount of time people spend on television is still much higher. We reach a lot of people, but they don't spend as much time on BuzzFeed as they spend watching reality shows … or something" (Peretti in Salmon 2014: n.p.). Yet this is reflective of the fundamental approach *Buzzfeed* has chosen: it is able to survive and be commercially suc-

cessful on the basis of repeat serendipitous engagement, without needing to rely on a regular readership that is loyal to *Buzzfeed* as a serious news brand.

The challenge for operators in the news industry, from legacy outlets such as the *New York Times* to new players such as *Buzzfeed*, is therefore now to deliberately design their content to take advantage of social filtering processes; this would react to the fact that "a significant number of social media users tend to rely on the people around them to tell them what they need to know rather than relying solely on institutional media" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 810). This crucially requires becoming part of processes of news discussion and curation, rather than merely building up an audience for the organisation's own accounts: it is only if the material being posted by these accounts is widely viewed and re-posted that it stands a chance of reaching a wider audience beyond the relatively narrow group of the outlet's direct followers.

As we already have seen in the previous chapter, this also enables a considerable shift in balance between the corporate news brand and the personal brands of the individual journalist who work for it. On social media platforms, journalists "can leave the pack and become individual news hubs, while especially employed journalists can easily push the news of their own organization through their network" (Brems *et al.* 2016: 3). Such personally branded dissemination and discussion work may indeed become more effective, and especially also more persuasive, than the more generic content promotion activities conducted by the main corporate account; the respected individual journalist, focussing perhaps on a particular news beat, most likely has a better chance of convincing their followers that a particular news story is worthy of their attention (and amplification) than a generic, impersonal, corporate account. This illustrates how recent "economic and technological changes … weaken organizations and empower individuals, allowing journalists the freedom to navigate uncharted waters through social and mobile media" (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 226)—even if at times that freedom will also bring with it considerable uncertainty.

As Molyneux points out, then, "news companies may need to proceed with caution, … as there may be a point where a journalist has developed enough of a personal brand that the benefits of independence (and its difficulties) outweigh the benefits (and difficulties) of being part of a larger organization" (Molyneux 2015: 933). But this is also a balancing act for the journalists: as the 2016 *Digital News Report* documents, "almost everywhere, editors and journalists are trusted less than news organisations" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 8), and their success as individual, independent brands is therefore

far from guaranteed. In the near future, we may therefore well see especially the most prominent, most trusted journalists break away from the news organisations where they have made their names, in order to develop their own personal brands; some of these newly independent journalists may also join forces under the auspices of smaller outlets that adopt more network-centric organisational structures with limited institutional overheads. As Lowrey points out, such a development in a transforming industry is also anticipated by organisation ecology theory, which "predicts that during disruptive times, new landscapes tend to emerge, populated by both large, older generalists, which concentrate centrally, and small entrepreneurial specialists that seek abandoned resources in the margins" (Lowrey 2015: 146).

The Normalisation of Journalism

Indeed, by now audience demands and competitive market pressures have already forced even the older generalists to embrace social media, with differing degrees of enthusiasm. As we have seen, "newspapers and broadcasters have normalised their use of social media as source material, filtering the best for a mass audience—and developing new skills and roles for curated or 'networked journalism' in the process" (Newman *et al.* 2012: 15); similarly, they have developed increasingly prominent social media presences for their news products as well as for individual journalists, to disseminate the latest news to social media audiences and engage at least to some extent in news discussion and social news curation. This adoption may further undermine their ability to generate revenue from their legacy news products, but the only available alternative would have been to abstain from social media altogether, and thus cede this emerging news space to their less reluctant competitors (especially perhaps to public service media and other non-profit news outlets).

But this normalisation is unable to simply tame social media and defuse their potential to disrupt the industry, in the same way that blogs were normalised in the wake of the first wave of citizen media: "j-tweeters appear to be normalizing microblogs to fit into their existing norms and practices but, at the same time, they appear to be adjusting these professional norms and practices to the evolving norms and practices of Twitter" (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 31). It is quite likely that the much more widespread adoption of mainstream social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, compared to the significantly more niche status of news blogs and citizen journalism sites, has made the task

of normalising social media more difficult for journalists, in fact; the demotic social media practices that have emerged on these popular platforms exert substantial pressure on journalists to conform, while conversely the small population of professional journalists and news organisations have little prospect of significantly affecting user practices.

Thus, Broersma and Graham argue,

> normalization theory as a conceptual framework sells short the fact that coherent and distinct social media repertoires have emerged in the past decade. These follow from the affordances of social media platforms and, more broadly, from a networked logic that fundamentally differs from the industrial mass media logic which underpins legacy journalism. (Broersma and Graham 2016: 99–100)

But this is true only if we assume that normalisation always occurs in the direction of professional practice—that is, in the way that blogs were normalised into mainstream journalism. What we are observing in the present context, by contrast, is the normalisation of professional journalism, alongside many other professions, *into social media*.

Individual journalists as well as leaders of the industry are beginning to realise this. Journalists who are active social media users, in particular, are already "much more likely to believe that the traditional role of journalists is and must be transformed by social media" (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 380). Peter Horrocks, the head of the BBC's Global News division, has been even more explicit: "you're not doing your job if you can't do those things. It's not discretionary" (qtd. in Eltringham 2010: n.p.). At the U.K.'s *Financial Times*—not necessarily perhaps the most obvious outlet where a drastic transformation of established journalistic approaches would be expected to occur—Head of Audience Engagement Renée Kaplan "has been … developing a strategy for moving the *Financial Times* from 'digital first' to what she calls 'audience first' … changing the way journalism is produced and distributed to integrate engagement objectives into the commissioning and production process" (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016: 15).

However such an 'audience first' approach is interpreted and implemented, then, its emergence demonstrates the shift towards the dominance of a network logic in journalistic practice that Broersma and Graham have pointed to. "Networked digital media have amplified the communicative forms which structure and reproduce" the relationship between journalists and their audiences (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 4), and this results in "a shift in the modes of mutual observation and interaction which also affect[s] the gen-

eralised expectations journalists and audiences have of each other" (6c). It also affects the relationships between journalists and their news organisations: journalists now "focus more on what audiences think of them" (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 232), and perhaps less on what their editors' views are. This, in turn, represents "part of a general trend of increasing audience orientation in journalism, making the credibility of news and the legitimacy of journalism key factors in commercial success" (Hedman and Djerf-Pierre 2013: 371).

This also drives the further diversification of journalistic roles, as individual journalists, not least also in the process of building their personal brands, are exploring the forms of audience engagement that they are most adept at and most comfortable with. As Molyneux observes,

> now that journalists have a direct line to their audience, they have begun to act differently than they would in other news arenas, perhaps making it more difficult to maintain independence. Their focus is still the news, but they are taking on different roles—commentator, heckler, interpreter, marketer, and so on. (2015: 933)

Not all of these roles are still strictly journalistic in an orthodox definition of the term, however, and some of the news professionals who reposition and reinvent themselves in this way no longer necessarily concern themselves with that label: "there is a schism between those who call themselves journalists and those who seem to do the same type of work but are wary about labelling themselves as such" (Fulton 2015: 371). Some of this is also related to professional histories: as we have seem most prominently in the example of Andy Carvin in Chapter 3, some news workers who rise to prominence especially through their social media curation activities are no longer necessarily employed primarily in conventional journalistic roles, or understand themselves to be journalists in a narrow definition of the term.

Nor surprisingly, then, in her study of Australian news workers Fulton identifies

> a distinct division between those participants who had worked as journalists in traditional media and others who had come into the space via other professions. Those who had previously worked in the occupation still identified as journalists, while those who had not were more cautious about using the occupational term. (Fulton 2015: 366)

But such distinctions also intersect with similar distinctions between conventional and novel outlets and platforms for the news: many of the non-journalist news workers identified by Fulton's and other, similar studies are

now contributing as permanent or freelance staff to conventional news outlets, while professionally trained journalists as well as news workers with less traditional career histories can also be found working for a number of emergent sites and platforms that make no claims to being news outlets in a conventional sense, but nonetheless report the news. These include the surviving and now increasingly professionalised remnants of the first wave of citizen media, slightly more recent additions such as *Huffington Post* and *Buzzfeed*, and a number of novel outlets that are sometimes supported by crowdfunding or funded by relevant commercial organisations interested in quality specialist and independent coverage for their areas of interest.

In this evolving media ecology, then, social media platforms are increasingly emerging as the public forum where engagement with the news happens—between diverse actors including journalists, experts, politicians, celebrities, and ordinary users themselves. One effect of this development is that "journalists now find themselves in the rather unfamiliar position of not necessarily being the first ones to provide the 'news', let alone being the only ones telling people what to 'think' about as news, as the agenda-setting function of the mass media was once described" (Heinrich 2012: 62); another is that these 'people'—the everyday users of the news—are now very significant, active participants in news processes at all stages of journalism, from sourcing through dissemination to curation.

News usage during the age of mass media was "based on … a rather passive consumption of professionally selected, framed, and interpreted news items (this is not to deny the notion of a cognitively active audience that unconsciously makes sense of the messages conveyed to it)" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 33); by contrast, news usage via social media makes these cognitive reception processes, and the supportive or oppositional negotiations of meaning performed by those news users, a great deal more visible and interactive, at a potentially global scale: "the readings by the audience result … themselves again in manifest, publicly accessible texts. This way the individual opinions can be perceived as common viewpoints and enter into various forms of publics—potentially even into the same public as the original text" (Katzenbach 2016: 9–10; my translation). And most importantly, in these social media spaces the process of evaluating and negotiating the meanings of a specific news story is conducted within the same media space: the third-party social media platform that is controlled neither by news organisations and journalists nor by experts or ordinary users.

Social Media as Tertiary Spaces for the News

This final point is perhaps the most crucial, and arguably represents the root cause for most of the difficulties experienced by journalists and news organisations in coming to terms with the new media environment in which they now find themselves. As Loosen and Schmidt put it succinctly, "with social media, journalism and audiences meet on uncommon ground" (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 7), in a space that is both unfamiliar and outside of their full control.

"Earlier online undertakings by journalists were mostly performed on web pages maintained and operated by their employers" (Larsson and Christensen 2016: 3), and the non-journalistic challengers of the first wave of citizen media similarly operated from a set of blogs and related platforms that, while less well resourced, were similarly usually under their full and direct control. During the first wave, this resulted in a clear dichotomy between mainstream and citizen media, mostly arguing at and disagreeing with each other from a distance until the creeping normalisation of news blogging and citizen journalism enabled a number of individuals to switch sides, in both directions, and even allowed entire citizen news outlets (such as the *Huffington Post*) to become part of the journalistic establishment. Talk of the 'blog wars' in Australia in the context of its 2007 federal election exaggerates for heightened effect, but nonetheless validly points to the existence of relatively clear opposing fronts in this first-wave conflict.

Both sides of this conflict, then, operated from proprietary bases that were controlled by their respective publishers; as Shirky pointed out at the time, "most weblogs are much more broadcast than intercast. … Most comments are write-only replies to the original post in the manner of Letters to the Editor, rather than real conversations among the users" (Shirky 2002: n.p.). Much the same could, and in some cases still can, be said about the operational models of mainstream news sites, too; on either side of the pro/am frontline, except for the professional and citizen journalists who are able to author new content, users or audiences were invited in merely as guests and considerably less privileged contributors.

These primary and secondary news spaces continue to exist, of course. But now they have been joined, in all senses of that verb, by social media acting as a tertiary type of space for the news. For instance, "Twitter is a distribution channel for news that is not controlled by the news media. Journalists tweet links to their news articles, but it is the distributed response of the Twitter community that determines whether that news spreads" (Orellana-Rodriguez

et al. 2016: 107); in much the same way that community also determines the visibility of other news-related content originating from alternative news sources.

The tertiary spaces provided by *Twitter* and other social media platforms, in other words, are where the content posted on the primary and secondary news spaces of mainstream and citizen journalism sites circulates and reaches an increasingly sizeable and important audience, and where that audience amplifies, evaluates, and curates this mixture of content from many different sources. Having watched the gates of these original sources, social media users open their own gates, more or less widely, to enable these sources' articles to circulate on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, and thereby also bring these individual articles into contact with each other. Similarly, too, many of the authors as well as the subjects of these articles are themselves active on social media, and increasingly become involved in these processes of dissemination, discussion, and curation themselves; in this way, too, the tertiary spaces of social media serve to connect the previously much more disconnected inhabitants of the first and second spaces of news publication.

Therefore, "whereas j-blogs appear within the framework of a given organization's news site, and thus are often edited to meet standards and protocols, j-tweeters operate on a neutral platform" (Lasorsa *et al.* 2012: 24). That platform is neutral only in the sense that it is not inherently aligned with any one major news outlet or other industry player; at the same time, it must be noted that it certainly pursues its own commercial interests and embodies a specific ideological perspective (on matters including free speech and democratic deliberation, for instance). From this perspective, as Ahmad notes, it becomes important to ask a "pertinent question: that of whether journalism has not become a useful 'tool' for Twitter—or for that matter large corporations such as Google and Apple, whose control of the profits that can be made from web technology in the information age seems increasingly secure" (Ahmad 2010: 149). By increasingly embracing the tertiary spaces of *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and other social media platforms as crucial environments in which their news articles circulate and their staff engage with news audiences, mainstream and alternative news outlets necessarily cede a considerable amount of control over the processes (and proceeds) of news coverage to these social media platform providers, which do not have any inherent allegiance to traditional journalistic ideals.

In these tertiary spaces, then, "the medial thematisation of the everyday and the political by individual citizens stands … side by side with profession-

ally produced journalistic and non-journalistic offerings. For users of digital media it is normal that brief notes from friends, contributions by companies or celebrities, and journalistic offerings gather on one screen" (Katzenbach 2016: 12; my translation)—and the design of contemporary social media platforms offers remarkably little opportunity for the major commercial or civic actors to be featured more prominently than ordinary citizens. Tweets posted by @nytimes or @bbcnews will appear in a given *Twitter* user's timeline alongside and in the same format as those by their own family and friends, with no specific indicator that the former represent a different class of account (*Twitter*'s blue tickmark that indicates officially verified accounts might have served this purpose at least to some extent in earlier times, but that tickmark has now also been made available to a much larger group of accounts, including those of ordinary users). Similarly, as the posts by major news outlets to their *Facebook* pages are shared through *Facebook* users' personal publics, they will appear alongside a wide range of other content from ordinary users and other non-news sources, and not necessarily any more prominently.

This is not to deny that especially the major, legacy news outlets still command a considerable amount of name recognition for the imprints they have established over the course of many decades, of course. But as Castells notes, "while the old struggle for social domination and counter-domination continues in the new media space, the structural bias of this space toward the powers that be is being diminished every day by the new social practices of communication" (Castells 2007: 257–58). This is especially pronounced on platforms such as *Twitter* with their comparatively minimal user interface design: the available range of features for customising one's account profile simply does not extend to a point where a major corporate player could definitively distinguish their *Twitter* presence from those of ordinary, individual users. "From this purely system-oriented perspective, almost all Twitter users are equal" (Gruzd *et al.* 2011: 1303), and they emerge as prominent nodes in the *Twitter* network predominantly on the basis of their sustained content contribution and engagement activities.

As Heinrich points out, then, prominence and influence in these social media spaces is accorded to specific participants by the logic of the networks that underpin these platforms:

> which node is connected to the others, and how strong or weak these ties are, depend on the individual nodes. How big or how small these nodes are also depends on the individual nodes. Such nodes can be journalistic organisations such as the BBC, *The New York Times* or Associated Press; however, these nodes are also tweeters, bloggers

> or the independent journalist freelancing on international territory. Some of these nodes might have more impact than others, yet they all *share* the same information exchange sphere. (Heinrich 2012: 64)

Further, the initial reluctance of journalists and news organisations to engage fully in the spaces of *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other social media platforms has provided a head start to other actors from outside the field of conventional professional journalism in assuming roles of influence and authority in this social media information sphere. These social media opinion leaders are unlikely simply to melt away as the journalism industry takes a greater interest in social media; they constitute a real and persistent challenge to journalism's claims to news authority.

In this tertiary space, pre-populated with a broad range of minor and major societal actors and according no inherent special privileges of voice and authority to conventional news outlets and journalists, it is therefore also very difficult for journalists to engage in effective boundary work of the type that we have observed in the early phases of both waves of citizen media. Such boundary work is possible when the boundaries are clearly demarcated—it was a valid if not always successful strategy when there were clear battlelines that could be drawn between the primary spaces of the mainstream news industry and the secondary, second-tier environments of news blogs and citizen journalism sites, for instance; and it could be attempted again to distance social media sceptics and abstainers like *The Australian*'s editor Chris Mitchell, who saw themselves as upholding traditional journalistic ideals, from the "highly politicised activists" on *Twitter* who dared to challenge journalism's authority to explain the world to its readers (2016: n.p.).

But the divisions between 'us' and 'them' are nowhere near as clear-cut when so many journalists and news outlets are themselves present and active in the tertiary spaces of social media, where they inevitably come into direct contact and interaction with other actors, from politicians and celebrities to ordinary users. Here, the rejection of non-traditional news actors through boundary work must almost necessarily give way to a more dialogic engagement: "digital media have introduced a conversational mode into the journalism-audience relationship, by providing communication channels and spaces that afford direct interaction, whether dialogue- or conflict-oriented" (Loosen and Schmidt 2016: 7). Journalists still have the opportunity to dismiss and ignore their critics, to be sure—but to do so, and to do so persistently, is to act against the underlying logic and unspoken rules of social media, and is

likely to undermine the journalist's standing with their followers. "Journalists enter but do not control these newer media spaces, which operate according to principles that challenge professional boundaries on different levels" (Revers 2014: 821).

Rethinking Journalistic Ideals

At least implicitly, the social media guidelines or rules implemented in different newsrooms and news organisations may therefore also represent an attempt to (re)define what it means to be a journalist and to do journalism in the present, highly digitised media environment. We have already seen in the previous chapter that the growing adoption of social media for content sourcing, news dissemination, and audience engagement, and especially also for associated personal branding activities, appears to encourage a further personalisation of journalism around charismatic individuals; inherently associated with this is also a continuation of longer-term trends away from conventional journalistic ideals of objectivity and towards the greater incorporation of interpretation and opinion. Beyond individual practice, this raises important questions at the level of news organisations, and even at the level of the overall profession of journalism.

Such questions predate the emergence of contemporary social media platforms themselves; as Deuze has pointed out, "multimedia's careful embrace of interactivity as well as a merging of different cultures (print, broadcast, online; 'hard' and 'soft' news; marketing and editorial) within the news organization … confronts the individual professional with multiple interpretations of objectivity" (2005: 456). The increasing importance of social media as tertiary spaces where professional practice is conducted further intensifies this confrontation, however—and the social media guidelines we have discussed at the start of this chapter aim at least in part to spell out what specific news organisations see as an appropriate balance between professional objectivity and personal opinion. Here, it is notable that the very status of the news organisation within the overall continuum of journalistic institutions appears to play an important role in determining the extent to which opinionated uses of social media are seen as permissible: Lasorsa *et al.* find that compared to the industry leaders, "less 'elite' journalists were more willing to deviate from traditional norms and practices—and act more like other non-journalist Twitter users—by posting their opinions on Twitter" (2012: 29).

