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To cite this article: Kalyani Chadha & Rob Wells (2016): Journalistic Responses to Technological Innovation in Newsrooms, Digital Journalism, DOI: [10.1080/21670811.2015.1123100](https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1123100)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1123100>



Published online: 12 Jan 2016.



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JOURNALISTIC RESPONSES TO TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION IN NEWSROOMS

An exploratory study of Twitter use

Kalyani Chadha and **Rob Wells**

This study seeks to investigate how journalists at leading national US newspapers and wire services grapple with the impact of technological changes, especially the introduction and growing use of social media in newsrooms. Using a qualitative methodological approach involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with journalists employed at leading national and regional news organizations such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, The Dallas Morning News, Bloomberg News, Reuters and the Associated Press, we explore how journalists view the impact of the growing use of social media, specifically Twitter, on their work environment. We find that while they acknowledged that Twitter facilitated aspects of their work, they almost universally perceived the growing use of this technology as contributing to a variety of tensions and potential conflicts within the newsroom.

KEYWORDS conflicts; journalists; newsrooms; technology; social media; Twitter

Introduction

Ongoing changes in communication technologies are widely understood to have significantly altered the practice of journalism, transforming the manner in which news is gathered, produced and disseminated (Pavlik 2001). Yet the changes associated with the introduction of new digital technologies have not merely impacted on the news products that we consume, but have also had recognizable organizational and institutional implications for their producers (Ornebring 2010; Robinson 2011). Thus, whereas early assessments of the impact of technological innovations on journalism tended to analyze them in terms of their ability to enhance accountability and participatory communication (Kawamoto 2003), subsequent research has been characterized by the growing awareness that technological changes have complex consequences for journalistic work environments, that they affect both the practices that underpin newswork, as well as the established hierarchies and relationships that exist in newsrooms in profound and sometimes deeply unsettling ways.

As Robinson (2011, 147) expresses it, "the specific employ of new technologies alters the professional and personal relationships of workers to their bosses, each other,

their clients and customers as well as their work product and company brands." Focusing on the growing use of social media, notably Twitter, this study seeks to explore how journalists at leading US newspapers and wire services perceive the impact of this increasingly significant social media platform on their every-day work.

Literature Review

Discussions regarding the impact of technological innovations on newsrooms gained particular resonance as digital technologies were introduced into the processes of news production. Indeed as Lim (2012, 90) points out, digitization "progressively brought together what were previously in analog environments discrete steps in sourcing, constructing, disseminating and receiving journalism." Not surprisingly, these changes gave rise to significant debates centered on the way in which technologies of convergence were transforming traditional newsroom structures, operations and division of labor (Saltzis and Dickinson 2008), albeit in a manner contingent upon the varied management and institutional strategies that characterized different newsrooms (Boczkowski 2004).

While some optimists argued that digital technologies in newsrooms enhanced "flexibility in content transmission and in accelerating information access and data retrieval" (Lim 2012, 92), others were less sanguine about ongoing changes. Bromley (1996) and Ursell (2001), for instance, raised concerns that the so-called multi-skilling necessitated by the introduction of new technologies not only blurred distinctions between technicians and journalists but also had the potential to distract the latter from their primary tasks of news gathering and coverage. Meanwhile, Cottle and Ashton (1999) made the case that the increased workloads on journalists caused by technological changes created a more pressured working environment that ultimately had a detrimental effect on news production.

Similarly, Deuze and Bardoel (2001) as well as Garcia Aviles and Leon (2002) found that journalists in converged newsrooms reported high levels of stress and apprehension caused by the imperative to be multi-skilled. Analyzing a news organization undertaking convergence, Klinenberg (2005, 51) also discovered that journalists felt frustrated at having to contend with the imposition of "additional responsibilities and new pressures of time and space," which they saw as limiting their autonomy and ability to produce high-quality journalism. Meanwhile, an eight-newsroom study by Nygren (2007) revealed strategic shifts in daily work practices and production processes that involved the erosion of many traditional journalistic roles accompanied by the emergence of new designations. Additionally, Deuze (2008) found that the demands of integrated newsrooms compelled journalists to diversify their skill sets and spend time producing more content for varied platforms within the same time period. This development not only affected news production since it "recast" specialists into more general roles but also had potential consequences for professional autonomy.

