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Uses of Twitter and Citizen Journalism: A Comparison of Press Reaction to the September 11th
Terrorist Attacks and the Boston Marathon Bombings

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Uses of Twitter and Citizen Journalism: A Comparison of Press Reaction to the September 11th
Terrorist Attacks and the Boston Marathon Bombings

Boston, Mass—2:50 p.m.—April 15, 2013: “Holy shit! Explosion!”

Kristen Surman tweeted these words just one minute after the explosions went off at Copley Square during the 117th Boston Marathon. She was one of the first to mention the bombings online along with Twitter user DeLo, who tweeted, “Uhh explosions in Boston,” around the same time. Surman does not work for a news station; no one paid or directed her to tweet this information. She simply uses Twitter as an average citizen and happened to witness the heinous act of terror. For nearly ten minutes, regular citizens, like Surman, provided the only information getting to the public. While general users do not typically have the followers or credibility to affect news distribution, they have a presence journalists cannot ignore. Even Twitter itself is transforming the journalism field—many reporters turn to it as a tool for both news gathering and news delivery.

The immediacy of Twitter played a crucial role in the development of the Boston Marathon bombing story because users tweeted about the crisis in real time. They can tweet at any time and from any location, made even easier due to the widespread use of mobile phones (“Twitter”). According to Twitter.com, 500 million tweets are sent per day. Many of these tweets merely describe mundane, day-to-day life: commonly referred to as “lifecasting.” However, during significant events, tweets can easily spread news (Lasorsa). Because Twitter provides a 24-hour live timeline of information, it facilitates “citizen journalism:” reporting done by non-professional journalists, most often online. In times of crisis like the Boston Marathon bombings, citizen journalists provide the fastest, and sometimes the only, information (“Citizen

Journalism”). Additionally, citizen journalists can provide different perspectives that media outlets might not otherwise have access to.

During the September 11th terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Twitter and other social media sites did not exist; therefore, people had to get their updates from traditional outlets, such as television, radio, and newspapers. Approximately 90 percent of Americans received their 9/11 news through television broadcasts, the most popular medium for this crisis (Reynolds and Barnett). These people likely turned to broadcasts because the television coverage began almost immediately after the initial plane crash and continued non-stop in the hours and days following the disaster (Xigen and Izard). Many print organizations did publish special editions regarding the attacks, but could not compete with television for breaking news. So, to get information to the public in a timely manner, some of these outlets turned to the Internet (Randle, Davenport, and Bossen). For people at work who did not have access to a TV or radio, they had no other option for updates. However, media outlets did not typically use websites for distribution on average news days; therefore, the organizations faced many challenges. Web pages often loaded slowly because of increased traffic or large media files. Additionally, many sites, hours after the first crash, did not show any indication that the attacks had even occurred, never mind have the ability to provide updated or timely information (Randle et al). Using the Internet in this way was still a new phenomenon in 2001 because many news organizations did not consider the Internet as a major distribution outlet and those that did often faced technological difficulties.

Over time, methods of communication among people change. Newspapers, formerly called broadsheets, gained prominence starting in the 1600s and 1700s: in 1639 the first printing press arrived in the American colonies. Following this invention, Samuel Morse created the

electric telegraph in the United States during the 1830s, allowing people to contact each other more quickly over long distances. Alexander Graham Bell improved the telegraph to become the telephone in 1876. In the journalism world, the creation of the radio in the late 1800s and early 1900s allowed for the distribution of news throughout the country by voice instead of in print—a major change (Fang). Additionally, the first broadcasting stations, opening in the 1920s, made it possible for news air on the television. Starting in the 1990s, the Internet arrived in the public sphere and continues to revolutionize modern society (Fang).

The online world has since exploded and people today can access any information instantaneously. Smart phones have only increased the speed and range of information exchange. According to Maeve Duggan and Aaron Smith in a 2013 Pew Research Center report, 57 percent of American adults use their phones to go online or check email (Duggan and Smith). The way we receive news has shifted because of the ubiquitous nature of the Internet: We no longer have to wait for the next day's newspaper or the 6:00 news. In 2006, Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Noah Glass, and Biz Stone created Twitter. This social media website has proven to be especially influential during times of crisis because of how many people have access to it. At the beginning of 2011, Forbes.com reported Twitter had reached about 200 million users (Chiang). The demographics as of November 2015, according to Twitter.com, state that there are 320 million monthly active users. Twitter has only increased its influence in the public sphere; meaning, it continues to affect the journalism world.

Because of the constantly changing mediums, journalists have to always consider the effects on ethical principles. The Society of Professional Journalists' *Code of Ethics* (updated September 2014) lists four major ethical categories that journalists should respect: seek truth and report it, minimize harm, act independently, and be accountable and transparent (*Code of Ethics*).

Journalists should always provide the most accurate and non-biased information possible; they must verify both information and sources as well as provide context, relevant source material, and attributions within the report. To minimize harm, journalists have to respect all parties involved in covering a story including sources they interact with, the subjects of the story, and the public. In this sense, journalists need to find a balance between having compassion for human beings and releasing a story. Acting independently means providing information to the public because of the inherent duty, rather than for gifts or benefits. Finally, accountability and transparency mean admitting and correcting mistakes both in a story's content and ethical decisions. It also means explaining clearly any methods used and decisions made in reporting a story (*Code of Ethics*). Despite common revisions to the *Code of Ethics*, these basic principles remain the same.

Even with guidelines to follow, journalists sometimes find themselves in situations where they overlook aspects of media ethics. During times of crisis, the limited information and hectic situation often make it hard for journalists to follow all of the rules. They often try to release as much information as possible, sometimes reporting rumors or inaccurate statements and citing anonymous or non-credible sources (Reynolds and Barnett). Additionally, crises like the Boston Marathon bombings or the September 11th attacks can be traumatizing for the public, so the media has to decide where to draw the line between newsworthy and inconsiderate. In the digital age, journalists need to take extra precautions because anything can find its way online and spread with extraordinary speed, regardless of its truth. News outlets will inevitably make mistakes, especially during chaotic and potentially dangerous situations; therefore, a journalist needs to deliver the accurate and timely information to the best of his or her ability. In today's world, the Internet and social media provide the fastest outlet for news.

With Twitter being so new, its lasting impact on the journalism world remains unknown. However, by comparing the media coverage of the September 11th terrorist attacks to the Boston Marathon bombings, we can see the role that Twitter plays in the spread of news during crisis situations. In the past, when an event occurred, the public would learn about it by the complete and official news reports. People would automatically turn to radio, print, or broadcast for the information journalists spent their day compiling and confirming. Today, social media alters the cycle. This thesis aims to examine how Twitter and citizen journalism have reshaped the professional journalism process and how they likely will continue to affect news distribution. While there are both positives and negatives to Twitter and citizen journalism, the Internet is too pervasive for journalists to still rely exclusively on their traditional methods.

Literature Review

Advances in technology, such as the Internet and smartphones, have changed the face of news distribution, regardless of journalists' opinions. The evolution of technology includes the invention of the microblogging site Twitter in 2006: met by some with uncertainty and resistance and by others with excitement and anticipation. Twitter's 140-character limit and the tendency for users to post trivial messages mystified people, especially in the journalism world. However, as more people and journalists began embracing the site, Twitter became a hot spot for the spread of news.

Although many journalists have positively adapted their practices for Twitter, some hesitate to embrace it because of the potential consequences like the inability to keep personal life separate from professional life or heightened risk for posting inaccurate information. Social media heightens this risk because of widespread citizen journalism. Now, with non-professionals constantly posting news information, pictures, and videos, something inaccurate

could go viral. However, citizen journalism does not influence the field in only negative ways—it can provide media professionals with a wide variety of information. Even with journalists learning how to best employ Twitter in their work, the struggle is far from over. In 2006, some journalists immediately opposed Twitter while some supported it. In 2014, this discrepancy still exists because journalists are still trying to answer their questions: do the benefits outweigh the consequences, what is the most effective way to embrace Twitter, and will Twitter last long-term?