Additionally, journalists also seem to regard professional objectivity increasingly as a relative rather than absolute commandment, and treat it as situationally dependent; for instance, some of Parmelee's informants "said that the objectivity standard that applies when tweeting about their political beat does not always hold true when their tweets are not about politics" (2013: 302), distinguishing their objective professional stance on their core areas of reporting from their opinionated personal stance on other topics even though both are likely to be expressed through the same personal social media account and contribute to the same personal brand. Conversely, one of Revers's interviewees makes a distinction instead between the more opinionated voice they adopt on social media and the more subdued tone used in their mainstream news reporting: "it's a little snarkier on Twitter" (2014: 820). This shows that such journalists adjust their approaches based on whether they operate within the primary spaces provided by their own news imprints, or the tertiary spaces of social media.

For news organisations, such differentiated and diverging approaches to objectivity are likely to be concerning: they mean that the unified, reliably objective journalistic stance previously sold to news audiences as part of the news product is now giving way to a more variable and possibly inconsistent collection of more or less objective or opinionated styles of news reporting embraced by different journalistic staff and across the various platforms serviced by the news organisation and by individual staff accounts. This could significantly undermine the audience's trust in the organisation's news product—and arguably this loss of trust has already occurred in recent years, as the shift of more and more of the news process from backstage to frontstage has revealed the news as a socially constructed narrative rather than an objective truth.

In response to the decline in the belief—amongst journalists as well as audiences—in journalistic objectivity as an attainable absolute good, a gradual redefinition of the concept of objectivity has occurred, therefore. More recently,

> in a more practical understanding of the concept, objectivity has been understood in the sense that journalism should be balanced and neutral, and a considerable amount of literature has argued that objectivity in this sense (often referred to by synonyms like impartiality, detachment, or nonpartisanship) remains a cornerstone and an ideal to strive for in journalism. (Rogstad 2014: 690)

Another useful synonym for such practical objectivity in our present context may be neutrality; as one of Revers's informants puts it,

> good journalism … is neutral about its consequences or whom it helps, whom it favors. But it's not objective because if I was not bringing with me the cumulative value of my experience …, I would not be doing my job. We're making judgments every day about what is important and what isn't. (qtd. in Revers 2014: 820)

This highlights the fact that journalistic gatekeeping has never simply been objective, but that it has always also been informed by long-established news values that determine the perceived newsworthiness of specific events and issues.

In other words, again, it is now well accepted that the news is and has always been socially constructed—in the first place by editors and journalists in the primary spaces of the mainstream news media, or (pursuing different news agendas) by the small community of citizen journalists and news bloggers of the first wave of citizen media in their secondary, second-tier spaces of self-publication, but now also increasingly by ordinary citizens acting (alongside these other groups) as gatewatchers, newssharers, and news curators in the tertiary spaces of social media. The promise that mainstream news media can still make, now that the processes of this social construction of the news are plainly obvious on the frontstages provided by platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, is that its journalists—wherever they operate—will seek to serve as neutral but not necessarily entirely objective guides through the voluminous flow of information that now circulates through a variety of channels—and where they fulfil that promise, they can also continue to rise to prominence as important curators of social media streams.

In this context, the other core journalistic ideal that is challenged by the news industry's gradual adoption of social media is accuracy, together with the associated professional practice of verification. "Through the discipline of verification, journalists determine the truth, accuracy, or validity of news events, establishing jurisdiction over the ability to objectively parse reality to claim a special kind of authority and status" (Hermida 2012: 659); however, in a complex, real-time, and rapidly evolving social media environment it is becoming increasingly difficult to accurately verify the facts of a matter, especially of course in the context of acute, breaking news events. Even in day-to-day practice outside of such periods of particularly heightened reporting activity, however, the ready availability of social media as a source of information is causing concerns for news organisations: for instance, the "[London] *Times*' Deputy Foreign Editor, Suzy Jagger, [is] worried about younger journalists thinking [that] 'Twitter is … a replacement for actually going out and meeting people'" (qtd. in Thurman and Schapals 2016: 289).

Both in acute and day-to-day contexts, journalists active on social media are likely to feel implicit pressure from their social media audiences as well as their news organisations to be the first to flag and cover emerging news stories; they must balance this call for speediness with their obligations to accuracy. These challenges are especially heightened when the stories in question are emerging, as rumours, from social media platforms themselves; in such cases (which are increasingly common, given the growing role of social media as a backbone for communication across all areas of society), journalists are torn between amplifying the visibility of these rumours by engaging with them, and waiting until independent information that supports or contradicts them has reached the news outlet through more conventional channels. Journalists' and their news organisations' responses to these competing pressures have been found to differ across different outlets; in particular, it appears that born-digital outlets are somewhat more open to embracing speed at the expense of accuracy (and to apologise for any errors that arise from this at a later stage). Such errors can turn out to be costly, however; "there have been a number of well-documented cases where misleading pictures and stories in social media have been given the 'oxygen of publicity' by news companies desperate to get one step ahead on a major news story" (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 407), and this might seriously undermine the reputation both of individual journalists and of their news imprints.

Therefore, a range of increasingly sophisticated verification approaches have gradually been implemented into journalistic processes that engage with social media; for content originating from social media, "the biggest news organisations continue to try to verify every picture or video they plan to use by contacting the owner directly. They do this to protect their editorial integrity but also because rights and payment for newsworthy footage are increasingly factors" (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 409). In major news organisations this is now sometimes the task of dedicated social media content identification and verification teams such as the BBC's UGC Hub; smaller news outlets that value accuracy over speed may instead wait until the user-generated material circulating via social media has been verified and republished by the major outlets before they use it themselves.

Although, as Schifferes *et al.* report, "many senior editors have suggested that social networks themselves need to change the way they are organised in order to work more effectively with news organisations" (2014: 410)—including the implementation of better content verification mechanisms that are operated by the platforms themselves—, such developments appear highly

unlikely. As their reluctant responses even to more obviously problematic practices such as impersonation, trolling, and hate speech demonstrate, social media operators have very little incentive to proactively curb their users' ability to participate on these platforms as they wish; their fundamental interest is always in more, not less user activity. It does not seem realistic that *Twitter* or *Facebook* would implement any frameworks designed to reduce the circulation of rumours through their platforms, therefore, especially when in many cases it would be very difficult and labour-intensive to accurately verify or debunk such rumours. Notably, the only major social media platform which has begun to police the circulation of rumours by its users is the Chinese *Weibo*, which "has implemented punishments for people who are found to put out unreliable information, such as banning them from posting" (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 410)—but such initiatives are clearly a result of the unique context of Chinese Internet governance, and western social media platforms are unlikely to emulate this example. If "smaller news organisations simply do not have the manpower [*sic*] to carry out these checks" themselves (Schifferes *et al.* 2014: 410), then, the more sensible solution is perhaps to engage ordinary social media users as collaborators in the verification process; as we have already seen in Chapters 3 and 4, the collective evaluation and verification—and thus, the social curation—of available information constitutes a crucial user practice both during breaking news events and in day-to-day newssharing.

Such a collaborative approach also means an acceptance that journalists are no longer fully in control of news verification, however. As Karlsson points out, "this has consequences for journalistic norms and the authority associated with the role of journalism. Thus, it is difficult for journalists to refer to a 'we get it right' norm when the 'we' part is potentially compromised by users, and the 'get it right' part is compromised by fast inadequate news and a plethora of different voices" (2011: 280). But this challenge to established norms is not entirely unprecedented (Hermida 2012: 663): similar pressures have arisen ever since the arrival of live, 24-hour broadcast news channels, which have often had to make difficult choices between speed and accuracy and have not always managed to 'get it right' either. However, as Hermida notes, "the choice between being fast and being right … has acquired greater import at a time when the audience can itself disseminate the news as readily as journalists" (2013: 303).

Servaes links these questions to broader issues of information overload that are felt across society:

> those working for mainstream media seem to have an especially hard time adjusting to the new reality of information overload and continuing inequality. How to deal with a permanent overload of information will be the key challenge for journalists and citizens alike, and how to regulate this in a democratic way will be the challenge for public authorities. (Servaes 2009: 372)

One negative consequence from such information overload that is often highlighted is the possibility that the constant, voluminous stream of information experienced by journalists and ordinary citizens alike will leave them little time to process and evaluate the information they encounter; for journalists, this may then lead to a shallower form of reporting (which we have already seen described as 'stenographic' in the previous chapter) that presents informational factoids without offering a comprehensive picture that involves meaningful evaluation (Parmelee 2013: 300). At the same time, this view appears difficult to reconcile with the tendencies towards a greater prevalence of opinion and commentary in journalistic content; it appears that journalists are now both engaging in more reporting of the processual minutiae of political and other developments, *and* offering a greater amount of often opinionated evaluation of what these minutiae might mean. In this context it is therefore hardly surprising that one of the key concerns that arises for journalists and their news organisations from the adoption of social media is also the increased workload that this generates: "it does add an extra layer … , especially if you have a high-profile story where people are expecting [Twitter] updates throughout the day" (informant qtd. in Parmelee 2013: 301).

Networking the Spaces for Journalism

"Journalistic outlets, then, might have to adapt to the rules of collaboration. And this includes a self-image of being just *one* node among many others" (Heinrich 2012: 65). This would constitute a final, definitive break with their traditional self-perception, which held that all the news that was deemed to be of importance to audiences passed through the news organisation as a single gatekeeper. This loss of one of the fundamental nostrums of professional journalism may be confronting, but could also be seen as potentially liberating for news organisations and professional journalists: "however challenging these developments may seem, they might add some invaluable contributions to the way journalism can be practised today—provided one understands these

interactive paths, acknowledges their power and starts seeking ways to embed them in everyday work practices" (Heinrich 2012: 62).

Some such understandings are now beginning to develop, and are set to have a major impact on how news is produced and positioned by mainstream outlets. In a major report on the *Future of News*, for instance, the BBC spells out that "engaging our viewers, listeners and users so that we have a genuinely activated audience means turning large parts of the news into something you do, rather than just something you get" (BBC 2015: 45); this foreshadows a greater partnership with news users in sourcing information, disseminating the news through a broader range of networks, and collaborating on the social curation of news and related information.

This may then also reposition the role of the individual journalist. As Hallin pointed out in 1992, "journalists used to speak sometimes in the first person—listen to Edward R. Murrow or Bill Shirer. Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad thing if that practice came back" (Hallin 1992: 21); in the tertiary spaces of social media, where journalists are increasingly engaging with news users as themselves rather than simply as representatives of a news organisation, this re-personalisation of journalism is almost inevitable, and has already begun. As a result, "what appears to happen is not so much subversion but expansion of professional boundaries … which accommodate diverse forms of journalism" (Revers 2014: 821), and this contributes to a greater transparency in all aspects of the news process. As Molyneux puts it, "social media … take down the curtain by allowing both sources and readers to interact with the journalist. This is part of a larger, digital-age trend" (Molyneux 2015: 922).

Part of this is again also driven by the realities of a post-gatekeeping information environment. If raw news and information is already in circulation within social media spaces, what is the value of conventional journalistic products? To make a meaningful contribution when the bare facts of any matter are already on the public record, "there must be a willingness to shift mentalities, to adapt the traditional values and practices of journalism so that they match the best part of the wider contemporary news culture" (Russell 2009: 366); this may require the journalist to become a guide through the available collection of information, analysing and interpreting the available record—and constructively discussing those analyses and interpretations with other interested social media actors along the way. As Paterson reports, Kenyan newspaper journalist Irene Awino has described this as a move towards 'day-two journalism': in an informational environment "where it is rare for newspapers to break stories given the increasingly rapid dissemination of, and

discussion about, political news on social media … the focus has to be on providing alternative angles and in-depth analysis the next day" (Paterson 2013: 3).

This certainly does constitute a considerable change of mindset for journalists socialised into the traditional ideals of detachment and objectivity, but also provides a substantial opportunity for enterprising journalists and news outlets to make a name for themselves. For instance, Newman recounts how BBC reporter Laura Kuenssberg live-tweeted the U.K. party conference season in 2009, as an experiment with using the then still emerging *Twitter* in journalistic practice. "By the time she left the BBC to take up a new business correspondent role with rival broadcaster ITV News, she had amassed over 60,000 followers, 'not far off a small circulation newspaper and far more than we had ever expected'", in Kuenssberg's own view (Newman 2011: 40). Such early adopters, and the many other journalists who have followed their lead in more recent years, now constitute what Russell describes as "a well-branded leaner class of what we might call traditional journalists. The members of that new leaner class, in turn, will adjust to becoming merely one set of contributors to the collection of news material aggregated by users and filtering software to make a new kind of 'paper of record'" (2009: 365–66).

In coming to terms with that adjustment to a lesser level of influence over the coverage and interpretation of the news, it is also important for journalists and their news organisations to acknowledge that some of the profession's traditional claims of supreme authority are directly responsible for the critical stance many news users now take towards it. The BBC has put this realisation most succinctly in its *Future of News* report: "the voice of God is no good to people who are not believers in the news" (BBC 2015: 44). The greater humility and acknowledgment of professional journalism's own shortcomings that is expressed in such sentiments may go some way to repairing the fraught relationship between news outlets and the general public; the more personable and constructive engagement between journalists and news users that is possible within social media environments will further help to reposition journalism as a partner in the social curation of the news that is becoming a more and more central component of news dissemination and engagement processes.

Ultimately, as we have noted above, this reverses the direction of the normalisation processes that we have observed in previous instances. Traditionally, the "journalistic adoption of user-driven new media is not so much 'innovation' as it is 'incorporation' into existing journalistic practices" (Volk-

mer and Firdaus 2013: 106); palatable aspects of first- and second-wave citizen media practices were normalised to a point where they no longer constituted a significant threat to the journalistic status quo. In the present context, however, it is the practices of journalism that are normalised into social media, much as journalists themselves are gradually socialised into becoming constructive contributors to *Twitter* and *Facebook*. For instance, "creating a personal identity … is not something most journalists have practiced. Yet, it is so much the structural norm of social media that journalists using services like Facebook and Twitter almost naturally begin creating a public-facing identity" (Molyneux and Holton 2015: 229).

Because platforms such as these are now—in terms of both audience size and corporate power—major global media leaders in their own right, they have become too large for journalism to normalise and thus neutralise; as a result, "journalists are being pulled into the modes and logics of other actors with whom they are competing for attention" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 39). However, this process of the normalisation of journalism into social media is far from complete—as we have seen through a number of examples, significant debates continue to rage between traditionalists and enthusiasts amongst journalists and editors. As Revers puts it, "currently, a consensus does not seem to exist in journalism. What usually happens in institutional transformation is that change agents challenge the established logic in moments of crisis and propose alternative visions" (Revers 2014: 822).

But in spite of this as yet incomplete transition in attitudes within the industry itself, news audiences (or more appropriately, news *users*) online are already voting with their feet, affording the leading platforms of social media an ever more crucial role as spaces for the news. As a result of these shifts, *Twitter* now serves as "a newsroom … that is open, distributed, and collective, in contrast to traditional models of the newsrooms as enclosed, concentrated, and exclusive spaces" (Hermida 2014: 366), while in Bell's view *Facebook* has become "the world's front page" (Bell 2015: 89). This also imbues these platforms with considerable power both as emerging players in the news industry itself, and as platforms for public discussion and debate—a form of power that Castells describes as "network-making power" (2011: 781), since the technosocial infrastructure provided by these platforms now serves crucially to connect news outlets with their sources and audiences.

This role is expressed by *Facebook*'s Randi Zuckerberg in her observation that "I see more and more media companies understanding the importance of allowing people to consume content anywhere they want to consume it on

the web, not just at the media company's website" (qtd. in O'Connor 2009: n.p.)—social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* provide that crucial connection. But such influence also has repercussions for the platforms themselves, which must now increasingly be understood as media publishers rather than as mere communications services: "Facebook does not see itself as a publisher, it only sees itself as a platform. But once Facebook is the world's front page, publishing responsibilities begin to attach themselves to the company" (Bell 2015: 89). Their active interventions in what information can be shared and what ideas can be expressed within the spaces they provide now critically affect the flows of information across society, and around the globe, and any deliberate or accidental biases built into these platforms can come to have significant effects.

This raises important questions about the ownership of these emerging news processes. As Hermida puts it,

> journalism, which was once difficult and expensive to produce, today surrounds us like the air we breathe. Much of it is, literally, ambient, and being produced by professionals and citizens. The challenge going forward is helping the public negotiate and regulate this flow of awareness information, facilitating the collection, transmission and understanding of news. (Hermida 2010: n.p.)

Journalists and their news organisations, the platform providers and their algorithms, citizens and their governments all have an important role to play in this contest of commercial and societal interests; conversely, the role of journalists as gatekeepers is progressively less crucial: "where the significance of journalistic gatekeeping to a person's information experience could once be assumed, … the degree to which a particular person's experiences are shaped by what we would call journalistic curation" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 36) is now becoming a matter to be revisited from new perspectives, as this book has done. The flow of news and information continues to be curated—but by a broader and more diverse constellation of curators than ever before.

Platform Power

Whichever of these actors are currently in the ascendancy, all of them rely crucially on the connective infrastructure provided by the leading social media platforms in order to undertake their curation activities. This has led to the development of a somewhat symbiotic but ultimately unequal relationship

between the news curators and the platform providers—a relationship from which the providers now tend to benefit especially strongly, as Ahmad points out: "for all its usefulness as an innovative marketing and research tool for journalists, journalists themselves are a pretty useful source of marketing for Twitter. They appear to promote it at every opportunity, sometimes at the expense of their own work's quality" (2010: 154).

It is the free promotion which *Facebook* and especially *Twitter* have received from journalistic reporting about their crucial role in covering breaking news stories; as backchannels for discussing live news telecasts and other broadcast media content (Harrington *et al.* 2013); and for engaging directly with journalists and other newsmakers, that has attracted millions of new users to these platforms. The journalism industry has freely posted its news content to these platforms, in the hope that this will not merely inform the users gathered here but also result in a volume of monetisable click-throughs to its own Websites that is sufficient to sustain professional journalistic operations; however, if such social media strategies "simply end up transforming newspaper websites into appendages of Americanized corporate information capitalism … the question of survival will become something of a moot point (the issue will become 'survival in what form, and to what ends?')" (Ahmad 2010: 154).

The relationship between mainstream industrial journalism and the leading social media providers is a fraught mixture of cooperation and competition, therefore. On the one hand, journalism increasingly relies on social media to source information, disseminate content, and connect with a growing portion of its audiences; on the other, news organisations and social media platforms also compete with each other for user attention and advertising revenues. As the Pew Research Center reports, for instance,

> total digital ad spending grew … in 2015 to about [US]$60 billion … . But journalism organizations have not been the primary beneficiaries. … Even more of the digital ad revenue pie—65%—is swallowed up by just five tech companies. None of these are journalism organizations, though several—including Facebook, Google, Yahoo and Twitter—integrate news into their offerings. (2016: 6)

There are many reasons other than following the news that attract users to social media platforms, of course, but news has been an important driver. News organisations have helped to make social media platforms such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* attractive destinations for their users, but they have not themselves necessarily benefitted substantially from doing so; operating in a tertiary space

that they do not control, they remain subject to the whims of the operators of those spaces. As the BBC points out in its assessment of this new environment, "there are huge risks. What if Facebook decided to launch a news division and didn't want a given provider on its platform, for example" (BBC 2015: 39)? Similar but somewhat less dramatic problems could also result from a change in the way that such platforms display and highlight the news updates posted by various news organisations, of course: as Newman *et al.* point out, for instance, news publishers are "delighted at the amount of new traffic but also concerned about over-reliance on Facebook and in particular about its algorithms, which are changing all the time and over which they have no control" (2015: 77).