According to Robinson (2011, 148), "scholars have documented recent newsroom transformations as propelling revolutionary labor changes that force routine modifications, wreak havoc with reporter-supervisor expectations, make some tasks outmoded and add work duties." Journalists, researchers point out, are increasingly called upon to acquire new skills and adapt to new time cycles and deadlines and operate as "flexible

laborers" (Klinenberg and Fayer 2005, 228). This emphasis on flexibility, Preston (2009, 65) points out, seems to be "linked to a 'continuous culture of projects' involving a never-ending process of 'tackling change' as prominent managerial themes in negotiating new working practices and routines with editorial staff in contemporary news organizations." Such innovations related to practice, which include the introduction of streamlined production, increasingly specific technical formats and layout templates, and centralization of planning, scholars like Ruusunoksa and Kunelius (2007, 14) argue, exist in "a state of interesting tension," with reporters' values and "other ideals of the dominant professional ideology of professional journalism."

Overall, the introduction of new digital technologies has thus been widely identified as being crucially implicated in transforming news production, institutional patterns and journalistic practices (Deuze and Marjoribanks 2009; Ornebring 2010), and altering the manner in which work is accomplished but also calling into question established norms, professional values and identities, as well as newsroom relationships as identified in foundational works (Breed 1955; Gans 1979). In recent years, while many once disruptive Web-based technologies have been increasingly normalized in newsrooms, social media platforms continue to represent a technological shift with which journalists continue to come to terms, particularly in terms of their ability to work independently (Deuze 2008). Indeed, the potential loss of reporter autonomy represents a significant thread in discussions focusing on the introduction of new technologies. Historically, the notion of autonomy has long been viewed as a defining characteristic of journalism's claims to professional status (Beam 1990; McLeod and Hawley 1964). In fact, the idea of journalistic independence from external constraints—which evolved in the context of the growth of professional clubs and associations that contributed to the emergence of a form of self-governance, professional norms and self-identity (Schudson 1978)—has come to be identified as central to the ideals of American journalism (Hallin 1989). This study, however, focuses on autonomy *within* news organizations, by examining the implications of the increasing, often mandated, use of social media platforms for reporters and their ability to operate independently.

Occupying a position of primacy among the different forms of social media adopted by news organizations is Twitter, which has emerged as *the* leading platform for news organizations (Broersma and Graham 2013; Parmelee 2013)—as evidenced by many recent works that underscore journalists' growing integration of Twitter into reporting activities, whether to identify sources, to cover breaking and evolving news events (Vis 2013; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira 2012), as well as to verify information and obtain quotes (Broersma and Graham 2013). In examining Twitter's relationship journalism, researchers have also focused on the implications of its use for journalistic norms, Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012), for instance, found that journalists "normalized" the use of the platform by employing established professional norms, while Parmelee (2013, 291), who examined political journalists, found that his participants did not "use Twitter in ways that suggest a major shift in traditional journalistic norms such as objectivity and gate-keeping."

But although existing literature shows a considerable focus on how journalists use Twitter to gather and distribute news, there is relatively little empirical research into how journalists perceive the way Twitter affects the reporter–editor relationship, story selection and interpersonal relationships with supervisors and fellow employees. Our study about the implications of Twitter within the newsroom thus adds a different