Original Reception by Journalists

Because Twitter differs from traditional journalistic practices, many journalists felt it threatened the field. Some avoided it altogether, while others tried Twitter only to determine it has more problems than benefits. Maureen Dowd, an editorial columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote an article titled “To Tweet or Not to Tweet,” emphasizing her anti-Twitter opinion in April 2009. In her article, Dowd transcribed an interview with two co-founders of Twitter: Biz Stone and Evan Williams. She emphasizes that when an employee of ABC News tweets about his broken shower pouring out brown water or when a woman posts about her father’s funeral, Twitter is “destroying civilization” (Dowd). Either the tweets show useless information (such as the shower) or they should remain private (like with the funeral). Dowd ends her article by saying, “I would rather be tied up to stakes in the Kalahari Desert, have honey poured over me and red ants eat out my eyes than open a Twitter account” (Dowd). However, three months after writing the article, Dowd opened a professional Twitter account. Even though Dowd completely rejected the site, the pressure from the field or from *The New York Times* pushed her in the direction of social media. Despite having to incorporate Twitter into her career, Dowd

approaches the site in a minimalist and traditional manner: she only posts links to *New York Times* articles.

Other professionals had a similar adverse reaction to Twitter. Journalist Marc Gunther posted a blog article on his personal website in 2009 explaining why he believes Twitter stands out as a marketing tool over a platform for breaking news. Gunther enthusiastically embraced Twitter in the beginning: he helped incorporate a hashtag for a Brainstorm Green sustainability event, so participants could live tweet and easily follow the stream of information (Gunther). The character limit of Twitter facilitates brevity and the ability to access the site on mobile devices allows users to tweet immediately from any location; therefore, the site thrives on live updates. However, Gunther argues that the immediacy of Twitter can cause inaccuracies to spread. During a panel at the Brainstorm Green event, Gunther reported misinformation regarding carbon emissions, which caused an uproar in the Twitter sphere. Gunther concluded that covering events live as a participant is nearly impossible because it does not provide adequate time to check facts. Also, with mistakes on Twitter, users cannot tell how far the misinformation spread before the correction. (Gunther). In the beginning, journalists like Maureen Dowd and Marc Gunther only saw the negatives of using Twitter for professional journalism. Many journalists did not know how to best incorporate it into the field, because of how different it appeared. Dowd and Gunther argue that Twitter encourages radical and inaccurate approaches to news; therefore, traditional practices are more effective.

Not all journalists initially rejected Twitter; many immediately saw its benefits. Rather than viewing Twitter as destroying the journalism field, some professionals see Twitter as supplementing and, in some cases, revolutionizing it. For example, a *Nieman Report* journalist, John Dickerson, commented in a 2008 article titled “Don’t Fear Twitter” that Twitter’s informal

feel creates the perfect platform for brief “pieces of color” that journalists pick up when covering a full story or for drastic and chaotic events such as the September 11th terrorist attacks (Dickerson). He believes Twitter will neither destroy nor replace traditional practices. Rather, Dickerson notes that Twitter should merely be used as a complement to these practices. Other journalists also had positive reactions to Twitter entering the journalism field. Noah Arceneaux and Amy Schmitz Weiss conducted a study analyzing the press coverage of this social media site during the first three years after its creation: 2006-2009. After analyzing a purposeful sample of 237 newspaper articles, magazine articles, and blog posts, the researchers discovered that journalists had mostly positive reactions to Twitter. Even the articles that incorporated negative comments typically had at least one positive element to them (Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss).

Since Twitter’s inception in 2006, journalists still have not come to a consensus on the site’s place in the field. Paul Farhi’s article in the *American Journalism Review* in 2009 claims journalistic tweeting can be both meaningful and irrelevant, depending on the situation. He emphasizes that Twitter’s speed can keep up with rapidly-changing events and its “social” aspect encourages exchange of information; however, there is no guidance for journalists should use it (Farhi). When the journalism field first embraced Twitter, people had doubts. Even if they saw the potential of this site, journalists hesitated with how to best use it and what effects it would have on the field when put into practice. Journalists in the beginning merely speculated on what benefits or consequences Twitter would have because they did not have enough experience using it. Journalists are still learning and experimenting with the different ways to incorporate Twitter. Therefore, the more practice journalists have using a microblogging site for news, the easier it becomes to see the effects of Twitter.

Embracing Twitter in the Journalism Field

Over its lifetime, Twitter shifted from a messaging platform to a source for posting and receiving information. With this change in the website itself, the view and use of Twitter changed. Alfred Hermida analyzes the relationship between Twitter and journalism practices in his 2009 article “#Journalism: Reconfiguring journalism research about Twitter, one tweet at a time.” He notes that Twitter originally posed the question “what are you doing?” to users when they logged in. However, this question changed to “what’s happening?” in 2009 (Hermida). This shift shows how popular Twitter became in terms of spreading news. “What are you doing?” prompted users to tweet about trivial aspects of their lives, but “what’s happening?” had users looking at events around them, thus enabling the spread of news. A September 2014 Pew Research Center article reported that 16 percent of U.S. adults use Twitter in general and eight percent of U.S. adults use Twitter for news specifically (Anderson and Caumont). Half of all adult Twitter users receive, discuss, or promote news on the site; therefore, journalists can use Twitter to effectively promote their stories and reach this audience.

Twitter has elements that make it more useful for news distribution than other social media sites, such as Facebook. The Pew Research Center conducted another study in February 2014 analyzing how people use Twitter and speculated whether Twitter would survive alongside Facebook. According to the research, Twitter fosters different “crowds” on the site, each revolving around a certain type of conversation including political sphere, community information, and breaking news (Smith et al). These crowds imply that the conversation happening on Twitter largely reflects the news.

When compared to Facebook, Twitter stands out as the news distributor. The Pew Research Center’s studies show Twitter is a more public social media website than Facebook because users do not have to become mutually agreed upon “friends” to see each other’s posts;

therefore, Twitter users can simply follow journalists and news outlets to easily receive updates (Brenner). Additionally, access to the site from any location encourages live reporting of an event, a useful element to modern journalism. When compared to other social media, like Facebook, Twitter stands out as the leading mobile site. Approximately 54 percent of people who use Twitter for news often receive this news on a mobile device while only 38 percent of Facebook users get their news this way (Holcolm, Gottfried, and Mitchell). Even though other social media sites are older than Twitter, journalists embrace it because, so far, it has proven to be a useful format for breaking and discussing news. Journalists want to use the websites that their readers use; therefore, they need to embrace Twitter.

Part of the shift to journalists accepting Twitter as a useful news platform includes organizations releasing guidelines for the best use of microblogging. As more journalists create accounts and become familiar with the website, they can see what works and what does not work for the field. Many news organizations have released social media guidelines outlining the proper way to handle news distribution over Twitter. Guidelines from news outlets such as Associated Press and National Public Radio cover aspects of journalistic tweeting such as avoiding bias in tweets and in people you follow, verifying facts and Twitter accounts, identifying as a professional journalist, and remembering that even private conversations on social media can become public (Memmott and Thompson; *Social Media Guidelines for AP Employees*). Organizations take the time to draft guidelines for using Twitter; meaning, news outlets are taking this social media site seriously. Even though journalists are still learning and experimenting with it, Twitter has progressed from a foreign website to a popular news platform.

How Journalists Appear to Use Twitter Today?

Social media sites, especially Twitter, bring journalistic practices into the digital age. In order to keep up with the field, many journalists have no choice but to develop a social media presence. According to a study conducted by Lars Willnat and David H. Weaver, approximately 54 percent of U.S. journalists “regularly” use microblogs for their work (Willnat and Weaver). They mostly use social media to keep up with events happening in the community. Approximately 78 percent of journalists use social media to check for breaking news, about 73 percent monitor other news outlets, and almost 60 percent find ideas for stories through social media (Willnat and Weaver). The research suggests that journalists actually use Twitter in more ways than simply marketing their publications. Even though about 80 percent of journalists say social media is an effective promotional platform, almost 70 percent say social media allows them to engage more with readers (Willnat and Weaver). Twitter allows for a conversation between the reporter and the audience and many journalists take advantage of this feature.