Such concerns have already turned out to be justified. The 2016 *Digital News Report* notes that "news has become a more important part of the Facebook mix over the last year. Algorithms have prioritised breaking news, news-related videos, live streams, and other visual content, while publishers have been stepping up their efforts to publish native formats" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 9); further change is inevitable as *Facebook* steps up its efforts to combat 'fake news', however it may come to define that term (Zuckerberg 2016). This changeable environment privileges those news outlets that have been able to adjust their social media content publishing and promotion strategies to the evolving priorities that have become evident on the platform, and undermines the efforts of those that have pursued other approaches.

Facebook's introduction of its Instant Articles framework has been especially controversial in this context. Launched in early 2015, with Instant Articles *Facebook* "would publish whole articles or videos instead of just publishing links to them. The rationale for the development was that links to external sites slowed down the way news reached readers" (Bell 2015: 90), because they still required users to click on those links to navigate to an external site, but more importantly Instant Articles also retains users (and thus, an audience for advertising) on the platform itself instead of losing them to the Websites of news outlets. Bell describes this as a "trade-off between control of your own journalism, versus reaching large audiences", and suggests that this choice "is inevitable for both national and international media" (90); she notes with some surprise that even "news organisations like the *New York Times* signed up to a greater loss of control by being one of the first organisations to participate in the test" (Bell 2015: 90), and points out that "the idea that an organisation so apparently dedicated to the control of its own brand would take this route is a signal of how much changed behaviours in news

audiences [are] forcing even the most resolute organisations to make compromises" (90).

Such native, in-platform news publishing frameworks may provide additional revenue to news organisations even when users choose no longer to click through to their own sites, but in doing so also deliver more of the fate of professional journalism into the hands of the social media providers: "with more and more users engaging with news on Facebook, the platform … will undoubtedly gain leverage towards the newspapers they host" (Larsson and Ihlebæk 2016: 11). An alternative approach would be for these news outlets to develop their own in-platform article display frameworks, but because of the additional development overheads that this would create, this course of action is unlikely to be a feasible option for any but the most prominent, best-resourced global news brands; as Nielsen puts it, "what works for Amazon may not work as well for the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*" (2016: 114). Notably, however, major brands such as *The Guardian* have explored this option in the past (Weinberger 2015: n.p.), with mixed results.

In the view of some commentators, then, "Facebook and Twitter stand accused of living parasitically off the quality content produced by mainstream media and reaping the commercial benefit" (Mare 2013: 87–88). From this perspective, there is the distinct prospect—or threat—of a creeping takeover of the news industry by the leading social media platform providers; this has progressed from a competition for audiences and advertising revenue to a direct intrusion into editorial decision-making processes:

> first tech companies created new pathways for distribution, in the form of search engines and email. The next industry overlap involved the financial model, with the creation of ad networks and app stores, followed by developments that impact audience engagement (Instant Articles, Apple News and Google's AMP). Now, the recent accusations regarding Facebook editors' possible involvement in "trending topics" selections have [shone] a spotlight on technology companies' integral role in the editorial process. (Pew Research Center 2016: 7)

None of this would be problematic if there was still a viable prospect of a sustainable news industry that did not incorporate distribution of and engagement with the news via social media as a major component of user practices. Today, however, as we have seen throughout this book social media have come to play an ever-increasing role as important pathways to the news; what emerges here is a news "ecosystem where Facebook, Google, Apple, and Amazon control the advertising and technological environment" (Newman *et al.*

2016: 32), and where news organisations are no longer in control of their own destinies.

Although centrally addressing the role of search engines rather than social media as pathways to the news, this has been demonstrated especially prominently in recent battles over *Google News* as an aggregator of news headlines. As the 2015 *Digital News Report* outlines,

> German publishers have been at the heart of European demands that Google start paying for content. But when a new law led to news snippets being left out of search results, news publishers were forced to request readmission, after traffic from Google and Google News fell by 40% and 80%. (Newman *et al.* 2015: 26)

This situation could easily be translated to social media. If a news outlet were successful in preventing links to its news from being shared through *Twitter* and *Facebook*, the end would not be an increase in direct visits to the outlet's Website, but rather a further, significant decline, due to the substantially reduced visibility of the outlet's content in the leading social media spaces where users may serendipitously discover its latest articles.

Ultimately, then, mainstream news outlets are forced to come to terms with the growing dominance of the tertiary spaces of social media, and of the companies that operate them. As Bell puts it,

> the free press is now controlled by companies whose primary interests are not necessarily rooted in strengthening public discourse and democracy. On the one hand, journalists can reach far greater audiences immediately than was the case in the past. On the other hand, journalists and publishers have very little control now over how information reaches the world and there is limited transparency. (Bell 2015: 89)

At the same time, this also sets up new challenges for the social media companies themselves. As Hermida reports, "at a major online news conference in September 2012, Twitter CEO Dick Costolo was asked cheekily, 'so, how does it feel to be the voice of the press in the 21st century?'" (Hermida 2013: 306). Though tongue-in-cheek, that question has a harder edge, as being classified as a news outlet would make *Twitter* subject to a different and more complex set of rules and regulations than apply to it if it remains merely a communications carriage service. For this reason, representatives of *Twitter* and *Facebook* have consistently downplayed their roles as news publishers and disseminators: in 2016, for instance, one of *Facebook*'s vice-presidents stated explicitly that "we are definitely not a media company, but we do recognise that we play an important role and that means we have responsibilities … to be thoughtful

about how we … help people find the content that is going to be most relevant and interesting to them" (qtd. in Battersby 2016: n.p.). Whether these platforms are going to be able to maintain the argument that they are not news organisations in their own right, however, remains to be seen.

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· 7 ·

HYBRID NEWS COVERAGE

Liveblogs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liveblogs as a Hybrid Format

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From Social News Curation to Curated Social Media Content

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liveblogs and Their Audiences

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Between Mainstream and Social Media

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liveblogs as Public Journalism?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Liveblogs and Beyond

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Situating Liveblogs in the News Ecology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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NEW(S) PUBLICS IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Our discussion over the past chapters has documented that the second wave of citizen media has turned newssharing and news engagement via social media into a habitual practice for ordinary users, and has led to the establishment of a social media-supported ambient news network that enables serendipitous news discovery and transitions to focussed social news curation especially when acute breaking news events occur, or within dedicated longer-term networks of topic-focussed social news curators (cf. Lehmann *et al.* 2013: 864). We have also seen how individual journalists and their established and emerging news outlets have begun to respond to this changed environment, both by participating directly in the tertiary spaces of social media platforms and by introducing the liveblog as a particularly important new hybrid format that builds on social and alternative media content and practices but re-embeds them into the branded spaces of conventional news Websites. All of this has shown that the contemporary media ecology now supports an interplay between primary conventional news spaces, secondary alternative news and factual content spaces, and tertiary social media spaces serving as the intermediary channels that connect them; further, each of these spaces is itself subdivided into various sites, platforms, and channels, each with their own specific and idiosyncratic content formats, user populations, engagement

practices, and technological affordances. Given this complex, multi-layered, and highly dynamic environment, then, the question that we must address in the present chapter is whether and how such structures still enable the societal public debates that are widely regarded as a crucial prerequisite for functional democratic processes—and in particular, what role social media play in this context.

Unfortunately, discussions about the potential and actual role of social media in public debate are often foreshortened to a mere contest between utopian and dystopian perspectives: social (and more broadly, online) media are either glorified by their boosters as the solution to all the present problems that plague public debate, or condemned by their detractors as a chief source of those problems in the first place. But it is important to avoid such over-simplifications, even if current political contexts appear bleak: I write this in the year in which Britain voted to choose a path of slow self-destruction by exiting the European Union, and in which the United States elected Donald Trump on an explicitly neo-fascist platform, with social media platforms serving as instant scapegoats to explain the rise of the irrational and self-defeating voter behaviours that have become evident in these and other instances. The real picture is likely to be considerably more complex, however: neither are social media causing the fragmentation of societies into 'red states' and 'blue states', into 'remainers' and 'leavers', and nor are they a panacea that will fix the severe problems caused by the decline of the conventional news media as leading spaces for mainstream public debate.

Indeed, past years have revealed a number of contradictory tendencies in relation to the news. In most developed nations, the brands and imprints of the conventional news industry have declined considerably across most available metrics: their audience figures are shrinking, sometimes at alarming rates, as more news users turn to online and social media channels as their key (and sometimes primary) sources of news; for the most part, as we have seen, this is not simply a straight transition from offline to online formats within the same brand (e.g. from the BBC's television news programmes to *BBC News Online*), but instead also a transition from comparatively routine, loyal readership and viewership towards a more serendipitous discovery of atomised news content, driven not least by word-of-mouth shares and recommendations in social media spaces. "Social recommendation is intensifying the trend towards the unbundling of editorial products" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 822), so that "the platform itself on which the news is disseminated is becoming irrelevant to a certain degree" (Heinrich 2008: 13).

As a result, for many conventional news outlets subscription and advertising revenues have also declined precipitously, leading to cuts in staffing and reductions in quality and in turn affecting audience satisfaction with and trust in the news published by such outlets—which, in a vicious cycle, drives a further move of users away from these struggling outlets. At the same time, not least through newssharing in social media, audiences have never consumed a greater volume of news reports. Especially in language communities such as English or Spanish that span a very substantial number of countries, the ready availability of national and international news content online has further fuelled competitive pressures between these outlets; regional U.S. newspaper sites now compete with global U.K. brands such as *BBC News* or *The Guardian*, for instance.

It is therefore now difficult for conventional, mainstream media to still claim that they fulfil a role as providing a society-wide space for public debate within a unified national (or even international) public sphere. Rather, as Dahlgren puts it, the "impressive communicative heterogeneity" that the Internet has facilitated can also be seen to have resulted in considerable "fragmentation, with public spheres veering toward disparate islands of political communication". At worst, he suggests, this could lead to the disintegration not only of 'the' public sphere, but even of society as such: "cyber ghettos threaten to undercut a shared public culture and the integrative societal function of the public sphere, and they may well even help foster intolerance where such communities have little contact with—or understanding of—one another" (Dahlgren 2005: 152).

The central concern here is that different communities, drawing on a tightly circumscribed set of sympathetic media sources, may develop their own 'groupthink' and establish clearly defined in-group identities, and look with disdain and animosity towards any other groups that do not share their ideals. Thus, as Friedman warned in 2002, in spite of the high hopes for the Internet as a tool for connection and networking, the "integration" of geographically dispersed individuals into such communities, "at this stage, is producing more anger than anything else" (2002: n.p.). Our discussion of news engagement patterns during the first wave of citizen media supports this perspective at least to some extent: the insular blogs and citizen journalism sites that dominated the alternative, second-tier news media landscape at the time served as rallying grounds for specific communities that were often defined by shared interests and worldviews, and in turn argued with their opponents in the mainstream media and in other alternative media sites in comment

threads and by publishing tit-for-tat blog posts; as Dahlgren has pointed out, such "online discussions do not always follow the high ideals set for deliberative democracy. Speech is not always so rational, tolerance toward those who hold opposing views is at times wanting, and the forms of interaction are not always so civil" (Dahlgren 2005: 156).

In line with this dystopian perspective, Keane has suggested that "although they typically have a networked, interconnected character, contemporary public spheres have a fractured quality which is not being overcome by some broader trend toward an integrated public sphere" (Keane 1995: 8). However, note that he writes this in 1995, and that Dahlgren's similarly pessimistic perspective was stated in 2005: that is, before the widespread popular adoption of social media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. More recent developments, some of which we have charted in this book, offer reasons to come to a somewhat more balanced assessment. Yes, in the current media ecology the news is atomised and covered by a range of outlets with differing levels of reliability:

> social awareness streams unbundle a news story into its individual components. News is omnipresent in the form of unstructured data, coming in fragments of raw, unprocessed journalism from both professionals and the public. Contradictory reports, rumors, speculation, confirmation and verification circulate via social interaction in a compressed news cycle on Twitter. [However,] news and information is published, disseminated, confirmed or refuted in public through a process facilitated by social media. (Hermida 2012: 665)

and—through collective social news curation and/or with the help of social media curators in liveblogs and elsewhere—this process can be remarkably effective at debunking rumour, uncovering facts, amplifying important stories, and highlighting key eyewitnesses and other informative sources to be followed. "If this is true, rather than polarising the public sphere, [such] spaces may actually facilitate a broader range of information sharing and debate" (Wright 2012: 13).

Conventional news outlets still play an important role in this environment, and in particular the leading, most trusted news brands may not only do well here, but even attract new audiences. Focussing on the United Kingdom, for instance, Newman *et al.* report that

> although newspaper circulation has fallen consistently and profit margins have plummeted, it is the websites of traditional print publishers and broadcasters that continue to dominate news online .... In fact, the strength of the national newspaper and

> broadcaster brands in the UK, the competitiveness of the market, and the way they have embraced new media techniques like blogging has made it difficult for new players to emerge and capture a significant audience. (Newman *et al.* 2012: 10)

This is because the adoption of social media as a source of news by a growing number of users is not necessarily a zero-sum game (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 820): *Twitter* and *Facebook* may also point users in growing numbers towards the conventional news brands whose articles, however atomised and removed from their original contexts of publication, now circulate through social media channels. In this way, "social recommendation can benefit news organizations in extending their reach", even if it also "further undermines established business models based on delivering large, aggregate audiences to advertisers" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 821).

Yet it is also obvious that conventional, established news brands are facing increasing competition from new, born-digital outlets that range from major news operations to small citizen journalism outfits. "Citizen journalism is now an essential part of news gathering and delivery around the world. Indeed, we would be missing events both global and local without access to citizens willing to produce this content" (Wall 2015: 797), as we have seen throughout this book—but while this is a problem for the conventional news industry, in our present context it points simply to the fact that although traditional business models for producing news content may be in trouble, the news as such is not. As Revers puts it, "as means to publish thrive and public communication becomes participatory, news proliferates while professional journalists' share of it dwindles" (Revers 2014: 809). We must not conflate the commercial difficulties facing the mainstream news industry with an inherent crisis of news and journalism as such, therefore.

But is such news from a much broader and more diverse range of sources—found through gatewatching, disseminated through newssharing, and organised through social news curation—a sufficient equivalent to the gatekept, edited, and published news of the mass media age? "Social sharing means that users bypass professional editors and instead receive news based on the recommendations of people they trust. However, there are unanswered questions as to whether networked audiences are exposed to news that is popular rather than important, and how far social recommendation limits exposure to a variety of news sources" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 822). We can now state with some certainty that in aggregate, the news as circulated on social media is certainly more diverse and multiperspectival; it constitutes "an expansion in terms of

available communicative spaces for politics, as well as ideological breadth, compared to the mass media. Structurally, this pluralization not only extends but also disperses the relatively clustered public sphere of the mass media" (Dahlgren 2005: 152). Even the professional journalists interviewed by Parmelee accept this, with one of them stating that she sometimes sees "an angle or a viewpoint that you may not have thought about when you were reporting it. … It's that alternative view that I always like to include in as many stories as I can" (anonymous informant qtd. in Parmelee 2014: 443).

Social Media and Everyday Public Debate

The more important question, however, is whether individual social media users are also exposed to such overall source diversity—or whether their specific selections from the wide range of possible sources available to them in social media spaces continue to privilege only a handful of highly similar perspectives. This is a particularly heated debate at present, and we will return to it in more detail later in this chapter; for now, however, we might take some heart from observations that focus especially on indirect and involuntary exposure to news content through the newssharing activities of others in an individual social media user's network. An *et al.* suggest that "there is a non-negligible amount of indirect media exposure, either through friends who follow particular media sources, or via retweeted messages. … Indirect media exposure expands the political diversity of news to which users are exposed to a surprising extent, increasing the range by between 60 [and] 98%" (2011: 18); this means that "users receive information from six to ten times more media sources than from direct exposure alone" (19).

Even concerns about the emotional and sometimes angry nature of discussions and debates about news and politics in social media and related spaces should be relativised as we adopt this more balanced perspective. Any form of offensive, abusive, and threatening behaviour must be condemned here, of course—this is never justified, least of all when it is motivated by personal prejudices based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or class. Merely emotional (yet non-offensive) forms of engagement with the news should not be similarly dismissed, however, even if in the "contemporary democratic theory of political participation, there is often a strong emphasis on rational deliberation as a normative ideal of how it should proceed". As Dahlgren points out, an insistence on rationality "as the overall model of participatory

practices can become constrictive of expression and even excluding in terms of participation" (Dahlgren 2014: 193).

This is especially important because social media in their dual role as both personal and public means of communication and expression lend themselves particularly well to a more affective engagement with the news, producing what Papacharissi has termed "soft structures of feeling" (Papacharissi 2014: 116) that are nonetheless powerful facilitators of public debate and deliberation. The uses of social media for a wide range of idiosyncratic purposes, some of which may seem altogether unintelligible or at best banal to an inexperienced outside observer, should not fool us into thinking that such practices cannot also have an everyday political dimension: rather, "participation in broader social and cultural activities … can always take a turn towards the political. What becomes decisive is not the particular terrain as such, but the character of the engagement: it always has to do in some way, however remote (or mediated), with power relations" (Dahlgren 2014: 193).

In such everyday engagement with the news, then, affect can be a force for good, leading us to participate more fully in the discussion and evaluation of the news, and thus in public debate and deliberation:

> we respond affectively, we invest our emotion [in] these stories, and we contribute to developing narratives that emerge through our own affectively charged and digitally expressed endorsement, rejection, or views. Technologies network us but it is narratives that connect us to each other, making us feel close to some and distancing us from others. (Papacharissi 2014: 5)

Within social media, these narratives may be expressed, perpetuated, and critiqued using a repertoire of formats, styles, and registers of content and communication that departs markedly from the standardised and routinised templates used in conventional news coverage, but that is no less effective at telling the news story. The forms of expression included in this repertoire had been largely expunged from journalistic coverage by its (over)emphasis on rational debate; social media's return to more affective modes, by contrast, "implies a shift in emphasis away from the rational and an acceptance (and valuing!) of broader forms of communication including emotions, humour, rhetoric and private (not just public) issues" (Wright 2012: 16).

This acceptance of the affective as part of news and political discussion does not suggest that all expressions of affect are to be unquestioningly welcomed. Papacharissi points out that the rationalist perspective "assumes that democracies are rationally based when, in fact, they are messy affairs that are

driven by aspirations of rationality, caught up in the daily mise-en-scène of ethos, pathos, and logos" (Papacharissi 2014: 26); this implies that it is this messy but healthy mixture of rationality and affect—neither coldly calculating nor heatedly emotional—that characterises constructive public deliberation. Even when we disagree with an opponent's argument based on rational logic, the commitment to work towards a mutually acceptable consensus depends on an affective understanding of their concerns; even if affectively we dislike a particular course of action, we must remain open to persuasion on rational grounds. But as Papacharissi has also pointed out, "affect may … dominate expression and distract from factuality, as is the case with the affective structures that support the growth of the Tea Party movement in the United States" (Papacharissi 2014: 120). Thus, if the affective understanding of the opponent is withdrawn, or if affect overwhelms our rational capacities, consensual public debate breaks down—and with it, in an extreme scenario that now, tragically, no longer feels so entirely impossible, may come the breakdown of democracy itself.