dimension to existing literature on how technological innovations and digital technologies have changed news production. Motivating this line of inquiry is scholarship which has indicated that the introduction of new technologies into workplaces typically involves the development of interpretations regarding the utility and implications of such technologies on the part of those required to use them (Fulk 1993). These scholars argue that while the use of new technologies is often pushed by managers for reasons that they perceive to be rational (such as improving the product or in response to marketplace pressures, as in the case of news organizations), workers generally evaluate technology on the basis of their own contextual frameworks (Rice 1987). They point out that some individuals are opposed to change or learning new skills while others fear that technologies might “upset the balance and distribution of roles, responsibilities and consequently existing power relations within the organization” Leonardi (2009, p. 408). Consequently, they argue that the deployment of new technologies within organizations can be an uneven and contested process, invoking a variety of responses from workers who have to grapple with changing institutionalized practices, roles and patterns of interaction (Leonardi and Barley 2008). Put differently, they thus do not assume that new technologies are seamlessly integrated into work environments but can in fact be the source of potential challenges and conflicts within organizations. For example, our interviews suggest social media provides editors and managers with greater surveillance capacity over reporters and, as such, it represents a power shift to the institution and away from the individual journalist. Drawing on this approach, this study focuses on how Twitter—identified as crucial to contemporary journalism and widely employed in newsrooms—is perceived by journalists. Indeed, the notion that this platform facilitates the work of journalists in multiple ways has emerged as almost axiomatic, with news outlets and journalism organizations alike routinely underscoring its role in terms of gathering, reporting and distributing the news. Yet we know far less about how journalists *view* this increasingly significant platform, its utility, as well as its implications for news production and newsroom dynamics. *It is these journalistic perspectives that this study aims to explore.*

Methodology

In order to analyze how journalists view the impact of Twitter in newsrooms, we decided to base our exploration on in-depth interviews with journalists from leading national and regional news organizations that have adopted social media platforms to a significant degree. These outlets include: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *Los Angeles Times*, Reuters, Bloomberg News and the Associated Press. We chose these news outlets because, as leading national news organizations, they have adopted social media use on an extensive scale, in some cases even requiring reporters to develop a significant Twitter presence. Our decision to interview journalists was based on the fact that not only have discussions about the impact of new technologies and new systems of working often been “conducted from a distance,” with the result that “in contemporary studies of journalism, the voices of journalists are surprisingly seldom heard” (Saltzis and Dickinson 2008), but also because, as Lindlof and Taylor (2011) point out, journalists make good subjects for in-depth interview research because they “reflectively communicate their experiences.”

In order to recruit participants for this study (which was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board), we began by sending a brief description of our project to personal contacts in these newsrooms and asked them if they were willing to participate in our study. This brought in our first group of participants. During our initial interviews, we asked participants—who had been chosen with an eye to ensuring diversity of gender, age, nature of work and length of time in the newsroom—to help us reach out to other journalists who might be willing to participate in our study. Subsequent participants were thus identified with the help of the first group, in other words through snowball sampling. We took the word-of-mouth approach because we did not want to contact journalists institutionally since we felt that this might make them uncomfortable or unwilling to speak frankly with us, especially since technological changes are often an imperative pushed by newsroom management.

During the period from October 2014 to January 2015, we interviewed a total of 18 journalists from seven national outlets, generally two from each organization. While this number is relatively small, we felt that given the exploratory nature of this study, it was adequate. Moreover, this number is consistent with Kvale (1996, 102–103), who has said that between 10 and 15 participants in an interview-based study represents a reasonable attempt to go beyond the anecdotal and develop an adequate mechanism to “investigate in detail the relationship between the individual and the situation.” The group was made up of 15 reporters and three editors who had previously been reporters. It was approximately half male and half female and included journalists with different specialties including politics, economics and business, technology and data journalism, all of whom utilized social media in their daily work. They included veterans with 25 plus years of experience as well as those with 5–15 years of experience. This diversity of respondents was sought in order to triangulate our findings, as was the involvement of two researchers who jointly conducted interviews and analyzed data.

The interviews, conducted by telephone, lasted between 40 and 60 minutes each. Each interview began with a summary of the project and an informed consent protocol in which participants were promised confidentiality. After this, we asked the journalists a series of semi-structured questions centered on their perceptions regarding the impact of Twitter in their newsrooms, followed by appropriate follow-up questions.

Once we completed the interviews and transcribed the journalists' responses, both researchers read the interviews several times. Upon completing our readings, we began the process of inductively identifying themes from the corpus of interview data that related to our research focus. We then analyzed each transcript paragraph by paragraph to identify or “tag” ideas that related to the themes that we had initially identified. In keeping with Lindlof and Taylor (1995), we were careful to re-evaluate our themes based on data during the analysis phase of this study. Finally, the interviews were considered collectively to once again ensure that the data reflected the thematic patterns indicated by our analysis. As our sample contains journalists at major media outlets, we do not claim that they represent all journalists at different types of news organizations. However, we believe they do offer important insights into the way that journalists grapple with the growing use of social media such as Twitter in newsrooms.