Due to the rise in Twitter use, journalists now have the opportunity to adapt their news distribution methods. The British newspaper, *The Guardian*, has used Twitter in modern ways. This newspaper has fully embraced the influence of Twitter and submersed itself in the digital age. According to Ali Nobil Ahmad’s analysis of *The Guardian’s* use of Twitter, the newspaper not only tweets links to each story published, but also encourages journalists to establish a conversation with the audience (Ahmad). Journalists no longer passively tweet links to their stories; rather, they speak directly to Twitter users and ensure these users are aware of the journalists’ presence on the site. The journalism field previously did not have this opportunity. In a study conducted by Dominic Lasorsa, Seth Lewis, and Avery Holton, journalists deviated from traditional practices when using microblogging websites. Through analysis of the tweets from the 500 most followed journalists on Twitter, the researchers discovered that 43 percent of the

tweets were at least in part, if not primarily, opinion (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton). With traditional methods, journalists generally do not publish opinion; however, microblogging creates a grey area between personal and professional life for journalists; therefore, inserting opinion can seem more acceptable in this format. Similarly, journalists in the study did not solely report their own newsworthy information; they also tweeted about their jobs and personal lives, participated in discussions, retweeted other users, and linked to their news organization as well as outside sources. These actions provided accountability and transparency for the journalists (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton). Microblogging is a unique practice: opinion, accountability, and transparency can become more common in the news distribution process. Journalists become more open in their reporting and sometimes even involve the audience. However, many people still debate whether these changes benefit or detract from the journalism field.

Despite the positives that some researchers and journalists find in Twitter, others have a more negative view of the site. Even after six years of using Twitter, journalists have not perfected their methods. Dominic Crossley comments in his 2012 article "Twitter, Twit....Writ?" that Twitter could destroy essential parts of traditional journalism. For example, he explains the problem of libel through Twitter because people, especially news outlets, do not adequately fact check (Crossley). Crossley mentions the case of Lord McAlpine who, after a BBC report, was falsely accused of child sex abuse on social media. The accusation went viral and McAlpine originally intended to sue the thousands of people who tweeted or retweeted the libel. McAlpine eventually dropped his claims on anyone with less than 500 followers; however, this action still left most journalists targeted (Halliday). This case shows how Twitter, because of its informal nature, unintentionally promotes sloppiness in the spread of news (Crossley).

Even though many people see Twitter as expanding journalism—giving journalists the opportunity to interact with the audience and get information to the public quickly—cases like the controversy surrounding Lord McAlpine show that the benefits of Twitter do not come without consequences.

Additionally, some journalists and researchers do not believe that Twitter will have any drastic impact on the journalism field. A study conducted by Megan Knight addressed the fact that journalists might claim they use Twitter more often than they actually do. She analyzed articles during the Iranian elections in 2009 in terms of what sources were quoted and what line of communication lead the reporters to these sources. For example, Knight discovered that only four percent of the articles used and identified social media as the method for acquiring information. Instead, the articles mostly identified personal communication (20 percent) and official statements (12 percent), which are both traditional methods (Knight). Knight concluded that despite what modern journalists may believe, when they actually report news, journalists rely on “textbook journalism” rather than modern forms using Twitter (Knight). Therefore, Twitter does not appear to have a significant impact on the field. These differences in opinion and research can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that Twitter is still a new platform.

The World of Citizen Journalism

With the explosion of the Internet, average citizens have the opportunity to post pictures, videos, comments, or stories to a worldwide audience. This technology expanded the influence citizens have on the media and the spread of news. Even back to the 18th century with Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* and the Federalist Papers, citizens expressed their view on the world through publications. New technologies allowed bystanders to capture events on video such as with the assassination of John. F. Kennedy or the police beating of Rodney King (Glaser). In our

modern world, social media makes it even easier for people to get their information to the public. Therefore, citizen journalism has only increased in recent years. Twitter created a public forum for both professional and non-professional journalists to collaborate in the gathering, distributing, and filtering of news (“The People Formerly Known as the Audience”). The conversation-style media that arises from this new format changes the role of journalists in many ways. For example, journalists are no longer the sole collectors and distributors of news—they now have adopted the role of monitoring and enhancing the online news world. They add accurate and valuable information in the conversation because the public still views them as reliable (“The People Formerly Known as the Audience”). Citizen journalism is a prominent force influencing the journalism field; therefore, news outlets cannot ignore its presence, regardless of their desire to incorporate it or not.

Why do many citizens gravitate towards participating in the cycle of news? To involve themselves? Just because they can due to new technologies? Because they feel essential to the media? Martha Jack’s study of citizen journalists attempts to answer these questions. She determined, through surveys, that citizen journalists mostly value their ability to both share and generate information with other people. On the other hand, the citizen journalists felt least motivated by the fact reporting fills their free time. Other top motivators included being an informer to an audience, making use of the right to free speech, and simply exercising a passion for writing (Jack). Jack’s results emphasize citizen journalists’ dedication to their work—they will not likely cease their contributions to the news.

Citizen journalists can involve themselves in the news distribution cycle in a variety of ways. Non-professional journalists can post about news through social media sites, blogs, and wikis. Some news stations, especially larger organizations, have created apps, such as the CBS

EyeMobile app, where users can quickly upload photos, videos, and accounts of events on the spot (Ostrow). Other news outlets have separate websites where contributors can submit content to help journalists hear different voices and see various perspectives about a topic. CNN iReport and Fox News uReport are two popular websites that approach citizen journalism this way (Ostrow). However, many citizen journalists want to produce unaffiliated news stories. These people can create their own blog through sites such as WordPress, Blogger, or Square Space or they can contribute to an independent citizen journalism website such as AllVoices, Examiner.com, or WikiNews. These websites allow contributors to write, edit, collaborate, or discuss current event topics (“How it Works;” “Wikinews: What Wikinews is;” “Write for Examiner.com”). Because of the extent of the Internet, citizen journalists publish information in a variety of formats; therefore, this type of contribution to the spread of news seems unlikely to disappear.

The pervasive influence of citizen journalism has sparked controversy within the professional journalism field. Similar to other changes from social media, citizen journalism creates a split between professionals who believe it destroys the standard and quality of journalistic writing and those who believe it is a useful asset. A study from 2009, conducted in Texas, of 29 small-newspaper editors, determined 11 editors disagreed with incorporating citizen journalism in professional newsrooms and 18 agreed with the practice. Some editors who disagreed with citizen journalism cited reasons such as the fact journalism requires training and practice (thus it should be reserved for professionals only) or that the lack of knowledge of the practice and the ethics involved will detract from the credibility of a legitimate news source. Others observed practical hardships that would arise through using citizen journalists, such as feeling obligated to thoroughly check citizen-produced articles for mistakes or inaccuracies and

having to monitor those who only want to participate to broadcast a biased or slandered message (Lewis, Kaufhold, and Lasorsa).

On the other hand, more than half of the interviewed editors had positive opinions of citizen journalism. Some of these professionals commented that incorporating citizen-produced news is the inevitable future of the field due to technological progress. Public involvement allows for unique voices to emerge and greater accountability within the media because of criticisms or feedback that arise from the communities. In terms of practicality, some approving editors believe citizens fill gaps in news gathering and distribution that the professional staff cannot cover. Therefore, news outlets can include a wide variety of stories and subjects in their publications or broadcasts (Lewis, Kaufhold, and Lasorsa). The discrepancy within the field leaves the future of citizen journalism uncertain. The field is still reacting to the newly developed technologies and the changes that come with them, such as more citizens wanting to participate in the news cycle.

As journalists gain more experience dealing with contributions from citizens, they will more clearly see the effects of this facet of journalism. One study exposed and educated students on both traditional and civic journalistic practices. The researchers then analyzed the changes to journalism students' attitudes towards traditional beliefs, reporter-reader interaction, and community activism in the field. The results indicate that the students' views of objectivity, neutrality, and emphasis on conflict did not have a significant change after exposure to the more open practice of citizen journalism. However, this result did not reflect the students' overall opinions of citizen journalism. Their attitudes towards reporter-reader interaction showed a slight positive change and their attitudes towards journalists being active within the community showed the most significant positive change of the study (Anyaeibunam and Ryan). Although

the researchers conducted the study in 2003, before the invention of Twitter, its results show that after exposure to the civic journalistic practices, student journalists had more positive attitudes toward this form of journalism. Therefore, journalists who take the time to understand and experience citizen journalism may find that its norms benefit the professional practice.