But again, the extremes of counterfactual emotionality and irrationality displayed by the 'Tea Party' and other movements should not lead us to dismiss the more balanced yet still partially affective forms of engagement with news and politics that are now readily observable as everyday practices in social media environments. Indeed, these questions are by no means limited to or inherently caused by the growing role of social media in society: populism—and its more extreme form, fascism—clearly predate the arrival of social media by decades if not centuries, after all, and have sometimes constituted a direct reaction to the primacy of rationality by those who, rightly or wrongly, have felt excluded by it. Rather, then, the more equitable balance between rational and affective elements in public debate that can be found in some (but not all) of the discursive spaces provided by social media could be seen as an important step towards modes of news engagement and political discussion that are more inclusive and thus better able to generate meaningful societal consensus.

As difficult as this may be to see in light of recent developments, therefore, in many developed nations current crises of politics and democracy may mask a broader underlying trend towards such consensus on a number of fronts; in spite of extremist arguments from both sides, for instance, opinion polls in many countries have consistently shown clear majority support for major initiatives such as the mitigation of anthropogenic climate change or the introduction of same-sex marriage. That such consensus has emerged in spite

of the agonistic coverage of ideological debates on these issues in the mainstream news media may point to the role of everyday low-level discussion of such issues in interpersonal networks, not least on social media; it should give us hope that overall, social media can help to moderate rather than inflame the ideological tensions expressed between different political camps. From this perspective, it is possible that "by making users feel connected to a community and increasing their knowledge of other members, [social media] can foster norms of reciprocity and trust and, therefore, create opportunities for civic and political engagement" (Gil de Zúñiga *et al.* 2012: 331). It is notable in this context that Dahlgren, whose pessimistic pre-social media perspectives we have already encountered above, has more recently revised his appraisal towards a more ambivalent view, at least: in 2014, he writes that "I am … convinced that the new communication technologies do offer unprecedented possibilities for democratic (as well as undemocratic) intervention into the political arena" (2014: 192).

Social Media as Third Spaces in a Hybrid Media System

This picture of a complex interplay between existing and emerging communications platforms and spaces, between journalists, politicians, and the people formerly known as the audience, raises crucial questions about how we must now attempt to conceptualise the contemporary public sphere. As Poster pointed out as early as 1995,

> for Habermas, the public sphere is a homogeneous space of embodied subjects in symmetrical relations, pursuing consensus through the critique of arguments and the presentation of validity claims. This model, I contend, is systematically denied in the arenas of electronic politics. We are advised then to abandon Habermas' concept of the public sphere in assessing the Internet as a political domain. (Poster 1995: n.p.)

Instead, Chadwick and others have described the emergence of a new, hybrid media system that "is built upon interactions among older and newer media logics—where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviours, and organisational forms—in the reflexively connected social fields of media and politics" (Chadwick *et al.* 2016: 8): a system that is at present neither inherently failing nor flourishing, but still caught in a continuing process of emergence and evolution. As Chadwick *et al.* suggest, then, this hybrid

media system approach with its more "holistic" account of how information and communication platforms and processes intersect with politics shows how "'older' and 'newer' media" interconnect and interact (2016: 8), and, importantly, takes a view of these relationships as changeable and dynamic rather than fixed and static.

In this new, hybrid environment, the issue selection and framing power of journalists and news organisations is necessarily reduced; they no longer serve as the dominant institutions of the mediated public sphere. Indeed, even more broadly "the collapse of gatekeeping represents a direct attack on the elites—journalists, policy experts, public officials, academics, and the like—who have served as the arbiters of social and political meaning" (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000: 67); instead, such social and political meaning—and the news stories that serve as the raw materials from which it is built—are now returned to a more explicitly socially constructed state, and are therefore considerably more open to public challenge and reinterpretation. The discussions and debates through which such questioning occurs, in turn, take place in more or less public form in those spaces that enable broad engagement by ordinary citizens alongside conventional news workers and news makers—chiefly, therefore, in the tertiary spaces provided by social media.

Understood in this way, the tertiary news engagement spaces provided by social media, which connect the primary and secondary spaces respectively operated by mainstream and alternative journalism organisations and introduce a network logic into the interactions between these different nodes, also appear closely related to Ray Oldenburg's concept of the 'third place', as Wright *et al.* explain: "a third place, for Oldenburg, is a public space beyond the home or workplace where people can meet and interact informally. As the name suggests, they are place based spaces; the common denominator is the location of the participants and that community can thrive" (2016: 79). Much like some of the tertiary spaces of social media, Oldenburg's third places offer a neutral ground for engagement, discussion, and debate between diverse stakeholders as equals, irrespective of their social status and societal roles; similarly, too, although neutral with respect to the interactions between participants taking place in them these third places could nonetheless be proprietary and policed environments—Oldenburg uses the neighbourhood pub with its community of regulars as one example for such a third place.

Indeed, it is the existence of such community—and of the regular and structured interactions between individuals that the term implies—that turns an ordinary place into a third place matching Oldenburg's definition. In many

other places, "there is no lively conversation …, no suspension of the usual and typical, no joy of association. The 'ingredients' of third place are simply not there" (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982: 269). Arguably, the same is true also of the specific spaces available in social media platforms: not all of these spaces exhibit the same traits of engagement and community, for instance. For instance, the *Facebook* page operated by a news outlet may be heavily moderated and therefore fail to offer an opportunity for meaningful discussion, while its articles may be discussed vigorously and constructively elsewhere on *Facebook*; the generic hashtags promoted by a news organisation in its news updates may fail to attract a group of followers that is able to engage in effective social news curation, while the more specific topical hashtags used in re-sharing the same articles may introduce the same content into long-standing discursive publics on *Twitter*.

If Oldenburg's concept of third places—necessarily conceived in the 1970s and 1980s as describing distinct *physical* locations where participants gather habitually, and where "political talk emerges … through everyday conversation" (Wright *et al.* 2016: 80)—can be translated as third *spaces* to the non-physical environments of social media, then, they are likely again to privilege spaces that emerge organically, from the ground up, as gathering points for a group of social media habitués, rather than being artificially created by news organisations as they seek to stake out a space (a *Facebook* page, a *Twitter* hashtag, a liveblog) that is dedicated exclusively to their own news products. "Third places exist outside the home and beyond the 'work lots' of modern economic production. They are places where people gather *primarily* to enjoy each other's company" (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982: 269); third spaces, in social media, are similarly likely to be found where ordinary and not-so-ordinary social media users are forming networks of connection and regular engagement, developing longer-term social structures.

It is important to note here that such third spaces are most likely to emerge at the level of longer-term networks within social media: in the overlapping personal publics of regularly interacting friends gathered around each *Facebook* account, and in the densely interconnected clusters of mutual *Twitter* followers that emerge around shared interests and identities. These meet some of the requirements for online third spaces that Wright has established: they are "online discussion spaces with a primarily non-political focus, but where political talk emerges within conversations" (Wright 2012: 8); as we have already seen, in these networks between users an attention to news and politics may not be the dominant theme, but content relevant to these topics

is present through the habitual newssharing activities of everyday users, and will occasionally emerge to greater prominence. "However, such content cannot dominate the space" (Wright 2012: 12): Oldenburg's third places as well as Wright's third spaces are not primarily political environments; "people do not visit them to discuss politics and in this sense it can be hypothesised that they will be politically inclusive spaces" (Wright 2012: 12–13).

In considering the role of social media as third spaces—and indeed in the discussion of the emergent public sphere structures throughout this chapter—we must therefore move beyond a treatment of social media merely *as* social media (and similarly of mainstream media simply *as* mainstream media), which would imply that these media forms are internally undifferentiated. Rather, just as there are many different outlets, operational philosophies, formats, and practices in the mainstream news media, there is also a variety of "constellations of public, private, and potentially third spaces within social media. Put simply, the question is not whether social media platforms represent a third space, but whether there are specific areas (pages, profiles, and hashtags) that constitute a third space" (Wright *et al.* 2016: 81). At the same time, we must also understand that during the course of their everyday engagement with social media, users will move through a variety of such spaces on multiple social media platforms, and must therefore "study the interactions on *and* between these platforms in hybrid forms" (82).

Beyond 'the' Public Sphere

This, then, necessarily also addresses the question of what shape we must understand the public sphere to take, given the context of the contemporary media ecology. Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, first outlined comprehensively more than 50 years ago in his book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), retains a significant amount of influence over conceptualisations of public communication and deliberation processes, in online as well as offline contexts. Key to Habermas's model is the *Strukturwandel*, or structural transformation, which the rational-critical public sphere of eighteenth-century civic societies and coffeehouses underwent as it became the mediatised public sphere of the early and mid-twentieth century. In the process, the opportunities for *direct* participation by the general public in political and societal deliberation diminished, while new civic, state, and commercial institutions emerged to represent diverse societal groups in *mediated* public debate.

Influenced in no small way by the communicative environment of his time, Habermas's vision of this "virtual stage of mediated communication" (2006: 415) upon which the debates of the day are enacted by players representing the key societal groups and institutions presupposes the willing participation of socially and societally responsible media organisations, a strong public broadcasting sector, and a politically interested, rationally deliberating public if this system of interactions and interdependencies is to function as a public sphere. Crucially, the modern public sphere as Habermas describes it represents a structural model best suited to the age of strong mass media institutions (print, radio, television): to a media ecology in which societal debate will mainly consist of "mediated political communication … carried [out] by an elite" (Habermas 2006: 416).

Like his description of the critical public sphere of the pre-mass media age, this then-contemporary mediated public sphere can be seen as an "explicitly *idealist* concept" (Webster 2013: 25), which at a high level of abstraction must necessarily fail to capture the full nuances of public communication. A growing number of scholars have suggested that the idea of "'the' public sphere is a convenient fantasy" (Hartley and Green 2006: 346–47), idealising what is really a far more complex space of information flows, and a re-evaluation of Habermas's model under present-day conditions therefore seems appropriate. As Keane puts it, "the ideal of a unified public sphere and its corresponding vision of a territorially bounded republic of citizens striving to live up to their definition of the public good are obsolete" (Keane 1995: 8).

Even more importantly, however, the very idea of *Strukturwandel* which leads from the critical public sphere of the coffeehouses to the mediatised public sphere of mass media also implies that such structural transformation might continue *beyond* that point, towards yet another reconfiguration of public communication. The substantial institutional, economic, social, and technological changes which have been associated with the mass adoption especially of Internet and mobile media forms since the final decades of the twentieth century—that is, since Hallin's period of "high modernism" in the historical evolution of journalism (1992: 16)—provide a strong argument that such further structural transformation has by now taken place. What remains to be seen, however, is whether this transformation may be able to be accommodated in further adjustments to the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, or whether we are indeed "reaching a time when we need … to consider abandoning the concept" (Webster 2013: 25) because the continued revision of public sphere theory in response to changing communicative

dynamics has moved the term well beyond its intended meaning. A more dynamic and multifaceted vision of public communication than that provided by Habermas's 'public sphere' in its orthodox interpretation may be required to understand the contemporary post-mass media environment; as a result of this, "the conventional notion of a single, unified public sphere is likely to disappear in favour of a more segmented, pluralist model" (Boeder 2005: n.p.).

The idea of a unified, national mediatised public sphere must be contextualised to its time and space. In 1960s Germany, where public service television's prime-time news bulletin *Tagesschau* would regularly attract more than 50% of the total television audience (Launer 1981: 288) and where leading newspapers would similarly receive substantial nationwide circulation, it was possible to envisage these media spaces as the backbone of a truly universal, all-encompassing public sphere. However, the growing commercialisation, diversification, and subsequently also digitisation of the mass media, as well as the rise of an increasing number of commercial, public service, and community-driven niche media spaces have inevitably led to a gradual fragmentation of this central public sphere into a succession of ever more diverse publics which may or may not overlap with each other. Especially online it has become evident "that beyond the mass-mediated public sphere there have already been 'small', specialised publics that were created by media with limited reach" and take the form of "spontaneously emerging encounter publics" gathering around issues of shared interest and concern (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 14; my translation). Habermas himself recognised this in a 2006 update to public sphere theory, which acknowledges that public "attitudes are influenced by everyday talk in the informal settings or episodic publics of everyday society at least as much as they are by paying attention to print or electronic media" (2006: 416).

This gradual recognition of individual *publics*, operating under their own rules and conditions, alongside what remains of 'the' public sphere opens the door to a more comprehensive reconsideration of the model of a mass-mediated public sphere. A number of major alternative perspectives have been proposed in recent years. First, some approaches seek to distinguish a subset of 'the' public sphere by highlighting the technological means of communication upon which that subset is built. From this perspective, it becomes possible to speak of print or television public spheres, as well as of the "networked public sphere" of Internet-based communication platforms (Benkler 2006: 177). The prominent role of the Internet as a backbone for traditionally separate media forms and formats—as a delivery mechanism for streamed

television content or as a space for the publication of online newspapers, for instance—makes this distinction difficult to maintain in practice, however: with the continuing digitisation of traditionally non-digital media forms, the networked public sphere is in danger of coming to encompass almost all of 'the' public sphere in its conventional definition once again.

A more promising approach to distinguishing specific configurations of public communication within the public sphere as such is to highlight not their technological underpinnings, but their domain focus. A distinction of specific formations including the "political public sphere" (Dahlgren 2009; Webster 2013) or the "cultural public sphere" (Hartley and Green 2006) recognises that such domain sectors are never limited only to one media channel or communication technology, but operate across broadcast, print, online publishing and social media platforms. The contemporary political public sphere, for example, would encompass politically relevant content as it is exchanged through conventional mass media, online, mobile and social media, and face-to-face communication; specific messages within it are likely to transition through various channels over time as television news content is commented upon in newspapers, whose articles are shared via social media and become topics for watercooler conversations in the office. From this perspective, then, what used to be idealised as a unified, mass-mediated public sphere "thus can be seen as comprised of a vast array of interactional constellations, some relatively more permanent, others more fleeting" (Dahlgren 2009: 74). Necessarily, there are definitional challenges here, too—what constitutes 'political' communication, for example, is itself difficult to delimit—, but the existence of fuzzy boundaries for these constructs does not in itself negate the existence of such domain-specific public spheres.

A further variation on and extension of this model recognises a subset of "public sphericules" or, more properly, spherules (Gitlin 1998; Cunningham 2001; Bruns 2008), centring around more narrowly defined themes, beyond these broad domain-based public spheres. As part of the overall political public sphere, a public spherule might focus only on a specific area of policy, for example; this implies a further specialisation of participants and therefore a substantially smaller subset even of the superior domain-based public sphere which is itself already a subset of 'the' public sphere. Public spherules, therefore, can be seen as "social fragments that do not have critical mass [but] share many of the characteristics of the classically conceived public sphere" (Cunningham 2001: 134–35)—indeed, their smaller size and better thematic focus

may enable more effective processes of public debate and deliberation than is possible within more generic, multifaceted domain-based public spheres.

The concept of public spherules, in turn, is closely aligned with the idea of "issue publics", a concept introduced by Habermas himself (e.g. 2006: 422). One way to distinguish such issue publics from public spherules is to think of them as even more specific formations of public communication and debate: beyond domain-based public spheres, and beyond public spherules that focus on specific themes within these spheres, issue publics centre around individual topics associated with those themes. This would also imply that such issue publics are more changeable and potentially short-lived than these larger formations of which they are subsets: what results is "a more dynamic picture of specific issue-publics, that emerge, exist for varying durations, and then eventually dissolve" (Dahlgren 2009: 74).

While the concepts introduced so far have been centred on themes, topics, and issues in public debate, however, the growth in what Castells has defined as "mass self-publication" (2007) since the turn of the millennium—especially following the emergence of the current generation of social media platforms—offers yet further alternatives for identifying quasi-public spaces within the overall public sphere. These spaces, however, are defined not by their overarching theme but by their organisation around central individuals as what Schmidt (2009, 2014) has described as "personal publics". In social media spaces this results in a series of overlapping publics that are each defined by and centred around a pivotal account through which the user is able to communicate with a more or less vaguely understood public of 'friends' or 'followers'. Each user's circle of social media contacts is different to some extent from those of their followers, yet often they also overlap to a considerable degree, so that in combination a larger shared, networked public is constituted from these individual personal publics. However, personal publics extend beyond any one platform or medium, of course; to fully understand their reach we must also consider the central individual's circles of connections as they exist in other online as well as offline spaces. In combination, these form the individual's complete personal public.

Highlighting especially the role of social media in this process, Papacharissi (2010) similarly describes an emerging "private sphere" and suggests that the liminal, transitional, negotiated, "privately public" activity taking place here is empowering by providing a more controllable, less risky form of participation in public communication than fully *public* activity: "operating from a civically *privé* environment, the citizen enters the public spectrum by nego-

tiating aspects of his/her privacy as necessary, depending on the urgency and relevance of particular situations" (2010: 132). This, then, signals a further challenge to the concept of the *public* sphere in a communicative environment where the line between public and private communication is increasingly harder to determine. Social media users' actions in engaging, privately public, with the network of contacts contained in their personal public may not be intended to be visible to others who are not—the term seems appropriate in this context—privy to this circle of friends, yet the technological basis of leading social media platforms provides the potential for such 'personal' communication to be distributed well beyond its initially intended circle of recipients. The same is true in different ways for other forms of personal communication—from face-to-face chat to email exchanges—even if transgressions against the written or unwritten rules of privacy tend to be policed more closely in such contexts.

Personal and even private communication can make its contribution to the public sphere, therefore, and communication within many personal publics in social media spaces almost certainly does. Thus, "the unitary character of the public sphere is transforming into an amalgam of different 'sub'-spheres: The distinction between public and private spheres is blurring" (Boeder 2005: n.p.). Indeed, Habermas himself notes the importance of such communication at the outer edges of 'the' public sphere (in its narrow definition) as a constituent element of public debate and deliberation: in his view, "the public sphere is rooted in networks for the wild flows of messages—news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images" (2006: 415).

Towards Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers?

The explosion of the idealised, unified, and seemingly stable mass-mediated public sphere of Habermas's original conception into an abundance of intersecting, overlapping domain-based public spheres, thematic public spherules, topical issue publics, and networked personal publics appears to signal an irreversible breakup of 'the' public sphere into individual fragments. Several scholars have taken this as a sign that we are entering a dystopian era where society is fragmenting into a series of diverse "filter bubbles" (Pariser 2012) and "echo chambers" (Sunstein 2009) that are each subject to their own internal 'groupthink', and no longer find the common communicative ground to sustain broader public debate and deliberation. In many well-established democ-

racies, the recent rise of neo-fascist and related extremist groups that appear resistant to the widely circulated facts and arguments debunking their views has been seen as confirming these perspectives, and online and social media usually receive a substantial share of the blame. As Friedman put it as early as 2002, "just when you might have thought you were all alone with your extreme views, the Internet puts you together with a community of people from around the world who hate all the things and people you do" (2002: n.p.).