Findings

Technology as Challenge: Losing Autonomy

In responding to initial questions about the impact of Twitter, journalists initially seemed to mirror past scholarship on news production in the digital era, stating that social media platforms, in general, and Twitter, in particular, had facilitated their work in varied ways. Many described how Twitter helped facilitate certain aspects of the reporting process, such as making it easier to find and cultivate sources and subject matter experts. A reporter for a national daily Washington, DC-based newspaper recalled that whereas in the past he had worked hard to develop sources, “by cold calling people, taking them out to lunch ... sending hand-written cards,” social media had made the process much easier. As he put it, “a retweet can have a similar effect as a hand-written card ... from a source development point, it is a gem.” A reporter for a national newspaper said Twitter enabled her to obtain economists’ analysis of the latest data. “You can quickly get up to speed ... it’s like having 50 economists in the room having coffee.” Others agreed that Twitter enabled routine fact checking, and enhanced awareness of emergent information flows as well as the dissemination of news. They also said that being able to post to Twitter sometimes gave them a way to reuse and repurpose material edited out of their stories. These findings are broadly in line with research by Singer (2005) and Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012), who found journalists “normalized” new technologies by adapting them to existing routines and practices.

Yet once they had paid their initial homage to the usefulness of Twitter as a reporting tool, journalists reported a variety of challenges and tensions that they associated with its growing use within their newsrooms.

Primary among these is a perceived loss of autonomy caused by what reporters view as growing incursions by editors into the reporting process. As the canonical literature on newsroom sociology indicates, struggles over autonomy are not new. Breed (1955), in his classic work, noted that operating as bureaucracies, newsrooms sought to socialize reporters into established working practices, procedures and policies through implicit measures that rewarded those who followed organizational diktats while punishing those who resisted. Similarly, Boylan (1986, 32) also identified the existence of conflicts between reporters and management, especially prior to the 1960s when “the news agenda and style reflected almost entirely what the organization working through editors wanted,” while more recently Sparrow (1999, 139) underscored that “news is less the product of independent reporters qua individuals than the product of an organizational hierarchy, staffed by tiers of subordinates and superiors.”

But while reporter–editor struggles over the processes of news production are no doubt longstanding, our respondents argued that these conflicts over autonomy have been significantly exacerbated by the fact that changes in technology had given editors greater access to the same events as reporters via a shared social media environment. Whereas in the past, editors had remained comparatively removed from the process of reporting, at least in its initial stages, with the result that reporters had exercised greater control over their work, this dynamic, reporters said, has recently undergone a perceptible shift. While some veteran reporters traced the origins of this shift as far back as the rise of C-Span and cable television, whose coverage gave editors a direct window into events that reporters might be covering, the majority said that such “surveillance” had intensified with the rise of social media platforms like Twitter.

Commenting on this, a veteran reporter who has spent over 40 years working in Washington, DC said that editors had increasingly become “part” of the reporting process in unprecedented ways and tried to direct reporters in one way or another, often based on the direction of social media conversations. As he put it:

I was a courthouse reporter for a number of years and we joked that we were against televising court proceedings so that editors could not look over our shoulder. That’s changed. The editor has become more and more into the reporting process and that’s accelerated with technology, especially social media such as Twitter. In the past, you would not tell the editor about a story until you had it ready or you had a problem. But with social media, editors see information at the same time as reporters.

Another reporter went on to say that some editors, particularly those who were inexperienced or not “very centered or confident in their news judgment,” tended to be distracted by noise and chatter on social media and pushed reporters towards coverage that focused on minor twist and turns in the story, regardless of their overall significance. As a result, he said, reporters “find themselves chasing many little stories all day long ... coming up with little original research.”