Citizen journalists positively affect the journalism field during times of crisis. Through websites such as Twitter, citizen journalists can instantaneously post warnings, personal experiences, and general information to the public. The nature of Twitter allows for a live stream of posts which helps the public during quickly-changing disaster situations. Professional news outlets often do not have the time or the exposure to report disaster situations fully and timely; therefore, they can collect and verify the information posted by citizens and publish a formal article (Murthy 70-91). In this publication, I will address this facet of citizen journalism on Twitter by examining crisis situations such as the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013 and the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. A comparison between these two events emphasizes the effects that Twitter, especially citizen reporting on Twitter, has on breaking news. Also, I examine whether my own research confirms or refutes the existing literature. Ultimately, I analyze the hybridity of modern journalism through the changes that Twitter has facilitated within the field.

Methodology

In order to address my research questions, I interviewed a variety of journalists, in both print and broadcast, on their experiences with the September 11th and Boston Marathon crises. Talking with employees of news publications allows me to gather information directly from the source. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Journalists A and B worked in the same broadcast station during the September 11th terrorist attacks. While Journalist A remained with the same organization during the Boston Marathon bombings, Journalist B transitioned to work as a city communications specialist. She did, however, remain in contact with the news station. Journalists C and D worked in the print field. They stayed with the same publication throughout both events.

With the information collected from these journalists, I analyze how professional news outlets utilize Twitter and citizen-generated reports in general as well as compare use during the aforementioned events. I comment on how this small sample compares to the literature on these topics. My thesis concludes with my interpretation of the influence of Twitter and citizen journalism in crisis situations and how I believe it will or will not influence the journalism field going forward.

Research

Twitter

Media professionals find Twitter essential to their work due to its speed, ease, and transparency. Because of the benefits, Journalist A encourages his reporters to use this social media. He says he promotes “tweet[ing] their stories and what they’re up to at least several times a day if possible and then even promote the newscast story after that” (Journalist A. Personal Interview. 17 July 2015). Other news organizations do not make using Twitter an option. For example, Journalist C explains that her newsroom sets regulations for social media: “We require reporters and photographers to use Twitter... We expect them to tweet at least twice a day” (Journalist C. Personal Interview. 29 Oct. 2015). While these journalists now incorporate this site, at the beginning, they had to figure out how to best begin using it.

Journalist D could not deny the benefits of social media, so, when Twitter came around, she and her news organization went through the process of negotiating with her reporters' union in order to incorporate these tools. She says, "We approached the use of social media very gradually, but once we really got into it, trained people and people got comfortable using it, I think we did a great job with it" (Journalist D. Personal Interview. 2 Nov. 2015). Now, the challenge is not whether to use social media, but how to use it. "On the one hand," says J. D., "You want reporters to show some personality through their tweets. On the other hand, you have to remind them that they represent an organization. So it's kind of that fine line between personal and professional" (Journalist D). Twitter gives journalists the opportunity to connect more directly with the audience, so many organizations, like the one J. D. worked for, encouraged transparency through social media. Ultimately, no matter how they embrace social media, these journalists realize that they cannot compete in the journalism field without it.

Positives

All interviewed journalists believe the speed and range Twitter offers relates to the field the most. J. D. outlines, "The main [benefit] that everybody recognizes is it's another delivery system for getting information out to a large group of people" (Journalist D). The digital generation makes up most of Twitter's demographic. Therefore, according to J.A., Twitter "allows reports to connect with...a different audience—a younger audience" (Journalist A). Moreover, J.A. mentions, "It allows reporters to engage in conversation...allowing viewers to see what they're working on and maybe have a give and take throughout the day" (Journalist A). He explains that Twitter causes a progression in news delivery.

J. A. and Journalist B both mention how essential immediacy is in crisis situations where seconds can make a difference. When asked about what positives exist with using Twitter for

news distribution, J.B. replies, “In [a crisis] setting, it was getting the information out right away” (Journalist B. Personal Interview. 11 Sept. 2015). Even in non-crisis situations, journalists see the benefits of Twitter. J. A. also comments on the speed: “It makes it a little more immediate in that we go live at 6:00 with our newscast, but if we have confirmed information we can, you know, break it on Twitter...earlier in the day” (Journalist A).

J. B. also emphasizes using Twitter for information gathering: a key aspect of news distribution. She states, “If you want information you’re gonna get it—you don’t have to dig for it” (Journalist B). Whenever a reporter needs to quickly get information or updates, he or she can easily check Twitter rather than calling local news organizations, officials, or people involved. “Without Twitter,” J. C. explains, “you’re just sort of forced to call on the phone or walk through the streets...Twitter just broadens your universe completely in terms of gathering more information” (Journalist C). One’s location does not limit Twitter use—journalists can instantly get information from anywhere in the world. J. C. hypothesizes, “If something were to happen in Boston right now chances are you’re gonna find out about it within the next two minutes” (Interview 2). Referencing a local breaking news story, J.B. describes, “You blinked an eye, I mean [the story] was everywhere” (Journalist B).

J. A. also emphasizes this newsgathering aspect of journalism. He says that Twitter is “a great source of information, at least an initial source of information, to find out what’s going on” (Journalist A). Social media is just one more place for journalists to get leads to stories or find more details about a scene. J. C. compares social media to police scanners: “We don’t just take information off of the police scanners and put ‘em in a story. We try to get...what’s behind those words, verify that what’s going on. Same with a tweet” (Journalist C). She does not put any special emphasis on Twitter—it is just the newest technology that assists journalists with their

jobs. However, while journalists can mainly gather local information through police scanners, they can monitor for news on a global scale through Twitter.

Anyone can use and post to this site, especially from their phones; therefore, people who happen upon an event can quickly alert reporters. J. A. mentions, “There’s just so many voices and eyes and ears and phones out there now that...there’s so much more immediate access to information now than there ever was before” (Journalist A). Social media reduces the need for journalists to wait for phone calls or have to drive to different locations. City officials, police and fire departments, companies, schools, and average citizens can all put information online that journalists can immediately see. Overall, J. A. summarizes the process with, “We can’t be everywhere—it certainly helps us, you know, get to more things” (Journalist A). This immediacy can help journalists assess situations faster and easier, which can help in breaking news situations. When considering this aspect, J. A. recalls, “We’ve been able to respond to breaking news because we’ve seen it on Twitter first and then been able to...work the story out afterwards” (Journalist A).

Sometimes, journalists will use information they find on Twitter directly in their news reports. News organizations use a variety of websites and applications that can seamlessly embed tweets into an article. J. C. uses Scribble Live. It “will pull in tweets from all over the place. You can either put them in there manually or you can use a hashtag...” (Journalist C). J. D. mentions a similar tool: Storify. Users can incorporate photos, text, tweets, etc. to form a complete story. In terms of using Twitter, J. D. explains, “You might pull in some tweets that you get from people on the scene, but...we would never...let someone who wasn’t trained in journalism say something definitive” (Journalist D). These processes organize information

gathered on Twitter to fill out an article with additional information, yet still allow journalists to pick and choose what tweets get published.

Negatives

While the instantaneous nature of Twitter benefits media professionals and the public, it can also hurt the field. J. D. sums up the shift to incorporating social media with: “The business changed and I think it’s a good thing, but there are risks” (Journalist D). For example, J. A. comments on the drawbacks of Twitter: “For the same reason it’s immediate, it’s immediate, so the negative is it’s also immediate” (Journalist A). This idea means that once the information gets published, it cannot be taken back because people are already reading it, retweeting it, and responding to it. J. B. describes that getting information out immediately can lead to “reaction from people that are very upset, very concerned, and they don’t have a chance to actually think about their concerns before they take to their keyboards” (Journalist B). Her comment shows that immediacy goes both ways: news organizations can broadcast information as they get it, but also the public can comment back just as quickly. As J. B. points out, this reaction often happens before people can assess the situation.

Additionally, inaccurate posts can circulate just as fast as accurate ones. Overall, J. C. mentions, “I think the amount of inaccuracy out there in the world has increased because of the immediacy of Twitter” (Journalist C). The general public wants information as soon as events happen; therefore, journalists have to rush to get their stories out before other organizations publish. J. C. notes, “The race to be the first person to report out...can lead to mistakes..., false information” (Journalist B). When compared to traditional broadcasts or print publications, social media journalism puts such an emphasis on speed that journalists sometimes cannot ensure accuracy as easily. For example, J. D. asserts, “In the haste of getting information out there,

there's a risk of not having the information be fact checked and as credible as it would if it were going in a paper" (Journalist D). While this misinformation may seem like a simple mistake, depending on what is claimed, news stations can see backlash. J. A. comments, "There will be people that will tweet out information that is unconfirmed and, in some cases, incorrect and if a journalist jumps on that and retweets it or uses that information without verifying it, you could get yourself and your station in a whole lot of hot water" (Journalist A). Overall, journalists are losing the time they need to ensure complete accuracy; therefore, they remain cautious about social media.