From this perspective, social media enable interested users both to connect with ideologically aligned fellow travellers to the exclusion of all others—establishing networks that are characterised by a high degree of homophily between individual members—, and thereby to avoid exposure to any mainstream and alternative news content that would challenge their political worldviews. This serves to reinforce and amplify their political perspectives:

> an echo chamber is created when individuals seek to find information and sources that support their viewpoints and filter out countervailing information. As they find added support for their views repeated online via such mechanisms as emails, blog posts, retweets, social media posts or links, possibly in a more extreme form, they become even more set in their views and less likely to seek countervailing opinions. The fear is that people tend to read others who share their political opinions, and without the mass media's diversity and explicit attempt at balance, selective exposure will produce more set and extreme opinions. (Newman *et al.* 2012: 7)

And yet those same online and social media that are being seen as harbingers of the fragmentation of society have also enabled the networking of broad coalitions that seek to counteract such extremism, and are responsible for engendering a greater level of news circulation and consumption than has perhaps been observed ever before in human history. Thus, it appears that "if the dispersion of public spheres generally is contributing to the already destabilized political communication system, specific counter public spheres on the Internet are also allowing engaged citizens to play a role in the development of new democratic politics" (Dahlgren 2005: 160). In reality, what we are witnessing today is therefore most likely the comprehensive structural *transformation* of an established system of mediated democratic participation, rather than simply the wholesale *destruction* of democracy itself, and we would do well not to adopt the rhetoric of filter bubbles and echo chambers without considering the empirical evidence before us. As Wright points out, "there is a danger that the cyber-polarisation literature a) adopts an idealised, golden-age view of what existed before the advent of the Internet and b) applies an

outdated understanding of how people consume news and talk politics online" (2012: 13). Proponents of the 'filter bubble' theory, often worried about the post-factual nature of social media-supported politics, must ensure that their own hypothesis does not itself become resistant to the facts that challenge it.

As we have seen throughout this book, after all, user engagement with the news is in robust health—especially in the interactive spaces provided by social media. "Once passive, users now filter news and discuss what media publish. Moreover, they propagate interesting stories further into the social network at unprecedented scale and frequency" (An *et al.* 2011: 18). It is of course possible in principle that all of these habitual acts of newssharing are directed only at like-minded others within these users' personal publics—even though, as we have seen in Chapter 4, there is considerable uncertainty amongst users about the actual audience that they address when they post their content (Litt and Hargittai 2016). But in reality it is much more likely that such shared news reaches a much more diverse and random range of recipients—and it is this more probabilistic dissemination that makes the serendipitous news discovery we have already observed possible in the first place. The 2015 *Digital News Report*'s nationally representative surveys across a dozen countries support this view:

> the growth of search and social media as gateways to news has … raised concerns over the potential for online 'filter bubbles', but our research suggests that they may help audiences find more diverse forms of news. Three-quarters of social media users (76%) and search users (73%) said they sometimes or frequently accessed different sources—leading them to brands they would not otherwise use. (Newman *et al.* 2015: 16)

Even in the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential election—which has been widely regarded as one of the most polarised such votes in recent memory, has revealed a deeply divided nation, and has therefore also fuelled a new round of discussion about the apparent echo chambers that exist around committed Republican and Democrat voters—there appears to be remarkably little evidence for the existence of such solipsistic partisan spaces beyond the extreme fringes of partisan politics. A nationally representative Pew Research Center study released just weeks before election day shows that the majority of social media users in the United States are frustrated with and "worn out" by the tone and volume of the political content they encounter on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, but importantly such frustrations result from the very fact that they *do* encounter substantial amounts of material that challenges their own worldviews

(Duggan and Smith 2016: 2). Similarly, "27% have blocked or unfriended someone" from their network because they posted offensive political content (4)—but the fact that they are encountering such content also implies that their social network and personal public was heterophilous to begin with:

> for many users, friend networks that encompass a range of political beliefs are the norm. Roughly half of Facebook users (53%) and more than one-third of Twitter users (39%) say that there is a mix of political views among the people in their networks. And an additional 5% of Facebook users and 6% of Twitter users indicate that most of the people they associate with in these spaces hold different political beliefs from their own. (Duggan and Smith 2016: 9)

(In addition, another 19% of *Facebook* users and 37% of *Twitter* users say they are fundamentally unsure about their connections' political views.) The report also casts doubt on claims that social media activities may lead to a hardening of political viewpoints as they are reinforced and amplified by consistent exposure to groupthink: while this may be true for the most ideological of activists and extremists, "roughly one-in-five social media users have changed their minds about a political candidate, or a social issue, because of material they encountered on social media" (Duggan and Smith 2016: 10).

If these patterns can be readily observed even in the United States, whose political system has been thoroughly dysfunctional for some years, and in the context of as belligerent an election as that of 2016, then this alone should be sufficient reason to treat the emphatic pronouncements that have been made about social media's filter bubbles and echo chambers with extreme caution. As Wright has pointed out, much of the material on these matters originates from the United States—whose often absurdly reductionist 'red vs. blue' partisanship thankfully does not translate well to most other established democracies—and tends to address only the most extreme cases of polarisation: unfortunately, "the theoretical and empirical cyber-polarisation literature focuses on explicitly political discussion spaces" (2012: 12). Yet as we have seen, the Habermasian 'wild flows of messages' that occur (not least through habitual gatewatching and newssharing) in everyday social media practice within the diverse personal publics of ordinary users, and that account for the vast majority of social media activity in any given society, do not take place in such extreme (and sometimes extremist) discussion spaces, and levels of political polarisation, ideological filtering, and homophilous networking are therefore likely to be considerably lower In such more ordinary, quotidian public communication. In describing these outer edges of the public sphere as a match-

ing private sphere, Papacharissi suggests that "social network sites expand the number and range of individuals who may enter the privately public space of the private sphere" (2010: 140), therefore.

In these everyday spaces of newssharing, where personal networks are crucial in facilitation news and political discussion, "hierarchical relationships between mass media consumers and producers of media content are being further unravelled. Social networking sites represent an evolution of the public sphere, where the dynamics of publication and distribution of news are being reshaped by networked publics" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 816). Fears of societal fragmentation as a result of the rise of social media may therefore be countered by an observation of the very interrelatedness and interdependence of these networked public formations at their various scales of duration and size. As Habermas notes, as "a larger number of people tend to take an interest in a larger number of issues, the overlap of issue publics may even serve to counter trends of fragmentation" (2006: 422)—individual issue publics may intersect with each other as well as with their overarching domain-based public spheres and thematic public spherules, while the less topically focussed personal publics could be seen as providing the glue which connects different thematic areas if the individual at the centre of the personal public engages, visible to their personal network, in multiple such areas. The lower barriers to entry into the semi-private spaces of personal publics especially on social media platforms, compared to participation in public debates in a more conventional sense, might then even serve to once again extend the contributor base of 'the' public sphere, following its temporary constricture when the mass-mediated public sphere of the mid-twentieth century replaced the critical civic public sphere of earlier times. In this way, the Internet "creates the technical preconditions for an *integrated public sphere* that combines different levels of publics in one medium" (Neuberger *et al.* 2010: 14; my translation).

This forcefully contradicts the 'filter bubble' and 'echo chamber' thesis, and it is therefore important to further examine the emerging structures of interconnection and overlap between the various forms of publics that may now be readily observed in online and social media (and that in doing so also serve as pointers to less immediately observable offline publics). "As modern society's dominating structure, networks are quintessential to the future of the public sphere" (Boeder 2005: n.p.); we should therefore understand the totality of these publics—with their vastly divergent spatial and temporal dimensions and dynamics—as a network of discursive spaces that collectively constitute (or, from a different point of view, have replaced) 'the' public sphere. Impor-

tantly, of course, both by having their materials shared by the participants in such networks, and by actively participating themselves, the representatives of the conventional, mass-mediated public sphere also remain part of these networks, but no longer serve as an especially privileged elite; instead, "the ability the Internet affords individuals to network within and beyond various institutional arenas in ways that can enhance and reinforce the 'communicative power' of 'networked individuals' is key" (Dutton 2007: 6), as it enables the establishment and communicative activities of a diverse range of publics.

Understanding Social Media Publics

Hinting at the idea of issue and even personal publics, Habermas writes in 1974 that "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (1974: 49). But how do we understand such publics—indeed, "what is a public? It is a curiously obscure question, considering that few things have been more important in the development of modernity. Publics have become an essential fact of the social landscape, and yet it would tax our understanding to say exactly what they are" (Warner 2002: 49).

First, as Warner points out, "people do not always distinguish between *the* public and *a* public, although in some contexts this difference can matter a great deal" (Warner 2002: 49). Our following discussion focusses squarely on the latter concept—reflecting the idea that there are a broad range of distinct publics of varying shapes, sizes, and durations, which only in combination and with considerable abstraction from actual day-to-day communicative practice add up to what could be understood as *the* public, or 'the' public sphere. A public, by contrast, represents a considerably more tangible formation:

> a concrete audience, a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, as with a theatrical public. Such a public also has a sense of totality, bounded by the event or by the shared physical space. A performer on stage knows where her public is, how big it is, where its boundaries are, and what the time of its common existence is. A crowd at a sports event, a concert, or a riot might be a bit blurrier around the edges, but still knows itself by knowing where and when it is assembled in common visibility and common action. (Warner 2002: 50)

Although Warner's examples here are of physically co-present publics, several decades of research into computer-mediated communication practices have shown that a similar sense of self-witnessing, or conscious co-presence, and of

bounded commonality is also typical for various forms of public online community: today, in particular, "social networking sites provide environments where people can gather publicly through mediating technology" (Hermida *et al.* 2012: 816). In such technologically mediated, physically dispersed contexts a further aspect described by Warner gains particular prominence, in fact: "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation—like the public of this essay" (Warner 2002: 50). The publics of social media necessarily emerge in this way: they are constituted around information and communication feeds addressing shared events, topics, interests, and identities. Such publics, then, "exist only when they are addressed as such, that is, … publics are temporally and discursively constituted by constant attention [to] and circulation of discourse about specific issues" (Lury 2012: 193).

Indeed, it is this continuing attention and engagement, as well as the heightened sense of co-presence (even if 'only' in non-physical form), that distinguishes such publics from mere audiences for individual texts:

> no single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, or even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. It is not texts themselves that create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time. Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and a responding discourse be postulated, can a text address a public. (Warner 2002: 62)

Such processes can take place in many mediated forms, as well as in direct interpersonal interaction; social media, however, facilitate them especially effectively. Indeed, a number of the affordances of social media—from standard *Facebook* comment threads to the user-initiated groups addressing a vast range of topics, and from @reply discussions on *Twitter* to the user innovation of hashtags as a means of constituting a discursive public *ad hoc*, immediately—seem explicitly designed to support the formation of publics around the circulation over time of a stream of shared texts.

Thus, "if it is the act of information sharing that presences actors, then this act can be read as an act of agency and we can begin to understand networked publics as publics defined by the sharing of information" (Papacharissi 2014: 126)—as Papacharissi further puts it, in a social media context publics "discursively materialize through the organizational logic of online platforms" (Papacharissi 2014: 126). Depending on the specific platforms used, but also on the internal requirements of particular publics, then, such publics

may work to very different rhythms and at very different scales: small interest groups comprising a handful of members may generate only a few posts per week, while large collectives of social news curators may form within minutes around the hashtags addressing major breaking news developments; regular online meet-ups may impose a certain periodicity on the circulation and discussion of content, while developments in the world outside of social media may generate a more reactive ebbing and flowing of engagement. "Not all circulation happens at the same rate, … and this accounts for the dramatic differences among publics in their relation to possible scenes of activity. A public can only act within the temporality of the circulation that gives it existence" (Warner 2002: 68).

The sharing and discussion of news content is clearly central to many such publics, especially in social media spaces. In the first place, as Chapter 3 has demonstrated, many of the most active and visible publics are fundamentally brought into being by breaking news stories—as acute events unfold, a range of discursive formations including one or multiple *Twitter* hashtags, *Facebook* pages and groups, and liveblogs will almost certainly emerge in rapid progression, and many of these will continue to track these events through to their eventual conclusion. Gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation are self-evidently crucial to these publics, whose very purpose it is to track and evaluate the news about these acute events as it comes to hand. Further, such individual publics do not exist in isolation from each other, of course: they often share participants, who facilitate the circulation of information and commentary not only within, but also *across* these publics (which may also mean across platforms) by reposting and crossposting content. Engagement by journalists, experts, and other authorities also means that these social media publics are connected with online and offline institutional and media spaces and thereby influence and are influenced by a variety of other discussions on the same events. And finally, many of these spaces are inherently permeable to casual users who are not attentive enough to unfolding events and discussion to be considered full members of these publics, but who nonetheless help to disseminate some of the public's texts further through their own networks, within and beyond the spaces of social media.

In addition to such explicitly event-related publics, it has long been recognised that "the Internet is a perfect playing field for communities of interest, in that the new web-based communication tools allow for coordination and collaboration independently of location" (Dolata and Schrape 2016: 8). The publics encompassing such communities have generally tended to emerge

more autochthonously, driven by their own internal dynamics rather than by external factors, and they continue to pay attention to their core topics even when they are not subject to major media attention at the moment. Gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation are crucial here, too—indeed, these communities can be understood as dedicated social news curation communities on specialist topics from infrastructure policy to model railroading and beyond. Their often more measured pace and longer timeframes of existence also provide them with an opportunity for more complex structuration:

> communities of interest and social movements have three main features that distinguish them from volatile non-organized collectives and that raise them into the ranks of empowered collective actors: (1) institutionalization dynamics, which allow for, structure and stabilize collective action on the basis of their own, primarily informal, rules, norms and organizational patterns; (2) the building of a collective identity that orients the group's vision and actions and that defines its activities to the outside; (3) internal differentiation processes that, over time, spawn the emergence of organizing cores and opinion-leading activists, alongside their respective networks and support bases. (Dolata and Schrape 2016: 9)

We should not assume that theme-specific publics are necessarily internally homogenous, therefore: "even like-minded people who belong in the same groups will have varied opinions and perspectives such that within-group discussions can lead to debate and a diversity of views" (Yardi and boyd 2010: 326).

In addition to these event-driven and theme-specific publics, finally, a third important type of public also exists. For instance, "while the Twittersphere itself is open-ended, the way people experience it is individually structured. The content of a user's 'window' into the Twittersphere is based on tweets from accounts the user chooses to follow, and is thus bound to the individual networks he/she chooses to maintain" (Ausserhofer and Maireder 2013: 293), and that network can similarly be understood as a public; it is a public defined not by immediate temporal dynamics or by distinct shared interests (other than in the very broad sense in which our various personal interests also contribute to the persona we portray to others, and which might make those others want to connect with us), but by interpersonal connections. Such personal publics, then, represent "a new kind of publicness which consists of information selected and presented according to personal relevance, shared with an (intended) audience of articulated social ties in a conversational mode" (Schmidt 2014: 11). These ties may be motivated variously by familial and friendship connections, professional relationships,

shared geographic location, political orientation, or fandom, amongst many other factors, and personal publics are therefore likely to exhibit considerable degrees of heterophily; thus, "while people might have similarity in background, it is more likely that [users] will inadvertently … come across people with divergent political views as social boundaries appear to be weakened online" (Wright *et al.* 2016: 83).

News content plays a role in these personal publics insofar as gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation have become habitual for ordinary social media users engaging in their everyday practices, outside any participation in event-driven or theme-specific publics. Even when they do not seek to intentionally contribute to those publics, many social media users now share news and other content that they feel may be of interest to their imagined audience of followers, as we have seen in Chapter 4; such activities are significant in their own right within the immediate personal public surrounding the central account, but might also generate greater effects as the news being shared is passed on horizontally from one personal public to another. These, then, may in aggregate add up to much more visible and meaningful consequences than each of the individual acts of sharing and engagement within a specific personal public would have been able to achieve; "in many individual cases … it has by now become evident that in digitally networked environments thematic careers rapidly develop from individual acts of articulation, transporting a position expressed in a supposedly 'minor' conversation into a wider context" (Katzenbach 2016: 15; my translation).

Individually and in their interplay with each other, these three key forms of social media publics—event publics, thematic publics, and personal publics—demonstrate the transformative power of social media. As Dahlgren points out, "publics, according to Habermas and Dewey, exist as discursive interactional processes; atomized individuals, consuming media in their homes, do not comprise a public" (Dahlgren 2005: 149). Social media, by providing the means for individuals to form networks of personal publics and to engage in event-driven and theme-specific publics, offer a means for news consumers to reconnect and form networks of interaction that can exert considerable influence on other forms of public debate. Their collective activity can help selected information and topics 'go viral', forcing a response from mainstream news media and other societal actors and thereby influencing the further news agenda, or provide an important counterpoint to the interpretation and framing preferred by other commentators, challenging them to justify their views. As Heinrich puts it, therefore, "within [the] evolving global news sphere, in-

formation flows are in fact multidirectional. A 'network' character of communication is taking shape based on a 'network' structure of journalism in which decentralization and nonlinearity are the key parameters defining news flows at the beginning of the twenty-first century" (2008: 2). Following Keane's description of the disruptions caused by earlier online media, we might therefore understand social media's publics, too, as "laboratories … in which the elements of everyday life are mixed, remixed, developed, and tested" (Keane 1995: 10)—and news updates and stories continue to constitute one crucial such element.

Studying the Interplay of Publics

Overall, thus, "publics on Twitter are … to be understood as complex communicative constellations whose structures appear different depending on the observer's perspective" (Maireder and Schlögl 2015: 136; my translation), and the same is true for other forms of offline and online publics. Within the spaces of social media, for instance, we may participate centrally in *Twitter* hashtags and *Facebook* pages, and thereby come to experience these as stratified groups of users interacting according to well-established if unspoken communal rules and values; or we may encounter them only casually and serendipitously, experiencing only a fraction of the rich networks of interpersonal connections, power relations, and information flows that occur within them. These differing levels of engagement with the many communicative spaces available to us determine whether we truly come to be members of a given public, or simply observe its interactions from the sidelines—and most likely our engagement can and does also change markedly over time, due to a variety of internal and external factors. As a result,

> most people in the developed world—and probably elsewhere—participate in multiple social networks rather than one group. They move among these networks and sometimes carry information between them. If communication in one network becomes too vacuous or too onerous, they can shift their attention to others. (Gruzd and Wellman 2014: 1252)

It would therefore be a mistake to think of social media simply as unified spaces with consistent patterns of user participation, any more than society itself represents a homogenous population: "extremely popular social media like Facebook and Twitter are not homogeneous groups of users, but contain an

extremely diverse range of online communities" (McKelvey *et al.* 2014: 438). Information travels across these communities (or more appropriately in our present context, publics) with more or less difficulty, depending on the degree to which they are interconnected: this is determined by the extent to which different publics share the same personnel; to which the cross-sharing of outside information is encouraged or discouraged by the public's unwritten rules; and to which existing technological frameworks help or hinder such exchanges. Crucial in this context are not only the specific event or issue publics that might form from time to time and often dissolve just as quickly—"temporary and barely regulated discussions about virally crystallized or medially introduced topics on Twitter, social networking platforms or the general blogosphere" (Dolata and Schrape 2016: 5)—, but especially also the longer-term structures of interconnectivity and overlap between personal publics, where habitual newssharing contributes considerably to the flow of information across the network. Such "open, transparent, and low-threshold exchange of information and ideas", on *Twitter* and elsewhere, "shows great promise for a reconfiguration of the structure of political discourses towards a broadening of public debate by facilitating social connectivity" (Maireder and Ausserhofer 2014: 306).