A different reporter who has covered politics in Washington, DC for well over a decade also emphasized that reporters now face considerably more pressure from editors to focus on what the latter see on Twitter, with the result that people find themselves “focusing a lot more on quicker hits and little things that they can quickly do something on.” She also described how her editors often asked her to “check out,” information put out on Twitter by reporters from competing outlets, even if the information was “trivial,” or “inane,” and did not merit any attention, in her view. Yet another reporter complained that “it can be frustrating when the social media folk ask for a four graf post about something like Honey Boo Boo because its trending on Twitter,” while a reporter who spent many years covering Congress, and recently became an editor for breaking news at a wire service, recalled the annoyance she felt at being interrupted while on deadline by an editor who “distracted and slowed” her down with irrelevant material published on Twitter.”

In a similar vein, a 40-year veteran journalist who has worked for a variety of wire services and a major paper in the capital said that editorial pressures to constantly keep abreast of news that was “breaking” on Twitter meant that he felt that he was often “writing a very superficial story that doesn’t provide the right context.” This long-time reporter also said that “he often felt pressured to write things that were less interesting,” due to editorial demands that he keep “on top of things.” Also, although most reporters recognized that their editors themselves operated under diktats from their supervisors, they said that the fact that editors and reporters often operated with different agendas resulted in conflicts. As one reporter with a national newspaper put it:

My agenda is to get the news and get it right. And their agenda is to explain to the guy in New York that we are not missing anything and that we are on top of things ... editors have to manage their own bosses and I think a big part of it is trying to cover their own flank ... so there is a tension in the relationship because everyone has a different pressure point.

While a couple of wire service reporters disagreed, arguing that their editors were not particularly social media-savvy, most respondents concurred that that their editors’

tendency to “react” to Twitter—as one writer put it—frequently forced reporters to cover stories that they did not see as significant, thereby limiting their capacity to operate independently.

Yet another related constraint that our respondents reported was the constant editorial mandate to “match the competition.” Keeping an “eye” on competitors’ coverage is a long-standing newsroom imperative. Indeed, Boczkowski (2010, 3) points out that “monitoring and imitation have long been staples of editorial work.” However, the journalists we interviewed asserted that this traditional dynamic had been vastly amplified by editors’ access to Twitter. Explaining this situation, a 15-year veteran reporter who has covered business and politics for various national and international news outlets and now works for a wire service said:

When editors see some reporter tweeting incessantly and then say “So and so says this ... why don’t we have that story? Probably half the information the person tweeted could be wrong or pointless ... but the editors see news on Twitter and say oh I don’t know, Boehner was having eggs for breakfast ... Why don’t we have that? And that makes people really really mad ... so I do think it creates pressures all around.

These sentiments were also echoed by a long-time wire service reporter who, after acknowledging the importance of being aware of what other news outlets were covering, expressed frustration with the “modern reporting environment,” where “every reporter has the experience of having a boss using Twitter to look over their shoulder.” Describing the pressure to “match” material, he said that this often led journalists to “match political spin not facts.” As he put it, “because some outlet is carrying it, there is pressure to put out what some politician is saying, even though what they are saying might not be accurate or even relevant.”

In other words, social media platforms, especially Twitter, create both external and internal pressure on reporters that can shape their news judgment. Interviews show reporters are responding to material from external sources ranging from the public to regulators to competitors. At the same time, they are being asked to account to editors internally for social media activity on their reporting beats.

In fact, many reporters made the case that editorial directives to “match” competitors, which had been vastly enhanced in a social media-dominated environment, frequently served to discourage reporters from exercising their news judgment and instead pushed them to converge on the same story. They argued that the expanded opportunities for information gathering and sourcing offered by Twitter notwithstanding, the relentless pressure from editors to not “miss anything” caused reporters to often lean in the direction towards following leading voices or trends, resulting in a potential loss of original reporting and homogenization of coverage of the type associated with “pack” journalism (Breed 1955; Sigal 1973). Reflecting on this trend, a reporter for a major paper in the west said that the pressure to monitor and match competitors:

Kind of homogenizes things ... everybody is writing about the same thing. I sometimes wonder if it has a paralyzing effect on original ideas because you are chasing, following someone else’s ideas all the time.