Even if true information gets to the public, without proper context or time, the posts can become blown out of proportion. Referencing the same local incident mentioned on page 21, J. B. believes, without Twitter, "It wouldn't have been that mass hysteria in that neighborhood and everybody checking Twitter...There would have been more time to grieve and assess the situation" (Journalist B). In the fast-paced world of Twitter, both media professionals and citizens do not always have adequate time to deliver and process accurate, level-headed information. J. B. even mentions, "Misinformation quickly spirals and...different conspiracy theories can come out of that" (Journalist B). With the desire to have a constant stream of updates, journalists feel that rumors and chaos sometimes result.

Furthermore, some journalists believe Twitter can compromise the journalistic process. For example, J. A. believes, "It can allow journalists to be lazy in that they won't verify their sources and they won't go out and do more" (Journalist A). Media professionals can now log on to Twitter rather than calling the people they need information from. However, no one can confirm the face behind the Twitter handle. Verifying where information comes from is just as important as verifying the facts. No journalist should use Twitter to cut corners. J. A. asserts,

“All social media channels are a great source for journalists, but journalists still have to do their job” (Journalist A).

Boston Marathon

According to my data collection, media professionals continue to embrace and utilize Twitter regularly in their practices. This social media site increasingly becomes a staple for the field in order to inform and update the public, especially in breaking news or crisis situations. The coverage of September 11, 2001 would have been extremely different if Twitter existed. J. C. speculates, “It would have been, oh my goodness, much more graphic. I mean think about it. If people were tweeting from inside that building?” (Journalist C). The immediacy of Twitter would have allowed much more information to surface.

As mentioned, the first tweets about the Boston Marathon bombings came out within minutes of the explosions. During this crisis, journalists had access to a lot more information and had many more outlets to release warnings and breaking updates. J. C., working with a city rather than a news organization during the Boston Marathon bombings, affirmed that she used Twitter to deliver essential updates: “A lot of it was ‘*we will remain open,*’ you know? Business as usual, certainly sending out a statement on behalf of the city manager and the mayor:... ‘*our public safety is well aware of the potential risks*’” (Journalist B). The city delivered this information both with original tweets and retweets or quotes from police and government officials (Journalist B). All of the information released by this city department was “not just to get the information out, but to protect citizens,” raising the stakes from mere reporting to public safety.

Even though J. B. represented city communications, reporters also utilized Twitter. J. A. comments, “We used Twitter to get information out there about the stories we were doing, about

what people were telling us” (Journalist A). He continues with this thought later in the interview when discussing the hunt for the Tsarnaev brothers: “We were also taking our own live stories that we were doing from back here [at the station]—we were tweeting out what we were reporting about, what was confirmed information” (Journalist A). He also mentions that reporters would not only tweet original content, but retweet relevant information from law enforcement officials. This news station, similar to the city officials, used Twitter to keep the public informed and updated during both the initial bombings and the later hunt for the Tsarnaev brothers. Emphasizing the immediacy of Twitter, J. A. comments that the station “[was] tweeting about it as it was going on” (Journalist A). Within the print world, J. D. used Twitter as just one delivery mechanism: “We would update our website continuously as we got more information. So you know sending out breaking news alerts, **tweeting**, putting things on our Facebook page” (Journalist D).

Media professionals use Twitter both for news distribution and news gathering. J. B. explains, “Anyone that’s involved in the news situation like that, you want to know what’s going on every second...I was right by my phone, right by the TV, listening to the reaction even if it wasn’t coming from the official [sources]” (Journalist B). While she admits she referred to TV more often during this time, she still checked Twitter for updates. “I was monitoring it for information,” she explains, “From that, I would go to my boss and say ‘*we’re hearing this, this, this, and this.*’ If I, in my gut, felt that something should be reported out or followed up on...I would let him know” (Journalist B). Regardless of the type of media, journalists stay updated on a breaking news situation in order to keep the public safe and informed. J. A., as part of the broadcast field, also affirms, “Twitter, for us, was just to kind of monitor the situation” (Journalist A). Specifically, his station used it to follow different officials, police stations, and

news organizations in all cities involved. In the print world, journalists also turned to social media websites. J.D. describes, “We had...people kind of working the online desk to monitor all those sites to keep updating the story and seeing what was happening” (Journalist D). Therefore, the news organization used Twitter to stay on top of the situation and produce the stories. These journalists were not in Boston during this time, so they had to rely on other sources to complete their articles.

As part of the monitoring process, J. B. explains she also uses social media as another way to fact check information. For example, she describes, “I was looking at [social media] to say ‘*well, Channel 7 is reporting x, y, and z. Is anybody else reporting it?*’ And then wait for the confirmation to be official” (Journalist B). Twitter allows news organizations to stay connected as breaking news unfolds, even if they do not immediately pass on unconfirmed information.

In the type of media setting like a city’s communication department, employees such as J. B. stress accuracy with every post. She recounts the process of delivering the official statement addressing the people affected by the bombing tragedy: “Look at it, edit it, what do we want to say.” She continues with, “That wasn’t a reactionary tweet...that went through a lot of people’s review” (Journalist B). Even though the Boston Marathon tragedy was a high-intensity situation, the media department of a city put priority on tweeting accurate and factual information over flooding social media with any information that came across their desks. Along with avoiding misinformation, reporters never included opinion. The updates J. B. provided were “very just to the point, factual, no opinion whatsoever.” She then adds, “I probably would have lost my job if I said anything [opinionated]” (Journalist B). Her comments show how this particular organization emphasized accurate and non-biased information. Even outside of city

communications, newsrooms want to publish accurate information; therefore, they use Twitter with caution.

Citizen Journalism

While much research indicates that citizen journalism can benefit news organizations by filling in gaps in coverage, gathering authentic emotion, and connecting with the public, in practice, media outlets hesitate to use it because of ease of misinformation spreading, the lack of training, and hidden citizen agendas. Within the journalism field, news organizations disagree over whether the benefits of citizen journalism outweigh the consequences or vice versa. Furthermore, individual journalists can have opposing opinions, complicating the debate of citizen journalism even more.

Negatives

Overall, J. B. believes that using citizen reports is not an effective form of journalism, especially in times of high crisis. She states, “I think the best way to get information out is from the proper authorities” (Journalist B). Citizen journalists can perpetrate (either intentionally or not) the spread of false information. For example, J. B. claims, “I think [following citizen reports is] where there can be a lot of misinformation that gets out there and that misinformation quickly spirals and before you know it you’re dealing with another crisis” (Journalist B). J. A. feels the same way. He emphasizes that citizen journalists can misinform the public not through false statements, but through opinion: “My biggest thing with citizen journalism is most of the citizens aren’t trained journalists. So, they’re not trained to only report the facts:…sometimes it could be opinion, sometimes they’re saying what they feel, sometimes it’s what they overheard, but they didn’t confirm” (Journalist A). This idea of lack of training resonates with professional journalists across mediums. Print journalist, J. D., makes similar comments. She says the

newsroom sometimes pulls information from citizens who are at scenes of events, yet the reporters are always “checking and double checking” (Journalist D).

Many journalists see adverse motives as a major problem with trusting citizen reporters—these people without training could want to get their name in the media or want to purposely destroy the reputation of the news organization. J. A. summarizes, “You could be talking to somebody who wants to get an in with the media and you could be talking to somebody who doesn’t like the media” (Journalist A). Professional journalists have the proper training to not let other factors influence their reporting. “In terms of crisis,” J. B. says, “you really follow you know this reporter or that reporter because here you’re getting an as accurate view as you can and not just for the glory” (Journalist B). She reiterates the idea of trusting only official news sources, such as police departments, city officials, etc. The problem with trusting citizen reporters, J. B. claims, is “you’re getting that average citizen reporter wanting to make his or her name, to be on the scene, to not having the training to report out facts” (Journalist B). Citizens who are not educated in journalistic methods or ethics may not think before they broadcast, and, if journalists are not careful, they could spread false information. J. B. believes, “There are people looking for their fifteen seconds of fame and even a very respected journalist could fall into, you know, perpetrating false information” (Journalist B). Her solution for not falling into this trap is, again, cite only official sources and attribute those sources. “Is your goal to make people look at you to say ‘*wow so and so is on the scene*’” Journalist 2 considers, “or, you know, ‘*wow that person really gave me the information I needed?*’” (Journalist B).