In this complex environment of multiply networked publics across diverse communicative spaces and platforms in the online and offline world, we are all inevitably "part of diverse publics that we observe with different levels of intensity and in which we participate with different levels of activity" (Maireder and Schlögl 2015: 118; my translation). Although in their analysis of social media networks Smith *et al.* point especially to a particular set of participants who "have links across group boundaries—… called 'bridges'"—and who "play the important role of passing information from one group to another" (2014: 7), the truth is that from a more holistic perspective almost all of us act to a certain extent as bridges between different publics, because to be a part of multiple publics is a fundamental aspect of life in contemporary, complex, mediatised society. (Conversely, to disconnect oneself from the many offline and online familial, friendship, professional, and interest publics now available to the ordinary person is increasingly seen as an indicator of a social disorder.) We are all bridges now, and our habitual newssharing—in our own personal publics on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, in more clearly defined event- and theme-specific publics, and within and between our various online and offline networks—has emerged as a powerful driver of information dissemination in society and across societies. In this sense, Gruzd *et al.* suggest, a platform like

"Twitter turns out to be an implementation of the cross-cutting connectivity between social circles that 19th-century sociologist Émile Durkheim … argued was the key to modern solidarity" (2011: 1314).

In this constellation, then, "multiple, intertwined content flows make up an individual's communication experience. Exposure to any given message (or, in aggregate terms, the types and frequencies of exposure) therefore depends on a person's position within the multiplicity of intertwined message flows" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 31). Online, this positioning is partly deliberate, partly serendipitous, as users have a choice to follow or friend particular peers, but have no inherent control over the day-to-day newssharing actions carried out by these peers; the considerable tendency towards context collapse—as "increasingly mainstream social media technologies … collapse multiple contexts and bring together commonly distinct audiences" (Marwick and boyd 2011: 115)—, which occurs particularly within the personal publics of individual users, further ensures that the information being disseminated through social media platforms is diverse and often unpredictable.

Although social media spaces necessarily constitute only one technologically delimited slice of the overall public sphere and its various associated communicative formations, it is nonetheless possible to utilise the evidence of communicative patterns which may be observed in such spaces to investigate the existence of the various extensions and alterations of the central public sphere concept as we have encountered them above. Especially in offering what has become known as 'big data' on the communicative activities of their very large, often global user communities, the current generation of leading social media platforms—chiefly including *Facebook* and *Twitter*—serve as unique 'living labs' where large-scale communicative patterns may be observed *in situ* and non-invasively (that is, without establishing artificial experimental conditions, and without interfering actively with the users' communication processes themselves). Although such 'big social data' research is not without its own challenges—see e.g. boyd and Crawford (2012) for a valuable critique of 'big data' research in the humanities—, provided that the inherent limitations of social media-related data sources are recognised and understood it becomes possible to use them effectively for our present purposes.

There is thus a considerable need for more in-depth and comprehensive, multi-layered social network analysis of user activities on contemporary social media platforms in order to develop a more sophisticated, evidence-based understanding of how information dissemination and engagement practices unfold in these spaces; current work largely addresses only selected observable

aspects of a greater whole. Such work variously focusses only on specific social media platforms—most often, due to the relatively greater accessibility of its data, *Twitter* (cf. Burgess and Bruns 2015); often generates only aggregate, bird's-eye perspectives of selected networks, even though "social media networks have an overall structure while the individual people within them have a local network structure based on their direct connections and the connections among their connections", as Smith *et al.* (2014: 7) warn; and usually tends to privilege active and observable acts of communication rather than also taking into account less evident acts of reception—Huberman *et al.*, for instance, erroneously claim that "the social network that matters" consists of "those people who actually communicate through direct messages with each other, as opposed to the network created by the declared followers and followees" (2009: n.p.), even though such *listening* (Crawford 2009) to the social media voices of others plays just as crucial a role in information dissemination processes.

A promising approach in this context is the "friend repertoires" perspective proposed by Schmidt, which examines "the composition of the set of accounts a user (or a group of users) is following" and enables us to "understand not only shared patterns and practices of information management … , but also how public communication is changing in the age of social media" (Schmidt 2016: n.p.). At the level of personal publics, this asks the question "who is receiving information from whom?" (Schmidt 2016: n.p.), and in combination with studies of the observable information dissemination activities by individual users and within the particular collective spaces provided by different social media platforms can offer new and more valuable insights into how the various observable publics across social media platforms intersect and interact with each other, and how news and information flows across them.

This must, of course, also take into account the various connective and communicative affordances that the different platforms offer: they "inform users about the variety of choices before them, while also providing cues regarding how their peers have acted in similar situations with similar choices" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 33), but 'friending' on *Facebook* has a considerably different valence from 'following' on *Twitter*, for instance; posting, liking, sharing, and retweeting are used for distinct and divergent purposes, and the understanding of these purposes may even differ between specific groups of users; and the two platforms also operate significantly different algorithms for suggesting new connections between users and for surfacing content from a user's network to greater visibility. Social media users' activities therefore

"originate and evolve not, as it appears, without any conditions, but rather in the presence of social and technical infrastructures that allow for the emergence of similarly oriented individual actions and the resulting collective behavior and that coordinate, guide, monitor, and, to a certain degree, control those collective activities" (Dolata and Schrape 2016: 5).

Importantly, too, as our focus on the everyday habitual and demotic acts of newssharing and news engagement in Chapter 4 has pointed to, social media analytics should not become obsessed with the small number of content items that achieve rapid 'viral' dissemination: in itself, "most information on social media platforms does not go viral" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 31), yet it still contributes in aggregate to the development of a broader picture of current developments and to the emergence of collective frames through which large publics of users understand the news and other current developments. Viral distribution of specific stories is often also strictly limited in its temporal extent; by contrast, most "distribution on social media platforms depends partly on like-minded and popular online intermediaries who serve as catalysts" (Klinger and Svensson 2016: 32), and with their help new issues and topics diffuse through the networks of social media at a more measured pace but may also have considerably greater lasting impact. As Papacharissi points out, "comparative exercises focused on measuring the public sphere potential of net-related platforms further undermine and misrepresent the civic potential of the internet by retrofitting it into models for civic engagement that speak to the political economies of prior eras" (2014: 26), and the widespread emphasis on assessing the public visibility of specific messages—on measuring which specific *Twitter* and *Facebook* posts go viral, and how many users have seen and shared them—misses the bigger picture of whether the dissemination of such messages, and many others on similar topics that achieve considerably less virality, effects a lasting shift in the themes and topics debated within a myriad of personal, event-driven, and theme-specific publics across the contemporary media ecology.

"A theory of public life that clings dogmatically to the vision of a unified public sphere in which 'public opinion' and 'the public interest' are defined is a chimera—and … for the sake of democracy it ought now to be jettisoned", as Keane has bluntly put it (1995: 20). The picture of contemporary public communication processes and practices that emerges from our present discussion instead, then, points to a multitude of overlapping publics of different sizes, lifespans, visibility, and impact, across a variety of online and offline communicative channels and platforms; put simply, "the crowd is actually a

bunch of crowds" (McKelvey *et al.* 2014: 437). Connecting these publics are the participants within them, who are always already inherently members of multiple publics, if with vastly differing levels of attention, engagement, and enthusiasm. Such membership, determined as it is at least in part by personal identity and interests, familial and friendship ties, professional and public roles, is clearly non-random, which will privilege overlaps between some publics (and categories of publics) more than others, yet at the same time these various and potentially contradictory reasons for building bridges between individuals and the publics they participate in also mean that any hermetic disconnections between particular publics are difficult to maintain, and that such disconnections must be constantly policed (this is evident for instance in the steps that some extremist groups take to exclude and ban those they disagree with).

The interplay between different communicative spaces in the contemporary media ecology indicates that reality is considerably more complex than any simple set of categories can depict. *Twitter* hashtags, for example, may be used in a variety of other ways than as a means of gathering together a temporary issue public; *Facebook* pages and groups may fulfil the role of gathering a thematic public more or less well, depending on how specific page owners are controlling access to, operating, and moderating these spaces; users' conceptions of their imagined audiences of friends and followers as personal publics may vary more widely than existing studies show. This does not invalidate the overall patterns of communication which emerge from the research presented here; it merely serves as a pointed stick encouraging researchers to look even more closely both at the global patterns and at specific, smaller communicative events. Similarly, what applies to *Twitter* may not necessarily apply in the same way to *Facebook* or other platforms, which each have their own communicative idiosyncrasies, nor may it persist beyond the next technological or design change made by these companies to their respective platforms.

A New Agenda for Public Sphere Research

Ultimately, to fully understand the contemporary network of online and offline publics through which intra- and inter-societal debates are now being conducted still requires considerably more research—research that will have to utilise an emerging set of mixed methods combining powerful 'big social data' analytics with painstaking close reading of communicative exchanges

across the network. However, the preceding discussion also demonstrates that the various concepts developed to extend or replace the Habermasian public sphere in its most orthodox sense can usefully be applied to and studied in action within *Facebook* and *Twitter* as global systems of public communication. While certain limitations apply to this analysis, what can be observed shows that these theoretical constructs are reflected in everyday communication, and lends support to the suggestion that similar formations of public communication will also exist in other online and offline spaces. If similar observations can be made in these other spaces as well—and ideally, if these observations can be matched against and correlated with each other—, then this could provide the starting-point for a large-scale, empirical study of information flows and participation patterns across the overall public sphere, and could indeed provide new evidence on whose basis it may become possible to address the pressing question of whether the idea of 'the' public sphere is still relevant in the contemporary communicative environment.

Any such analysis must crucially take an inclusive stance which extends well beyond the conventional spaces of 'public' debate and deliberation; in a media environment where social media play an increasingly important role, where "social and cultural evolution continues to scramble, blur, and reconfigure the distinctions between public and private" (Dahlgren 2009: 75), 'personal publics' and 'privately public' forms of communication as they exist in social media spaces, but also in many other forms of everyday communication, must necessarily be taken into account as well. Social media, which have helped to make many previously entirely private forms of communication more public, provide an ideal vantage point from which such liminal private/public forms of communication may be observed *en masse*, but in doing so also raise significant questions about the ethics of such large-scale observation (especially where users' understanding of the implications of their privacy settings for the visibility of their messages cannot be assumed). Similarly, the extent to which the specific communication patterns observed in social media spaces are representative for forms of private/public communication other than themselves remains largely unknown at this stage.

Finally, and perhaps in contrast to traditional public sphere theory which—while acknowledging the very long-term structural transformation of the public sphere—tends to assume that the institutions and actors participating on the "virtual stage of mediated communication" remain relatively stable within historically contingent epochs, it is also important to acknowledge the significant short-term dynamics of contemporary public communication. As

Dahlgren notes, "traditional perspectives on the public sphere do not help us understand how publics 'come alive,' … what their sociocultural dynamic[s] look like" (2009: 74); static perspectives on the roles of specific channels of communication also fail to account for the substantial changes to the uses of such channels which can occur over relatively brief periods of time. The very rise of social media as an increasingly important component of the overall media ecology within less than a decade clearly demonstrates this, but in itself still obscures the considerable internal changes which individual social media platforms themselves have undergone during this time. It should be noted, for example, that the *Twitter* hashtag—which we have seen in Chapters 3 and 4 as a key enabler for the gathering of short-term, *ad hoc* publics on the platform—was itself introduced only some time after the inception of the platform itself, and emerged not from ongoing in-house development of the platform but from the suggestion of a single user, Chris Messina (Halavais 2014); more comprehensive hashtag functionality was only subsequently built into the platform by its developers. Due to the substantially user-driven nature of social media platforms, this co-creation of communicative features between users and operators is likely to continue, on *Twitter* as well as elsewhere, and may significantly impact upon the communicative structures of these platforms as public spaces.

It is inevitable that the structural transformation of (what has traditionally been described as) 'the' public sphere will not only continue as the broader media ecology continues to change and adapt to a post-mass media, digitally-driven era, but that each small act of transformation will be all the more perceptible since it affects a very large community of users who engage with media more closely, more frequently, more actively, and more creatively than ever before. Small adjustments to this complex media environment—for example at technical, organisational, or social levels—can and do have significant repercussions, and any return of the overall media ecology to a stable equilibrium appears unlikely for the foreseeable future. Contemporary public sphere theory will need to find a way to describe a dynamic, changeable, and barely controllable system of interacting forces, rather than the comparatively static, balanced, institutionalised structure of old. This dynamic and possibly confusing environment should not inherently scare us, however, even though specific temporary phenomena within it might: overall, Keane suggests, "a healthy democratic regime is one in which various types of public spheres are thriving, with no single one of them actually enjoying a monopoly in public disputes about the distribution of power" (1995: 18).

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CONCLUSION

A Social News Media Network

The first decades of the new millennium have seen further fundamental transformations of the practices and processes through which we generate and engage with the news, and online and social media have been central to these transformations to an extent that we could now speak of the thoroughly integrated complex that includes conventional news organisations, alternative and citizen media outlets, professional and citizen journalists, industry and freelance newsmakers, dedicated social news curators and ordinary social media users, as a *social news media network*.

Social media have clearly been crucial drivers of these transformations. In the industry, "a 'new' dynamic of newsgathering, production and dissemination is taking shape that affects journalistic practices" (Heinrich 2008: 3), while amongst news users "there is a growing demand for more open, accessible and informative news media. People like journalism so much they are prepared to help create it themselves—for free" (Beckett 2010: 3). This has led to the central role that social media now play in the context of breaking news events, as we have seen in Chapter 3, and to the habitual, demotic everyday newssharing practices that are enabling social media to become an increasingly important source of news for a growing share of Internet users, which we examined in Chapter 4; it has also forced journalists to develop strategies

for engaging more directly with their readers and viewers by developing their personal social media presences, as outlined in Chapter 5, to an extent that would have been unthinkable during the first wave of citizen media; and it has led the news industry as a whole to confront social media as a tertiary space beyond its own imprints in which user engagement with the news must be anticipated, should be addressed, and can be measured, as shown in Chapter 6. These transformations, finally, have also led to the emergence of genuinely new and innovative hybrid journalistic formats, such as the liveblogs we examined in Chapter 7, that seek to incorporate some of the most attractive features of social media news curation while maintaining the primacy of conventional news outlets; and they have highlighted the questions that we asked in Chapter 8, about the future structure of 'the' public sphere in a media environment that is now dominated by a network of myriad overlapping spaces from personal publics through event and issue publics to thematic spherules, and beyond, rather than by a handful of mass media outlets conducting a public debate amongst elite actors on behalf of their audiences.

In spite of widespread talk of a 'crisis' of journalism, these developments also show that news itself is as important, and as popular, as it has ever been. Similarly, alongside the legitimate concerns about financial and operational sustainability that have been raised in many established news outlets—amidst a considerable number of staff cuts, mergers, and closures—there has also been a wave of new outlets, projects, formats, and approaches to doing journalism in a social media age. Not all of these new initiatives will be successful in the long term, and it would be unrealistic to expect them to be, but after a considerable period of relative stagnation the news industry is now innovating at a rate that has rarely been seen before. If Gans is right that the "news media can exist only if they include news organisations", then in spite of all the worries about their imminent demise the future of the news media seems safe for now (2003: 30).

But what is changing quite fundamentally in this environment are the practices of professional journalists in the industry, as well as of the users engaging in para-journalistic activities outside it. Many more of the activities previously conducted on the backstage, out of view, have moved to the frontstage, into plain sight for news users; "it seems that the methods of a 'closed' operational sphere of journalism are overcome and being replaced by a highly dynamic process of information exchange" (Heinrich 2008: 3). This continues the trends already observed during the first wave of citizen media, but at a much larger scale and with much broader take-up throughout society. Conventional news outlets clearly remain central even in a social news media

network; "the news that is most read, shared, and discussed in social media is produced by professional news organisations" (Newman *et al.* 2015: 82). But many other sources are now also directly accessible, and variously offer first-hand information, alternative interpretations and news frames, insightful or ideological commentary. As a result, traditional journalism is "under even greater pressure … to offer the user something unique: analysis, comment, collation and so on" (Ahmad 2010: 152).

The Journalist as Gatekeeper, Gatewatcher, and Curator

In these conventional news organisations, then, gatekeeping still remains important, at least to a point: "gatekeeping still yields considerable networking power, as most socialized communication is still processed through the mass media, and the most popular information Web sites are those of mainstream media" (Castells 2011: 780–81). But the selection decisions made by professional journalists and editors no longer determine whether or not a given piece of information or news will circulate in the public sphere: they merely affect how difficult it will be for the news to achieve widespread circulation. Without mainstream media endorsement, the news will have to rely on the collective but largely uncoordinated efforts of millions of individual social media newssharers to achieve a substantial reach—but this more circuitous route to audiences can ultimately be just as effective.

And the move towards a social news media network has also revealed that even in conventional news outlets, gatewatching has now taken its legitimate place alongside, and as a key input to, gatekeeping practices. As the BBC UGC Hub's Silvia Costeloe has put it, by searching social media and other online user-generated content spaces for material "sometimes you're finding the story, and sometimes you're just finding new angles on the story" (qtd. in Stray 2010: n.p.), yet both of these practices clearly constitute acts of gatewatching that have gradually become part of the everyday journalistic routine. Indeed, from another perspective this growing acceptance of broad-based gatewatching serves only as an acknowledgment that a much more narrow form of gatewatching has always been part of the job: the watching of the gates of news wires and competitor outlets in order to make sure that one's own news organisation does not miss out on covering any major emerging stories. Viewed in this way, the result is simply that

> a new inflexion of gatekeeping has forced itself upon newsrooms' digital operations. Instead of simply filtering inbound dispatches from a limited and well-identified number of channels (with wire agencies at the forefront), news organizations must now accommodate a multitude of interconnected flows of content to extract not only material related to stories deemed worthy of attention but also any bit of digital content that can serve as an ornamental addition to a dense and jam-packed portal. (Heinderyckx 2015: 257)

Yet perhaps this underestimates the true magnitude of this transformation. Well beyond dedicated journalistic units such as the BBC UGC Hub, it is now true that "contemporary online journalists can hardly be called gatekeepers. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that online newsrooms have reduced gatekeeping to its simplest expression" (Le Cam and Domingo 2015: 123). There is a marked difference between merely monitoring a few more channels for emerging stories, and becoming embedded as one node in a much wider network of newssharing and news engagement that will readily persist even in the absence of a given news outlet's participation; a social media platform such as *Twitter* "blurs long-standing distinctions between newsmaker, news reporter and news consumer" (Hermida 2013: 304), and thereby upsets the power relations between these roles. As we have seen in Chapter 3, a social media news curator like Andy Carvin, for instance, was doing a great deal more than simply filtering a broad range of channels for content to be added to NPR's news portal, in the way that Heinderyckx envisages; instead, working directly on *Twitter*, "Carvin was not simply broadcasting, but was immersed in the culture of a media environment that privileges relationship over information delivery, interacting and conversing with others to co-construct the news" (Hermida 2014: 368). Even the journalists publishing curated social media content to the liveblogs hosted on their news outlets' own Websites are doing more than merely sourcing a handful of tweets as added colour for an otherwise conventional news story; they are ostensibly still operating according to a social media logic, even if they do so outside of the infrastructural boundaries of contemporary social media spaces.