Because of the risks with citizen journalism, professionals hesitate when using citizen reports in coverage of events. J. C. emphasizes accurate reporting because, “We have a long tradition here...of credibility and integrity and you don’t want to jeopardize that” (Journalist C).

She would rather take the extra effort to fact-check information than take the risk with citizen reports. Despite the common view that citizen journalism can lead to more mistakes in reporting, J. B. seems to see less retractions than in the past. She comments, “I don’t see a lot of retractions on Twitter and that’s I think that’s the thing that has changed a lot” (Journalist B). To J. B., this decreased accountability “waters down the media” (Journalist B). Other reporters, such as J. C., have a more accepting view of mistakes in the media: “I think people kind of expect breaking news to have some misinformation and as long as you correct it right away that’s okay” (Journalist C). The Internet, and especially social media, accelerate the journalism process so much that it both print and broadcast organizations sometimes struggle to operate quickly *and* accurately all the time. J. C. continues with her comments on misinformation: “I think any misinformation hurts our credibility. That’s the bottom line...On the other hand, because the pace of news has sped up so much, I think people are accepting of a little bit of information that maybe is not quite one hundred percent accurate.”

Uses and Benefits

Other journalists agree with J. C.—they see the negatives to citizen journalism, yet accept that the news process has changed. J. C. states overall, “The days of waiting for everything to come to you and then crafting this perfectly accurate story? Those days are gone because you can’t wait that long” (Journalist C). While some journalists cite many reasons for not using citizen reports, they do not always completely reject them. Often they find compromises in order to get the benefits of citizen journalists, but not risk their reputation. J. D. mentions, “When I think of citizen journalism, it’s a lot of different levels of that” (Journalist D). Citizens are often the first ones to comment on something newsworthy; therefore, they can assist with the process of information gathering. For example, J. A. reports that he often uses citizen journalists as leads

to stories. Being part of a small station, he explains that the organization uses citizen journalists as extra eyes and ears in the community. He says, “We’re taking their information because they’re listening to it when we’re not and we’re using that as a lead to go to try to dig more and find out if there’s a story there” (Journalist A). However, the station does not go beyond that point, besides, maybe, using a submitted photo or video. J. A. describes, “Citizen journalist[s]...lead us to something, but then we’re doing all the rest of the ground work in terms of picking up the information, doing the interviews, and gathering the official information” (Journalist A).

Some journalists group citizen reporters so closely with other sources of information that they do not even use the term *citizen journalist*. For example, J. C. comments, “Somebody who’s just randomly tweeting? ... You might consider that person a citizen journalist. We would consider them a source like any other source” (Journalist C). J. D. describes how she and her station use citizen reports as regular sources: “We would use information...saying ‘*hey you ought to check this out what’s going on*’...and we would stay in touch with that person, back and forth, and say ‘*well what can you tell us?*’” Once the newsroom gets word of the lead or arrives at the scene, the reporters always verify with official sources. “So,” says J. D., “We wouldn’t go just on a say-so of a citizen journalist” (Journalist D). J. D. uses a similar process to J. A.: citizen reporters help news organizations get to stories, but are not used as sources of official information—they act as tip lines for journalists.

Additionally, J. B. notes, “If you’re following citizen reporters on social media and you’re feeling that sense of..., you know, ‘*we see something*’ or ‘*this person was directly affected*,’ yeah, you can go and you can get that story that much quicker” (Journalist B).

However, this accelerated news process does not mean that professionals can put less effort into

their reports. Referring to monitoring breaking news situations online, J. B. states, “Where you use that information, how do you use it, . . . that’s where you need to know, fact check, get the official statement because what you are putting out there, its media people are looking at” (Journalist B).

On the other hand, in order to give the public the necessary information, reporters may include citizen information. Sometimes, when journalists actively seek out reaction or commentary from citizens, they include that information in their reports. According to J. A., he uses citizen reports most often in breaking news situations: “Accidents, fires, crime scenes, you know, things like that” (Journalist A). J. B. explains that she uses citizen reports in these situations “to show that boots on the ground reaction” (Journalist B). However, reporters can only use citizen journalists if people are commenting on a situation. When asked what scenarios the newsroom uses citizen journalism for, J. C. replies, “Something that is not of interest to a broad group of people who would be on social media, they’re just not there. So, I would say breaking news probably more than anything else” (Journalist C). J. D. responds to the same question with, “I would say . . . used more in when you’re reporting from a scene of some place . . . Mostly I would say crime scenes” (Journalist D). In these types of situations, citizen journalists post information so quickly that newsrooms are notified about situations before officials have a chance to release a statement. Therefore, journalists can use citizen posts as part of their story coverage.

The community influences the news process because they experience the world and feel the effects of events. Therefore, journalists need to appeal to the people. Keeping reports exclusively factual is not necessarily the best practice. J. B. reiterates this point: “You can tap into [citizens’] emotions and, . . . I mean, the reporter is reporting out the facts, but also the

feelings” (Journalist B). In order to accomplish this job, J. B. asks herself, “What can I say actually to paint the picture from what you’re seeing?” As long as journalists put a disclaimer if they use citizen accounts in the story, J. B. sees no issue with the idea of citizen journalism. Many times news organizations do not have all the facts quickly enough in breaking news situations; therefore, they need to rely on eye-witness reports (either from the journalist covering the story or from the public).

Sometimes, news organizations incorporate citizen journalism in ways that do not require extensive fact-checking and filtering. For example, the print newsroom has a blog section where average citizens can post. J. C. explains, “We don’t endorse their opinions or what they’re writing about, but we offer them a venue to write and post on our website” (Journalist C). Staff members do not edit these blog posts; the only caveat is bloggers must follow general policy rules to stay online (Journalist C). As far as the print publication goes, J. D. describes different ways citizens can contribute: Letters to the Editor, or longer, “As I See It” segments (Journalist D). Each of these platforms gives citizen journalists the freedom to contribute to the news process, yet professionals still reserve the right to not publish certain writings or provide a disclaimer.

No matter what ways journalists use citizen reports or comments, they need to ensure that the integrity and credibility of the organization remains intact. According to J. B., media professionals using citizen reactions need to “keep in the back of their mind that some time, you know, you have to gage emotions” (Journalist B). Releasing information without processing it can be dangerous in the journalism field; therefore, journalists use citizen reports so long as they either verify beforehand or attribute the comments. J. B. advises, “Anyone can say that they’re a

reporter if they're on the scene,...but what takes a seasoned reporter is to take...information and process it and looking at the different ways of: who is this affecting?" (Journalist B).

September 11th

Citizen journalism seems to have increased in popularity because of social media; however, it was not completely obsolete before the Internet boom. Some people, like J. A., did not turn to citizens to cover the attacks: "We weren't using citizen journalism at the time, as far as I know, and I don't think citizen journalism really had a rise until, in my opinion, after 9/11" (Journalist A). He does admit that they could have used indirect citizen information by referencing other news stations' reports. On the other hand, some news organizations did seek citizen accounts on their own—they just had to acquire them through traditional methods. As J. D. describes, "I think there are many forms of citizen journalism that even date back many years, even before social media" (Journalist D).

For example, following the first plane crash, J. D.'s news organization immediately went out to gather reactions from citizens. The print reporters produced "kind of a 'Man on the Street.' You go out and you talk to people '*have you heard?...what do you think?*' That sort of thing" (Journalist D). Similarly, J. B. remembers, "We had a reporter stationed outside [our] City Hall to talk to people...and that's when we tapped into the emotions" (Journalist B). She notes that getting the citizen reaction and even seeing some of these people on the air was a powerful part of the newscast: "You could see the people, you know, that wanted to talk on camera about how scared they were, or memories, or ,you know, *I used to live in New York; it could have been me*" (Journalist B). However, these reports may not necessarily fall under genuine citizen journalism: the reporters could pick and choose, quote, and paraphrase the information they collected to make a coherent and officially verified story.

Additionally, because roads were closed into New York City, these news organizations had to rely on official statements and citizen reports to get information directly from the scene. “We were...finding people that we knew that lived in New York,” J. B. comments, “hearing from them what they were seeing” (Journalist B). The reporters could not confirm with their own eyes what the citizens were saying, so they had to trust the accounts of the average citizens.

Boston Marathon

By 2013, the journalism process had shifted. During the Boston Marathon bombings, citizen journalism became more prevalent due to the rise in social media. However, this change does not mean that news organizations threw out their old methods and turned only to citizens. J. A. remembers, “How we mainly got our information was from people that were either in the race, running the race, had family in the race” (Journalist A). The station did not have enough direct access to the Marathon finish line to produce a complete story without citizen reports; however, they did not generally broadcast unfiltered citizen information. The station used citizen journalism as a way to get leads and fill out the story. J. D. remembers, “The role of...citizen journalist[s] in that sense was more by providing information that then would go through a fact-checking, a verification process, by our own staff” (Journalist D).

J. B. mentions a similar experience: “I felt as though...I didn’t turn to the citizen reports” (Journalist B). Because J. B. was a city employee during this time, perhaps she had to follow stricter standards. Throughout the interview, J. B. reiterates that working for a city and putting out official statements required extreme caution. However, she imagines, “If I was on the scene, I could do a little more attribution saying, you know, John Doe...saw this. I could do that as a reporter” (Journalist B). However, similar to the situation on September 11th, the citizen reports that J. B. referenced, or would have referenced as a reporter, were in-person accounts, rather than

gathered from social media. She says, “I got a lot of...citizen reaction from people in Boston, from people here:...what they were seeing, were they injured, you know, getting that. But I could only report out officially” (Journalist B). Whether or not media professionals use citizen reports online, on the air, or in print, most appear to use them to monitor situations and find leads.

Traditional Methods

As seen with journalists’ comments on the role of citizen journalism during the Boston Marathon tragedy, reporters still rely on traditional methods. Even with new technologies making their way into the journalism field, media professionals do not want to lose the old processes. When speaking about social media and other modern techniques, J. C. summarizes, “I think it’s a good thing overall, but I think you have to always throw up the caution flag...The *big* thing is accuracy” (Journalist C). J. A. says social media is “kind of a dual edged sword” (Journalist A) and J. B. affirms, “You have to take it with a grain of salt” (Journalist B). As discussed previously, incorporating social media and citizen journalism into the professional world proves beneficial in some instances; however, journalists do not want to replace traditional methods.

Citizen journalism itself raises concerns in some journalists’ minds. For example, J. D. points out, “I went to a conference and they said citizen journalist is an oxymoron...because if you’re a citizen journalist you really haven’t been schooled as a professional journalist” (Journalist D). Therefore, J. D. believes certain events must have a professional journalist covering the story. She says, “I don’t think you’d use citizen journalism, for example, in coverage of a city meeting...or coverage of a trial in court. For something like that I think you

need expertise of the reporters who are trained” (Journalist D). Many journalists are not willing to compromise their methods just because of the benefits of social media.

September 11th Methods

During the September 11th terrorist attacks, social media was limited and even the Internet remained in the background. MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube arose in the early 2000s and by 2006 Twitter entered the online sphere. In 2007, Steve Jobs released the first iPhone, changing mobile access to media forever. However, 15 years ago, no one, including journalists knew the role social media would play in society. J. A. comments that, in 2001, “Twitter, even Facebook and those things, were foreign concepts” (Journalist A). Therefore, in order to report on the events of that day, journalists had to use traditional methods. After hearing about the attacks on a TV broadcast, J. B. and her newsroom had to begin their own information gathering in order to issue a report right away. She remembers, “When I say right away, it’s not Twitter right away. That was right away back in 2001. That was actually having to send a reporter there...either get an official on the phone or get them down in person. So, ‘right away’ meant some planning” (Journalist B).

Reporters could not refer to the constant steam of information social media provides; therefore, journalists went out in person, called sources over the phone, or monitored other news broadcasts. In order to gather all the necessary and available information as well as put out a timely report, J. B.’s news organization “had to coordinate to bring everybody in and to produce a show: make sure [they] had enough photographers so on and so forth” (Journalist B). J. B. outlines that to obtain information she and her news organization were “constantly monitoring the Associated Press, constantly monitoring all the other news channels: ABC, NBC, CNN, CBS...” (Journalist B). She also notes that they sent people out locally to gather citizen reaction

and called people in New York over the phone for that perspective. J. A. outlines, “We were picking up information any way we possibly could, whether it be through the state,...from the federal government, and from other, you know, national news sources, and they were relaying it down to us and then we were relaying it back to the viewers” (Journalist A).

Print publications took a different initial approach than broadcast station—they immediately set out to find a local angle. While the newsroom was monitoring TV and police scanners for general information about the incident, J. D. describes, “You talked to people like the trauma doctors,...you know, what’s it like to have to deal with this type of an event, you talk to the fire department, you talk to principals of schools” (Journalist D). However, even though their angle for the story was different, the print media still monitored professional outlets for information and went out to gather information on their own.

Once J. B.’s news station organized a report, it delivered that information to the public by “purely broadcast” (Journalist B). J. C., being in print, describes, “You can’t compete with...coverage that’s hour-to-hour on TV showing the pictures” (Journalist C). Therefore, this news organization relied mainly on its print sources, even though it did have the beginnings of a website in 2001. J. D. remembers that the website mainly housed breaking news updates: “For the most part it was just the information that was flowing from probably the *Associated Press* or *New York Times News Service*” (Journalist D). After getting information out on the website, the publication still had to produce a story for the paper. In fact, J. C. remembers, “We put out an afternoon edition of the paper, which was really odd. I mean that was pretty unusual, but it was a catastrophic event” (Journalist C). While the organization deviated from their normal schedule, it still delivered a story through its traditional print methods. J. C. explains, “As a print newspaper, the goal has always been to give readers sort of the breadth and depth. So, whereas

you've got everything coming in at you and the immediacy of a situation, as a newspaper you can sort of step back and say *'okay, this is what I really need to know'*" (Journalist C).

Boston Marathon Methods

However, even in 2013 when Twitter had been around for seven years, journalists still relied on traditional methods. Journalists had the option of Twitter during the Boston Marathon bombings; however, they mainly utilized other processes of news gathering and distribution. After hearing about the bombings briefly from a friend, J. A. mentions: "Immediately I'm in the newsroom and I'm turning on TVs and I'm trying to find out what's going on" (Journalist A). Additionally, J. B. recalls she heard about the attack initially through television, especially because the Boston Marathon is a live-broadcasted event. These journalists immediately turned to traditional methods rather than open Twitter. Even though J. C. heard of the incident via an alert or tweet on a phone, she "went in and turned on the TV for more information" (Journalist C). Therefore, when each journalist needed accurate updates on the event, they chose traditional broadcast over social media.

In order to gather information about the bombings, J. B. notes her media office was "on a conference call with the city manager, the chief of police, the mayor" (Journalist B). She describes the conversation focused on "what do we know, are we sending anyone to respond, are we upping our threat level,...how is this response going to be coordinated" (Journalist B). This tactic emphasized making phone calls rather than monitoring Twitter accounts and targeted official sources over average citizens. J. A. also describes working closely with professionals. He states, "Our partners...were [in Boston]...so we worked very closely with them" (Journalist A). He remembers being in contact with at least one reporter team including reporters and photographers: "They were looking at the same things we were looking at, but they had more

boots on the ground” (Journalist A). This process emphasizes that the station wanted to get information from as many direct sources as they could, rather than try to trust a tweet. J. D. asserts, “You wouldn’t rely just on Twitter to fill out a complete report on something as serious as the Boston Marathon—you’d be monitoring other sites as well” (Journalist D). In her mind, Twitter acts only as a side source of information to fill out a story with information or color from the citizen point of view. The crux of the story must come from legitimate, trained journalists. All encompassing, she says, “Twitter in my mind is just a delivery mechanism. I mean Twitter doesn’t cover the news” (Journalist D).