In deciding what of their gatewatched material to post or not to post, to share or not to share, the journalist continues to make a series of discrete gatekeeping decisions, then, just as these are made by the citizen journalist or the social media newssharer who are similarly drawing on gatewatching processes to identify the material they work with. But in social media (and liveblog) contexts these decisions no longer determine what stories are in the news; instead, they contribute to the curation of a continuous feed of news

that is constructed from the actions of professional journalists, citizen para-journalists, and ordinary newssharers, is beyond the control of any one news outlet, and exists across a broad range of platforms. In this light, "processes of curation may be better conceptualized as *drawing information in* rather than keeping it out" (Thorson and Wells 2015: 27). Users may tap into the resulting feeds through any number of access points—by following individual journalists on *Twitter*, liking the pages of particular news outlets on *Facebook*, reading liveblogs on particular events and topics, or going to the apps and Websites offered by a range of old and new news organisations—and in doing so will gain a variety of divergent perspectives on current developments that they are then also likely to recirculate (alongside their own supportive or critical readings of the situation) to their own networks through newssharing.

As Jarvis suggests, therefore, "in the future … organising news will be the most important role of news organisations" (2008: n.p.), and Beckett further points out that the approaches that they take to this task can also serve as key points of distinction from competitors:

> counter-intuitively, the abundance of disintermediated information may … give quality networked journalism a market advantage. The plethora of data sources and competing platforms and outlets means there will be a premium (or 'freemium') for authoritative and trustworthy curating and filtering of news. … The demand for transparent and relevant mediation will increase. Networked Journalism as a kind of intelligent and pro-active search engine will create quality by adding value to search. (2010: 17)

Algorithmically and Communally Curated Flows of News

In contrast to this comparatively optimistic view, Heinderyckx also foresees a darker side to this move towards news curation, however: because the volume of news content in mainstream and social media channels that should be monitored is now "simply out of reach for human operators", he predicts the automation, and thus the "algorithmification", of such curation processes, and suggests that this will introduce a fundamental "change in the nature of news selection. The mysterious process that could never be fully theorized and accounted for has nevertheless been fitted into technologies that require not just guidelines and broad principles but also rational operationalized decision trees" (Heinderyckx 2015: 257). Such concerns are no doubt justified; more

so in computer science than in journalism and media studies, problematically, there are already many projects that seek to algorithmically surface emerging and important news stories, especially in social media contexts, and *Twitter*'s and *Facebook*'s famous 'trending topics' lists constitute two prominent examples of some comparatively basic algorithms that have are by now very well established.

But several scholars have also pointed out that this algorithmification remains in its infancy, and that at least so far human agency has proven crucial in effective curation. Liu states categorically that "curating cannot solely be done through algorithms. Curation still requires human skill and discernment" (2010: 22), while Nielsen outlines some of the significant issues that an effective curation algorithm would need to overcome:

> automated display decisions may lead to filter bubbles (where we only get news that confirm our existing views), algorithmic discrimination (where news is customised in ways where people miss out on important information, for example, poor people getting little or no financial news), and raise privacy concerns (as they are based on collecting individual-level data about users). (2016: 112)

By current indications, at least, news curation algorithms are still a considerable way away from being able to replace human curators, regardless of whether the latter are professional journalists or social media collectives. As Bell points out in relation to the *Facebook* newsfeed algorithm, each decision about what types of news to highlight "means reprogramming the algorithm which selects types of news stories. Facebook might see this as an engineering task, but these simple decisions are also editorial" (2015: 90). Even *Facebook* itself had therefore chosen to augment its algorithmic selection of trending news stories with oversight by a team of dedicated editorial staff; it sacked this team and switched to a fully automated approach only when the existence of the team was revealed in May 2016 and questions about their possible political and other biases were asked. In turn, the results of this move towards full algorithmic news curation were deeply problematic, with fake and offensive news stories pushed to considerable prominence (Thielman 2016).

This episode demonstrates clearly the considerable hurdles that any algorithmification of curation choices in conventional news outlets as well as in social media platforms would still have to overcome; if even the exceptionally well-resourced *Facebook* has not yet solved the algorithmic curation challenge, there is little likelihood that smaller-scale news organisations will be able to do so on their own. Thus, "news organisations are stuck as to how

to respond, particularly as they lack any scale or technological solutions that might match those created by Silicon Valley" (Bell 2015: 90); but in fact to expect solutions to emerge only from the developers at leading technology companies—or more broadly from computer science—is already to look in the wrong place. Any technical interventions will only ever be as good as the conceptual frameworks upon which they are based, and here journalism as well as media and communication studies have an immensely important role to play. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and other companies in the new social news media network would be well advised to engage much more deeply and centrally with these disciplines of research than they have done to date. Meanwhile, until they do so, in light of their increasingly central role as news platforms even *Facebook* and *Twitter* may now need to hire (or re-hire) journalists, editors, and other professional news workers to manage these aspects of their operation, manually.

Even against the backdrop of the gradual algorithmification of so many aspects of everyday life, this points out the continuing relevance of journalism as a distinct practice. As Heinderyckx puts it, journalists

> have the experience and the intellectual capital to regain their footing in society as institutions capable of sorting through a mass of events and information and dividing the wheat from the chaff. … They must reinvent themselves and supply relevance and sense making, knowing that the task at hand means capturing the faint signals drowned in deafening background noise. They must achieve this in the new context where they [have] forever lost their monopoly. (2015: 264)

But such tasks are now carried out in an informational environment in which journalists are less central as producers and disseminators of news and information than they are as curators; as Lewis and Usher describe it, this repositions journalism as knowledge management, and displaces "the newsroom as the center of newsgathering. Instead, journalists would be helping to bring together all of the accumulated knowledge that people have contributed across open-source platforms and social media venues. Journalists would be curators in a community conversation" (2013: 612).

They will, however, not be alone in this, and although—following Heinderyckx—journalists who accept the challenge may be especially well-suited for taking on curatorial roles (whether in social media spaces themselves, or through liveblogging and similar formats), other professional and non-professional participants and collectives will also be able to build a reputation as constructive curators. Professional domain experts and amateur enthusiasts

are just as likely to be able to curate meaningful newsfeeds on their specialty topics; shorter- and longer-term collectives and communities that form around shared issues of interest and concern will be able to collaborate on gatewatching, sharing, and evaluating a considerable volume of information on their constitutive themes. In other words, even in the context of the same story or development many different news curators will be vying for attention, competing but often also cooperating with each other in an effort to offer the most useful and insightful stream of updates and analyses. Thorson and Wells describe this as a multitude of "curated flows", which are now "created through the overlapping curating activities of journalists, strategic communicators, individuals, social networks, and online display algorithms in the contemporary media environment" (2015: 25).

As news users engage with this network of curated flows, joining some of them for a while only to move to others that offer more up-to-date news or an alternative framing of events, "every mouse click reassures news consumers that news does not convey *the* truth but *a* truth" (Broersma 2013: 43). As we have pointed out, as a result the news is revealed as socially constructed by a myriad of gatekeeping, gatewatching, newssharing, and news curation decisions made by professional journalists, citizen para-journalists, and ordinary news users, and as Broersma argues, "the crisis of journalism is thus one of vanishing authority and vaporizing trust because citizens have more access to information and can assess alternative representations of social reality" (2013: 44).

Further, Heinderyckx claims that this crisis of authority is essentially also a crisis of truth itself; he suggests that "one key component of the original concept of gatekeeping is losing ground dramatically: verification. In the traditional news chain, verifying the accuracy and authenticity of information was the key to one of the locks of the gate" (2015: 258)—yet now that the gates of individual news outlets can easily be bypassed by information and misinformation alike, there is a concern that what circulates as or alongside the news online and in social media spaces only gives the appearance of factuality while no longer holding up to verification. But while this may be true, it does not mean that such misinformation necessarily circulates unchallenged: as Russell points out,

> the growing number of internet users now practiced at fact-checking is vastly surpassing the capabilities of most stripped-down newsroom staffs. At the best news sites, the commitment to accuracy on the part of the staff is matched by the commitment of the readers. Errors are called out and stories are updated all the time. (2009: 366)

Indeed, it is notable that past years have seen a considerable push towards the establishment of dedicated fact-checking units in many leading news organisations (even though, in principle, fact-checking should already be a core element of journalistic practice, of course). These units are charged with reviewing the public statements of politicians and other societal leaders, and assess them against the available evidence; often, they also initiate their activities in response to requests from the news outlet's on-site and social media userbase, and involve those users in the fact-checking effort. Arguably, such initiatives are therefore at least in part also motivated by the crowdsourced verification processes that are already a core part of user-driven news curation activities in social media spaces. This development might thus be seen as an example of a more general trend in which mainstream and social media "draw from and contribute to the strength of the other, while holding each more accountable" (Newman *et al.* 2012: 17).

Very evidently, such welcome initiatives have not managed to fully combat the circulation of what is now often referred to as 'fake news' through the channels of both social and mainstream media. But in spite of the new term, such 'fake news' is far from a new phenomenon: this mis- and disinformation is usually simply political propaganda, circulated by its originators to promote their own causes and discredit their opponents. Propaganda of this form has been prominent, to often highly damaging and destructive effect, across many epochs of human history, regardless of its contemporary media environment, and to blame current media—especially social media—for its recent resurgence would be overly simplistic, therefore. Rather, propaganda gains influence whenever considerable groups in society feel so disenfranchised from it that they are prepared to trust the apparently simple solutions to their problems that populist leaders and movements present to them, and to spread these messages—offline as much as online—through their own networks. Indeed, they will then do so even when presented with rational explanations for how such populist solutions cannot possibly succeed, if they perceive their personal circumstances to be so dire that they are prepared to trust in any solution that subverts the *status quo*. They may then even be prepared to actively share such propaganda in a tactical, calculated fashion although they know it to be factually untrue, as long as doing so disrupts the power structures they oppose. The structure of the contemporary social news media network, whatever it may be, plays only a very subordinate role in this—such groups will tactically appropriate whatever media technologies are available to them, from samizdat printing through amateur radio to social media. What is more important is

that mainstream actors in society will be able to successfully neutralise such propaganda only if they address the root causes of the disenfranchisement that lead ordinary citizens to support and share it—no amount of fact-checking and quality news reporting will be able to do so on its own.

News and Its Users

In the news environment away from such fringe developments, meanwhile, it is virtually unavoidable that "journalism's ideological commitment to control, rooted in an institutional instinct toward protecting legitimacy and boundaries, [is] giving way to a hybrid logic of adaptability and openness" (Lewis 2012: 851), and this must then also affect the shape, structure, positioning, and power of the news industry as a societal institution. Ultimately, as Beckett suggests, "it is difficult to see how news media culture can remain the same if the journalism alters" (2010: 15). Crucially, this will mean the development of even more opportunities to engage with news users—especially in social media environments—in even more meaningful ways; with more and more news work being conducted in the tertiary, third spaces of social media platforms, a positioning of journalism as exceptional and separate from the day-to-day newssharing and news engagement of ordinary citizens can no longer be maintained.

As we have seen, the news industry has traditionally sought to position itself as central to, but also separate from society; Deuze has summarised its fundamental aim as "telling people what they need to know" (2005: 455), and in this formulation—which many journalists would likely endorse—there is also an underlying sense that those people, left to their own devices, would not be able to build up enough knowledge to successfully deliberate and decide on the possible futures for their own societies. But the reasoning here is circular: the news media may once have been irreplaceable for the purpose of informing society simply because at the high point of the mass media age they provided by definition the only society-wide channels for the circulation of news and related information. The news industry could make its paternalistic claim 'you need us to inform you' not because of some inherent natural law that meant that modern societies must necessarily come to rely on this industry, but simply because the political economy of the media environment that was prevalent at the time made it difficult to establish credible, sustainable alternatives to a centrally organised, commercial industry of news production and dissemination.

Today, however, that political economy has changed fundamentally. In the contemporary media ecology, it is very evidently possible for the dissemination of news and related information, and for the public debate and deliberation that the circulation of such information enables, to route around the representatives of the mainstream news industry, and to actively engage and argue with their coverage and framing of the world around us. "The once privileged position occupied by the journalist has been reclaimed, as it were, by those citizens who want to participate more directly in the construction of the public sphere. The media, from their point of view, is no longer required to mediate any more; they can now choose to get their news directly from the sources they choose to consult—or else they simply make it themselves" (Turner 2009: 391). Writing in 2006, Habermas still claims that this cannot add up to meaningful public debate:

> in the context of liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend[s] instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics. Within established national public spheres, the online debates of web users only promote political communication … when news groups crystallize around the focal points of the quality press, for example, national newspapers and political magazines. (2006: 423)

However, as we have seen in the previous chapter, with the subsequent emergence of generalist social media platforms that enable a broad range of uses from the personal to the political this claim no longer holds: the publics that exist on these platforms—from personal publics through topically focussed and short-lived issue publics to longer-term thematic public spherules—now intersect and interact on an everyday basis, and information passes between them through the habitual newssharing activities carried out by a majority of users.

This is not to claim that established and emerging news media no longer play an important role in these environments, of course, but they are now embedded participants within these spaces rather than separate actors. The imprints of news media outlets no longer serve as the structural centre of online (or offline) debates; rather, publics form around the events and issues that are currently driving societal debates, and are given a digital manifestation on social media in the form of user-defined *Twitter* hashtag communities, *Facebook* pages and groups, and networks of interaction between users within their overlapping personal publics. For journalism, this means "a slow and subtle shift … in the consensual notion of serving the public, as it moves from a pri-

mar[il]y top-down meaning to an increasingly bottom-up application" (Deuze 2005: 455).

It is important not to misread this as a simple replacement of one medium of news dissemination and engagement by another, then; what has happened here instead is the emergence of new channels for a more multi-directional, networked discussion and evaluation of the news amongst multiple actors that have gradually shifted the power over news agenda-setting and framing away from the established news industry. Therefore, our understanding of

> the emergence of digital and social media needs to move beyond simple models of substitutions versus complementarities, as they have created a much more complex ecosystem for the creation and distribution of news. Similarly, any simple view of competition versus substitution of the Fourth and Fifth Estates needs to be refined to encompass this more inter-related ecology. (Newman *et al.* 2012: 17)

We must also avoid a merely technological perspective on these changes, as Hermida warns: "by and large, journalism practices have become more technologised, with reporters doing old things in new ways, rather than negotiating the transition to a post-industrial knowledge society" (2014: 364). New social media technologies have clearly enabled the development of a range of new practices amongst both journalists and news users, yet in doing so have only, finally, provided the technological supports for forms of news engagement that had already long been envisaged or demanded by journalists, journalism scholars, and news audiences. Talking back at the news and challenging the news frames offered by mainstream media is nothing new for news audiences—they have done so in private since before news became an industry. Social media have simply provided a new channel through which news users can do so more directly, more visibly, and with more hope of kickstarting a public discussion that may also involve other news users and even the journalists and societal actors directly involved in a given story.

Ultimately, then, "the question now is not whether journalism has changed, but *how* it is changing" (Tandoc Jr. 2014: 560), and what implications this has for the relationship between journalists and news users, between news organisations and their intended audiences. "Journalism as we know it is in search of a redefinition of its purpose and social contract, as well as a reconstitution of its boundaries, which have become alarmingly fuzzy with the rise of participatory modes of communication" (Hanitzsch 2013: 200), and Hermida suggests that in this redefinition of journalism's purpose it is crucial that "participation is prioritised over publication, shar-

ing over owning, change over stability, abundance over scarcity, relationships over information delivery" (2014: 365). If this seems to be a radical departure from traditional modes of journalism, then in light of the rapid transformation of other aspects of society in recent years it this is only appropriate and necessary; however, there is reason to hope that journalism can survive this transformation, as Hanitzsch points out: "even in a time of an ongoing and partly fundamental reconstitution of public and private communication, to which the internet has contributed in many substantial ways, the essence of journalism has remained remarkably robust over time" (Hanitzsch 2013: 202).

Indeed, perhaps the most fundamental change here is not in how the news industry generates its stories, but in how it engages with its users. Deuze foresees a "shift towards a co-creative mode when engaging with contemporary society" (2009: 315), and this shift is represented perhaps in former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger's vision of "a mutualized newspaper. … We have to get over this journalistic arrogance that journalists are the only people who are the pickers of authority in the world. I don't think anybody believes that now" (2010: n.p.; cf. Bruno 2011: 38 ff.). For Rusbridger this means that

> our readers have become part of what we do. They write commentaries for our Comment is Free site—they have helped with investigations into tax avoidance and police brutality. They form communities around individual reporters and issues, lending a hand with research and ideas, bringing us up short when we get things wrong. They have collaborated on big projects needing resources beyond our scope. We have done things that would have been impossible without them. In return we give them a more diverse form of journalism and the visibility that comes from a platform that reaches some 30 million unique users a month—two thirds of them outside the U.K. (2009: n.p.)

In this context, it is no surprise that *The Guardian* was also one of the leading early proponents of the liveblogging format ahead of its gradual adoption by a broader range of online news outlets; the liveblog, in its blending of news media and social media logics, serves as a key example for the mutualisation of news processes between journalists and users that Rusbridger sketches out here.

Other leading journalism scholars agree with this aim: as Beckett writes, for instance, "journalism is too important to be left to journalists and too valuable to be left to chance or crude market forces. Networking journalism is not just an option, it is an imperative and a necessity" (2010: 16). This repositions both the journalists and their audiences, of course: while it pushes journal-

ists to move further towards the curatorial role we have explored in previous chapters, it also requires news users to engage in an active, constructive, and sustained manner with the reshaped journalistic content they can now encounter and share. Only this also makes it possible for journalists to move "beyond the 'us' and 'them' arguments … and [explore] ways of collaborating with readers, bloggers, and other generators of ideas, words, news, analysis, pictures, and data" (Rusbridger 2009: n.p.). In the end, the more such ongoing, equitable, and respectful engagement between journalists and news users becomes the norm, the more it may also "help the profession reconnect with their community and rebuild its faith in the social function of the journalist" (Turner 2009: 392).

Not least because some hold-outs amongst professional journalists continue to cling against all odds to their privileged societal positions as gatekeepers and agenda-setters, rejecting any increased engagement with ordinary news users as an affront against their professional self-understanding, and because some segments of the news audience, rightly or wrongly frustrated with the mainstream coverage of 'their' topics, have come to reject the news industry altogether, the rebuilding to such mutual trust still faces considerable hurdles. Away from such extreme positions, however, the growth in participatory initiatives that build on "the recognition of a new or modified power relationship between news users and producers, as well as between amateur and professional journalists" (Deuze 2009: 316), especially as initiated by some of the leading global news organisations, offers some hope for more constructive engagement between journalists and news users. Indeed, Lewis even points to "the emergence of an 'ethic of participation', seeded in a hybrid resolution of the professional–participatory tension, that envisions audience integration as a normative goal of a truly digital journalism" (2012: 851–52). Those news outlets that were 'born digital'—carrying no organisational or attitudinal baggage from a previous, pre-digital existence—may be best placed to take an early leadership in this endeavour (Newman *et al.* 2015: 17); however, it should be noted that venerable news organisations with a long history in other media forms (such as the BBC or *The Guardian*) have also established themselves as major innovators in the field.