Professionals also worked on gathering their own information: “We knew people that were in the race...so immediately we stated getting on the phone with those people and, if we couldn’t get them, we were talking to their families” (Journalist A). Both J. A. and J. C. remember reaching out to running organizations and meeting local ones on their way back from Boston. Print stations took similar methods for gathering information. J. C. and J. D. were not in Boston; however, some reporters from their newsroom could get to the finish line to cover the story. J. C. recalls, “For the Marathon itself, we had, kind of, boots on the ground. We had sports reporters there and we were actively gathering the story” (Journalist C). In such a chaotic situation, journalists constantly referred to traditional methods of news gathering and even news delivery. J. A. describes, “We’re following it on social media...that actual day, but we were getting a lot of information still the old way” (Journalist A). While useful in some ways, social media is not replacing the reliable, official sources of information. J. D. affirms, “It’s the reporting done by legitimate news agencies...and then sent out online that play a bigger part than Twitter does” (Journalist D).

During the hunt for the Tsarnaev brothers, journalists had more time to digest the initial attacks. J. B. reveals that, during this event, she relied on both social media and television. However, she admits, “I relied more on TV than Twitter. People had to...It’s just not as widespread” (Journalist B). Even just two years can make a difference. J. B. comments, “Now, I think you’d pick up Twitter right away” (Journalist B). With the widespread use of smartphones, people can load their Twitter feeds while still in bed in the morning, while on the subway, or at their desk at work. Television does not have as great of a range; therefore, people may become accustomed to checking their phones before turning on the television.

Discussion

Comparison to the Literature

The journalism field has progressed with technology since 2006: many news organizations now embrace Twitter for daily journalistic use and have started to incorporate popular modern methods such as citizen journalism. At the beginning of the Twitter era, journalists had many concerns about the site’s effect on news distribution. By simply experiencing Twitter, journalists have completely alleviated some concerns. For example, many news organizations hesitated to incorporate Twitter because of its unique “microblogging” nature—there was no guidance for how to use it. However, journalists in my interviews revealed that they took a variety of steps to overcome this hurdle. Overall, they described negotiating with a union, providing official training on the medium, and setting specific regulations for professional Twitter use. While Journalists A-D still worry about many concerns presented in the literature, they take steps to prevent mistakes. For example, in both the literature and the interviews spreading misinformation and fostering sloppiness in news delivery stand out as

potential issues. Today, journalists overcome these risks by constantly stressing accuracy and accountability in the media.

For some topics, the journalists in the literature and the interviews maintain opposite views. On one hand, my analysis of the literature reveals that reporting opinion can become more acceptable via Twitter. On the other hand, Journalists A-D mention they adamantly avoid opinion and stress keeping professional Twitter accounts free of personal updates. These journalists also discuss concerns that those in the literature do not recognize. For example, Journalists A-D refer to the constant “race to be first” in journalism. These current professionals struggle with balancing accuracy and speed because Twitter reduces the time for fact-checking. While the journalists in my literary research do address the idea of inaccuracies on Twitter, they do not make the same connection to speed and competition that Journalists A-D do.

Beyond mere speculation about the effects of Twitter, both professionals in the literature and interviews comment on the best ways to utilize this site. Often, the journalists share the same opinions. For example, many journalists agree that Twitter operates most effectively during breaking news situations. They believe Twitter acts more as an aid to news gathering and as a tool for monitoring situations rather than standing on its own. Twitter comes into the media mainly as a way to discover and follow-up on leads—similar to a police scanner. No journalists voice fears of Twitter replacing traditional journalistic methods. Instead, they express incorporating Twitter as a complement to the methods they already use.

However, professionals in the literature and the interviews do not always have similar opinions or methods. While the literature highlights how social media creates a two-way flow of communication; Journalists A-D do not mention engaging in any direct conversation with the public via Twitter. In this instance, the journalists in my literary research appear to use Twitter

in more modern ways than the current journalists in my interviews. Emphasizing this idea, the professionals in the literature focus on how Twitter can function in new or radical ways, while not addressing utilizing it for delivery purposes. The interviewed journalists, however, explain they often use Twitter as a news delivery system—Journalist D even claims this is the only way she views Twitter. My own research reveals that current journalists may not be at a point to incorporate Twitter in ways that drastically change the face of news distribution, even though the literature focuses on these ideas.

Social media has inevitably caused an increase in citizen journalism, forcing professionals to address this facet of the field. My analysis of the literature suggests many journalists begin to accept citizen reporters as an essential part of news gathering and distribution; however, Journalists A-D remain skeptical. For example, a majority of the views expressed in the literature featured positive comments—such as using citizens to incorporate a wider range of voices in the media. However, in the interviews, professional journalists place too much value on objectivity and neutrality in the field to risk endorsing untrained reporters. While some professionals in the literature acknowledge that citizen journalists may increase bias and misinformation in the media, the overall consensus remains positive.

However, current journalists admit they still find ways to utilize citizen reporters without putting the news organizations at risk, often reflecting the methods used by journalists in the literature. For example, both professionals from my interviews and literary research cite similar benefits of citizen reporters. Many journalists rely on citizens to provide immediate leads and otherwise unattainable content to professionals. While the interviewed journalists put more emphasis on the speed with which citizens can produce information, all professionals comment that citizen reporters act largely as a starting point for stories. How far these citizens make it into

the official statements remains debated amongst professionals. Despite differences in the extent of citizen reporters' role, journalists in both the literature and the interviews promote fact-checking all non-professional information. Finally, both sets of journalists discuss the news organizations providing a platform for citizen journalists. The professionals in the literature put a far greater emphasis on this idea, mentioning official apps and news segments that turn to citizens as a part of the official newscast. On the other hand, the interviewed journalists briefly mention allowing average citizens to post on an unsponsored blog; however, they generally avoid allowing citizens to comment on news. Overall, the media professionals I interviewed had a more conservative view of citizen journalism than the literature suggests; however, they do not completely reject the idea.

Comparison of September 11th and Boston Marathon

After comparing media response to the September 11th terrorist attacks and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings, I found Twitter and citizen journalism did not have as great of an impact as expected. The adoption of Twitter in the journalism field mainly affected the speed of the news cycle, especially in delivery. Journalists in 2001 used traditional methods to deliver information: broadcast journalists used television and print journalists used print publications. While two print journalists mention using a website for major updates, they admit it was in its beginning stages. Being able to break news on Twitter accelerated the news cycle—it allowed journalists to more quickly and easily update the public. During serious breaking news situations like terrorist attacks and bombings, faster delivery makes a significant difference.

Twitter had a lesser influence on news gathering. While covering the events of 9/11, journalists had to spend more time coordinating with the newsroom and gathering information. In order to get official statements, they had to make phone calls or meet in person. Using Twitter

during the Boston Marathon bombings allowed for accelerated access to official statements. However, journalists typically relied on “boots on the ground” news gathering. In this sense, Twitter acted mainly as a more general monitoring tool, rather than a true method for gathering essential information and updates.

In terms of 9/11 and the Marathon bombings, citizen journalism saw even less of an increase in use between 2001 and 2013. For both events, professional journalists did not utilize citizen journalists in their true form. During the interviews, journalists continuously affirmed they did not allow citizens to make definitive comments about the unfolding situations. Newsrooms referred to citizen accounts to fill their stories with public reaction and emotion, but did not see these reporters as formal sources. They gathered citizens’ points of view mainly through traditional methods in both situations, meaning Twitter did not play this type of role during the Boston Marathon bombings. While journalists mention referring to social media for citizen accounts, when they needed information for reports, they mainly reached out to the public through either the phone or personal contact. Because the interviewed professionals approach both Twitter and citizen journalism in a conservative manner, they maintained journalistic integrity throughout the unfolding crisis situations. Overall, both Twitter and citizen journalism carry the reputation of increasing bias and mistakes in the media; however, my interviews revealed there was no difference in amount of opinion or misinformation between September 11th coverage and Boston Marathon bombing coverage.

While social media and citizen journalism shift the media in a general sense, when high-intensity situations arise, these tools are looked at as complements rather than main aspects to news distribution and gathering. As journalists continue to use Twitter, it will likely only expand as a news delivery mechanism. The public increasingly turns to Twitter for news, especially

breaking news; therefore, it continues to become the norm in all situations—it may even replace traditional delivery methods. I predict no change in using Twitter for news gathering due to the difficulty in trusting the information. As for citizen journalists, I foresee them continuing to contribute to a live-stream of updates; however, I do not believe they will ever replace traditional news outlets as reliable sources for information. While the journalism field constantly changes to accommodate new technologies and methods, the traditional methods and ethics regarding news gathering and distribution will always prevail.

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