This may be important also because—in spite of the considerable public take-up of social and other digital media across many developed and developing nations—the future of journalism still cannot consist of digital solutions alone. As *BBC News* director James Harding has pointed out,

> the digital future is fabulous, but it is not fair. The internet is enabling us to tell more stories in more engaging ways to more people than ever before. But there is a widening information gap between people online and those offline, an emerging generational divide in news consumption, a greater imbalance in reporter numbers between news organisations and uneven patterns in the fewer stories that seem to get ever bigger audiences and the many more that do not. (2015: 86)

Those—mostly older—news organisations that span multiple media forms, from digital to broadcast or even to print have a particularly crucial role to play here, as they are also best able to carry active public debates from digital into non-digital contexts and vice versa. More can perhaps be done here to ensure the greatest possible inclusivity, for instance by attempting to translate some of the innovative participatory approaches now being utilised in online environments to complementary offline formats, by facilitating unhindered information flows across these different formats, and by ensuring that public discussions and debates can thus become disconnected from the platforms on which they may be conducted. But news users also have a crucial role to play here, and have traditionally already played it: crucially, as we have already seen, their newssharing activities not only involve the horizontal passing on of information from one social media public to another, but also the vertical sharing of information gleaned from social media spaces to face-to-face communication and other forms of interpersonal engagement. This must continue, and any retreat into purely digital environments would be counterproductive.

An Industry in Transformation

As Schudson puts it, then, "whether the current moment of transformation should be welcomed or deplored is something on which people may differ" (2013: 194). On the one hand, Rusbridger suggests that "this feels like some kind of emergency" (2009: n.p.), and Deuze similarly anticipates—somewhat more contradictorily—"an inevitable catastrophe that hopefully will not take place" (2009: 317). Both write this in 2009, however, and the crisis narrative has now been around in journalism for so long that it has itself become normalised; journalism has managed to outlive its imminent death for a surprisingly long time by now. One reason for this may be that journalism has always been in flux: "much is changing today, and changing quickly, but it is not changing from a settled, static set of practices" (Schudson 2013: 193). In

other words, eternally concerned with the new, the currently happening, perhaps journalism itself is also eternally transforming, eternally adjusting to the media and communicative environments within which it operates—"journalism continuously reinvents itself" (Deuze 2005: 447).

This almost certainly also involves the further transformation of journalism's industrial structures, and the observations made throughout this book point to a number of possible developments in this context. Heinrich envisages "network journalism" as "a completely revised organizational form of the entire media system as such, which impacts all news distribution platforms from print, via radio through to television as well as online journalism", and "explains the structure of journalistic systems in the digital age" (Heinrich 2008: 5); one of the obvious questions emerging from this, then, is what the individual journalistic components connecting with each other in this networked system are going to be.

To begin with, Deuze has pointed to the considerable changes in the relationship between journalists and news organisations: writing in 2009, he notes that

> the international news industry is contractually governed by what the International Federation of Journalists in 2006 euphemistically described as 'atypical work', which means all kinds of freelance, casualized, informal, and otherwise contingent labor arrangements that effectively individualize each and every worker's rights or claims regarding any of the services offered by employers in the traditional sense. (2009: 316)

In this environment, whose rules are set in part also because of the considerable economic challenges facing a news industry that struggles to remain financially sustainable, journalism has become a precarious profession; a growing proportion of graduates from journalism courses now find their employment in more or less closely related jobs outside the news industry proper, for instance.

But the picture is more mixed than this downbeat assessment might indicate. For instance, while Turner similarly acknowledges that "the prospects for traditional journalism are looking grim", he also points out that "at the same time, the public has never had such comprehensive access to news, and new kinds of journalism are emerging through online or satellite platforms" (2009: 390). In this environment, even as employment prospects in conventional news outlets decline, the more personal branding of journalists as important voices in the news that we have observed in Chapter 5 may also create new opportunities for newsworkers prepared to go it alone and build a sustainable freelance career.

Tunstall therefore suggests that "increasingly it will be selected individual journalists, rather than newspapers, who will be able to demonstrate their integrity, independence and good judgement" (2009: 389), and even envisages an entertainment-derived system in which "journalists will have agents who will get them onto more and more platforms" (389). At the same time, however, this may also raise new questions about the motivations and integrity of the journalists who depend on constant public exposure in this way; "the expansion of the supply of news has not necessarily opened the door to a journalism which defines itself through professional training, a code of ethics, an editorial regime, and a principled focus on verifiable news and information" (Turner 2009: 390), and the growing personalisation of journalistic branding may result in the end in a further transition of professional roles from journalist-as-reporter to journalist-as-pundit.

At the same time, Russell usefully reminds us that "that gloomy story is a narrow business story, where the mainstream news industry is conflated with the much wider news, information and communication culture" (2009: 365). If we widen our perspective beyond the conventional frameworks of industrial news production, it also becomes obvious that quality news content continues to be generated, if sometimes in new, unfamiliar forms and frameworks and conducted by new journalistic or quasi-journalistic institutions with limited track records in the industry. Lowrey suggests that this is typical for an industry experiencing substantial disruption and transformation:

> this emergence of small entrepreneurial entities during disruptive times can encourage boundary spanning by larger entities. When emerging entities develop recognizable boundaries, larger organizations interact with them, usually without changing their core practices …. This describes the digital era, as news outlets partner with journalism startups (some of whom are former employees). (2015: 146)

A range of recent cases exemplify this trend. Before its more recent descent into becoming an outright partisan propaganda pipeline favouring a range of so-called 'alt-right', neo-fascist causes and organisations, for instance, the *WikiLeaks* model was not only to serve as an independent platform for the release of whistleblower documents, but also to partner with leading worldwide news organisations in order to ensure the broadest possible impact for its revelations. Even if such collaborations proved unsustainable in the particular case of *WikiLeaks* itself—due chiefly to the diverging personal agendas of the leading actors involved here—the overall "logic of the leak" (Bieber 2013)

that *WikiLeaks* established in its heyday has outlived it, and a variety of other whistleblower platforms and frameworks have emerged to replace *WikiLeaks*.

Baack, for instance, has demonstrated this extension of *WikiLeaks*' "logic of the leak" in the 2016 coverage of the 'Panama Papers', a vast collection of information about the activities of Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca in facilitating tax evasion for its global client base. He notes that "the work and discourse around the Panama Papers read as … an attempt not to copy WikiLeaks, but to adapt the practices … while simultaneously maintaining and expanding long-standing journalistic practices and identities" (2016: n.p.). Crucially, the processing of the leaked information was facilitated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), "a journalistic organisation that has been around much longer than WikiLeaks" (n.p.) but which has risen to global prominence only much more recently. "The Panama Papers demonstrate how much news media have normalised leaking since WikiLeaks 'disrupted' journalism in 2010. … The way journalists deal with and rationalise those leaks has been 'routinised' and fit into their professional identity" (n.p.), and ICIJ has become a key institution in facilitating this normalisation.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists is one example for how "the unprofitable heartland of investigative … news is seeking to remove itself from the market completely with non-profit funding models and broad-based alliances" (Newman *et al.* 2016: 32), and across various national mediaspheres we are likely to see an increasing number of such alliances between news outlets and journalists, but also with other, non-journalistic organisations that have a meaningful contribution to make to such initiatives. This addresses Heinrich's call that "organizational structures in today's print, broadcast and online platforms need to be reassessed according to the dynamics of an evolving global news sphere—not least through developing a 'new' sense of connectivity" (2008: 2). Indeed, the same sentiment is echoed by the BBC in 2015's major *Future of News* report, which also highlights the significant complexity of many major investigations:

> are there ways to look at healthcare, the drug trade, modern slavery, energy, cyber security that are properly global? The atomised approach news generally takes to such stories may be inadequate for domestic and global audiences—not because our audiences suddenly see themselves as global citizens but because of the nature of the stories. (BBC 2015: 24)

Such challenges, however, are likely to be addressed most effectively by a mix of greater international collaboration *and* greater topical specialisation. Alongside the major international alliances between leading news organisations and global collectives such as ICIJ, therefore, we also find a growing range of bespoke initiatives that focus closely on particular journalistic practices or specific thematic areas. This includes, on the one hand, non-profit investigative outfits like *ProPublica*, which

> give away to traditional newspapers the products of their investigative reporting. … These mostly small and scrappy organizations are dedicated primarily to investigative reporting or 'accountability journalism,' as most conventional newsrooms are not. They are finding ways to make the best of new technologies and new opportunities without giving up the professional dedication that has sometimes, over the long century of its emergence, made journalism worth our highest regard. (Schudson 2013: 199)

On the other hand, Russell also points out that "the market for consistently delivered well-edited beat reporting remains" (2009: 365); topic-specific news outlets that remain in many ways inspired by the citizen journalist sites of the first wave of citizen media have therefore also made a comeback across a range of speciality domains. But rather than situating themselves in opposition to a mainstream media that does not cover these particular topics in sufficient depth, they are now seeking to actively collaborate with such media outlets, and vice versa. Former *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger outlines how such arrangements were established during his tenure:

> the *Guardian* has six reporters doing the environment, but that's not enough to do the environment in reality. There is great content on the environment out there on the web. And so we went to the ten or 20 best web sites and said, why don't you sit on our platform? That way we get great content and they get access to this enormous audience, so I think the collaborative possibilities of the web are the interesting ones. (2010: n.p.)

Even in spite of the downturn in non-professional journalistic activities as the first wave of citizen media faltered, therefore, these practices persist at least in topically specific fields where experts and enthusiasts can operate para-journalistic sites that generate a sustained flow of quality information. This form of citizen journalism "is now so intertwined with the workings of the professional news media that it is hard to imagine citizen journalism—or whatever one wants to call it—disappearing" (Wall 2015: 807).

In this networked, collaborative environment involving a variety of organised and individual, journalistic and non-journalistic stakeholders, then, Heinrich sees public service media organisations as the "'supernodes' within an evolving globalized network journalism culture that is characterized by 'interactive' practices of newsgathering, production and dissemination" (Heinrich 2008: 1). This central role for public service media emerges largely in response to the pointed question of "who will pay for the resources required by investigative journalists, foreign correspondents and other categories of high-maintenance news-maker?" (McNair 2009: 349): although far from unaffected by the economic struggles of the overall news industry, public service media—relying directly or indirectly on state funding—are somewhat more insulated from the immediate impacts of the troubled revenue models of the commercial news industry. As a result, public service media organisations such as the BBC have become major leaders in journalistic product and process innovation.

Alongside such state-funded models, which are especially popular in European nations with a strong tradition of building state-owned universal infrastructure to address or avert market failure, a range of other models attempt to provide a steady source of funding that is not immediately dependent on the commercial success of the news outlets it supports, and enable those outlets to adopt a strong and independent not-for-profit stance. As Rusbridger explains, for instance,

> *The Guardian* is currently loss-making, but is supported by the Scott Trust, which owns a number of highly profitable businesses. The profits from the non-core businesses are there, according to the trust deed, to support *The Guardian*'s journalism in perpetuity. The idea of readers feeling a kind of ownership of our values and of our editorial content has a more cogent feel to it than if we were in more conventional ownership. (2009: n.p.)

But citizens and their governments will also be required to act in order to safeguard the continued existence and independence of professional journalism from market and political forces. Several news outlets, from small political newsletters to *The Guardian* itself, operate voluntary donation and subscription schemes that draw on the willingness of audiences to financially support quality news outlets even if they are able to freely access their content; such schemes can at least help to subsidise journalistic ventures, even if they are unlikely to fully fund them. Governments, too, could further support the news industry by providing more favourable tax breaks and other initiatives that

ease the financial stresses currently facing the industry, without creating a perception of political interference with the freedom of journalistic coverage. "In the end we have to confront the question of how we subsidize something society needs and where there is evident market failure. For the first time since the Enlightenment, communities are faced with the prospect of living without verifiable sources of news" (Rusbridger 2009: n.p.)—and while, as we have seen throughout this book, social media now play an increasingly important role in news dissemination and engagement and could thus address some of this market failure, journalistic news outlets do remain an important source of the news that circulates here.

Towards a Social News Media Network

Against the backdrop of the preceding discussion, which highlighted as yet unresolved problems with the current business models of existing news operations and pointed only to possible solutions that have not yet been tested outside of a handful of special cases, it may seem surprising that Russell stated confidently in 2009 that "the practice—if not necessarily the profession—of journalism might be seen as heading in the best possible direction" (2009: 366). However, as we have seen time and again, the disruption of the established news industry by digital and social media was not actually caused by a growing apathy towards the news, but rather by the desire of millions of news users to become more actively involved in identifying, sharing, and discussing the news. From this perspective, then,

> yes, business models are in flux, jobs are vanishing and the news industry as we have known it is in late-stage critical condition. But as anyone with an internet connection knows, news is thriving. Profits may be down but information is up. The amount of news material produced each day, access to that material, varieties in form and content, participation in the making and disseminating of it—it's all booming. (Russell 2009: 365)

This assessment continues to hold true today, and as a result professional journalism has become "enclosed, challenged, and partly subsumed by a more expansive sense of news production, which blurs definitions of what constitutes news and its producers" (Revers 2014: 809). Further still, Bell suggests that with the growing centrality of social media as platforms for all forms of news engagement "the existential question of a decade ago 'who is a journalist?' … has been replaced by 'who is a publisher?'" (2015: 89). Once answer to this,

surely, must now be *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and the many other established and emerging social media spaces through which journalism and news engagement is being conducted in the contemporary media environment, even if—for legal and regulatory reasons—such platforms themselves have so far sought to distance themselves as much as possible from any formal responsibility for the content that their users share here.

But as the flare-up of public debate about the role of 'fake news' in the aftermath of the U.K. Brexit decision and the U.S. presidential election in 2016 has demonstrated, as soon as these providers are involved in filtering, moderating, and otherwise algorithmically shaping the content that circulates on their platforms, they also assume a considerable editorial responsibility, and exercise significant power over public debate. This must ultimately also raise questions relating to news media policy:

> in Europe there is a highly regulated media environment. Even in the US commercial broadcasters are licensed to operate. By contrast, the largely Silicon Valley-based companies which are growing vast influence in this area remain largely untouched by media regulation in the US (though they are of course subject to copyright, patents, etc.), and strenuously try to avoid it in Europe and other markets. (Bell 2015: 90)

The challenges in this area are immense, however. Not only will the platform providers inevitably use their considerable financial resources and dominant market position to fight any regulations that they believe to be damaging to their commercial interests, but regulators themselves are also unlikely to be able to find the appropriate policy settings if they operate from an understanding of news media that is informed by the structural environments of the mass media age.

Instead, policymakers in this field—but also students of news and journalism, strategists within the industry, and news users—must likely seek to develop a more holistic model that addresses the entire social news media complex as one network of organisational and individual actors that engage, collaborate, and compete with one another on a variety of levels. Ultimately, this is a matter of media literacy: our ability to fully understand the multifaceted and dynamic news environment within which we now operate will continue to be restricted if we continue to apply categorical distinctions between industrial news production and individual news consumption, between professional and citizen journalism, between private and public engagement, that have now outlived their usefulness. We must instead come to regard news as a networked practice involving a wide variety of stakeholders interacting simul-

taneously—rationally and affectively, civically and socially—through a broad range of platforms, channels, formats, and communicative acts. "Journalism will not die out in this environment, because it is needed on so many social, political and cultural levels. Journalism has a future" (McNair 2009: 347), but for better or for worse its future is now as one of a number of news practices conducted alongside each other on a much more level playing field.

This more comprehensive, holistic perspective also avoids an unnecessary conflation of journalism in the narrow, industrial sense with democratic processes. Habermas notes that "some authors consider the political journalism to which we are accustomed [to be] a model that is being phased out", and suggests that "its loss would rob us of the centerpiece of deliberative politics" (2006: 423)—yet this is true only to the extent that other platforms and spaces for deliberation, including social media, will not be able to fill the gaps opened up by this decline. Some scholars would agree with this pessimistic perspective—Yardi and boyd, for instance, state with some conviction that "Twitter is hardly a medium for deliberative democracy" (2010: 317)—, but for others the picture is not so clear: Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, for instance, instead find that social media "seem to provide adequate and relevant information to reinvigorate the democratic process" (2012: 329).

The fundamental question here, of course, is how we might conceptualise deliberative engagement, and where in the complex network of social news media spaces that we have sketched out here we might look for it. Close up, the picture is likely to be quite different depending on whether we examine a highly antagonistic *Twitter* hashtag addressing a controversial political issue, or the everyday newssharing and casual political discussions unfolding across a loose network of personal publics on *Facebook*, on whether we follow the curated social media stream on a *Guardian* liveblog or the conversations between commenters on a politically partisan propaganda site. But from a systemic perspective, all of these are already part of a wider process of societal deliberation, and to look at any of them in isolation would be to misunderstand the networked social news media structure in which we now find ourselves:

> good societies are engaged societies—they are robust and active, dialogical and diverse, freely sharing ideas and information. We might think of this as a 'networked' variation on Habermas'[s] idealized public sphere …, featuring the same animated deliberation, but with a network arrangement that is more horizontal (peer-to-peer), and more representative of marginalized voices *vis-à-vis* 'coffee house' interests. (Lewis 2012: 848)

Indeed, what the holistic social news media network perspective emphasises is that news engagement and deliberation takes place across all spaces of communication, rather than only in the 'proper' deliberative contexts commonly valorised by public sphere theory. As Webster puts it, "there is around the term 'political public sphere' (which Habermas identifies as axial to democracy) a whiff of censure towards those who are less than fully abreast of political circumstances and trends", even though the fact that "people are less than fully engaged in political matters does not mean they are less than wholehearted democrats. It is merely that politics does not consume all of their lives" (2013: 31). The idea of a network of social news media spaces that stretches from the leading news outlets of our day all the way to the personal publics of ordinary social media users instead follows Wright's demand for a "renewed focus … on the informal, everyday political talk that occurs online. Such talk is crucial to civic life and democratic health more generally" (Wright 2012: 7).

This approach realises that in the social news media network, news engagement and political debate "becomes embedded in other contexts in much the same way as face-to-face political discussion might take place in the context of an office, a vehicle, a sporting event, a meal, a pub, or through other public activities. This makes political discourse an extension of other realms of ongoing discourse" (Himelboim *et al.* 2013: 158), and effectively rescues it from the "political junkies" (Coleman 2003) and other usual suspects who had become most centrally identified with news and political discussion during the late mass media age and the first wave of citizen journalism. This demoticisation is not without its challenges, of course; it can—and as recent developments have shown, frequently does—lead to the questioning of established authorities and the undermining of existing hierarchies of agenda-setting and issue-framing. But however painful and confronting such disruptions may at times be, especially for the news industry itself, "democracy refers to something beyond formal structures and procedures" (Dahlgren 2014: 192). We must trust not simply in its inherent resilience against propagandists and demagogues, but instead in the ability of our societies to build on the powerful tools for information and deliberation provided to us by the new social news media network in order to protect and improve our democratic system.

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