This tendency—reporters acknowledged—was especially marked in the context of political reporting where Twitter enabled the rise of what one reporter referred to as a “virtual scrum,” in which reporters commented on ongoing developments in real time on

social media, and in doing so, impacted coverage by other reporters who are under pressure to monitor and potentially match what leading reporters/outlets might be saying. Reflecting on the impact of this development, a veteran reporter who covered Congress for 15 years said:

As a reporter, you want to be driving some of your own ideas and you don't want to be dependent on what one or two big voices are saying ... And I think there could be the risk that you would be driven by people who have the biggest Twitter presence.

Concurring with this perspective, a reporter for a leading national daily said that online scrums made for "lazy" coverage that focused on the chatter about the issue rather than the issue itself. In his words:

It's like going into a bathroom and saying hey here's what people are writing on the bathroom walls ... it's like people are talking about the graffiti on the wall ... it's about the few people who take the time to go on social media ... it creates a sort of sameness but you're not getting a clear picture of what was said.

Echoing this line of thought, a veteran Washington, DC-based reporter made the point that the Web and social media had given rise to an unexpected development whereby "reporting in some sense had become more collaborative between reporters at different news organizations because of the common place where conversation is taking place" and that this meant that there was "a danger that there is less original stuff." As a result, he said, varied coverage of critical issues was often replaced by stories in which reporters were "basically confirming conventional wisdom about something." Referring to the coverage of Russia's actions in the Ukraine, he said that the view that Putin's response arose out of concerns regarding growing Western influence close to Russia's borders was largely discounted in US media. As he put it, "whether or not you agree with this view, no one is really exploring these other points of view."

Technology as Challenge: Questioning Personal Branding

Aside from feeling that they were less in control of the reporting process due to editorial surveillance of Twitter, several journalists also expressed concerns regarding the growing emphasis on personal branding by journalists. This development—which has up-ended the traditional dynamic between the brand identity of the media institution and its journalists (Hermida 2013)—many reporters argued, had wide-ranging implications for institutional identity and viability. Indeed, although recent research indicates that readers tend to prefer to follow individual journalists rather than institutional Twitter accounts (Hermida 2013) and that "Twitter visibility appears to be driven by individual personality, not institutional imprint" (Bruns and Burgess 2012, p. 105), the current trend whereby journalists create their own individual brand identities on Twitter seemed to render the majority of our respondents deeply uncomfortable.

Indeed, while our interviewees acknowledged that leveraging a Twitter presence into a recognizable brand was beneficial to individuals at a personal level in terms of raising their profile and status within the newsroom, many felt that the emergence of marketable "stars" created tensions from an institutional standpoint, especially if the reporter's personal brand seemed to overtake that of the news outlet. Put differently,

even as reporters admitted that journalists' profiles on Twitter often garnered more attention and visibility than those of news outlets and that individual reporters were consequently better positioned to engage with their audiences (Bruns and Burgess 2012), they expressed serious reservations about the manner in which some reporters were becoming "recognizable brands." While this reaction can be partly understood as an expression of journalism's occupational ideology that has traditionally discouraged journalists from developing an independent public persona distinct from that of their news organization, many of our interviewees felt that the "personal branding" of specific reporters added tensions to an already competitive work environment. As one reporter put it, "sometimes people wonder if someone is tweeting a lot, are they working at all?" Several others were concerned that the rise of the reporter as "brand" undercut the news organization itself. Elaborating on this theme, a reporter for a national daily paper said:

My fear is often that news organizations' business models are based on the fact that people are paying for a national news service. And if a reporter becomes bigger than the news outlet, I don't really understand how that business model can continue to work. People don't pay for what they see on Twitter.

Others simply admitted that even as they sought to build their brands via Twitter, they did not enjoy the experience. As one reporter who covers technology for a leading daily said about his efforts in this regard:

I am doing it but to be honest I do find it deeply annoying. The idea of having a personal brand ... I find it taxing because in part you compare your Twitter followers to other journalists and to your competitors.

While another commented that while he had spent a significant amount of time building his Twitter following, he was "not convinced that it was time well spent because he was not sure that this increased traffic to the news site." Similarly, a wire service reporter said that although he understood why individual reporters might build a large social media presence, he did not see it "as translating into gains for the media organization." Meanwhile, the few editors among our respondents also had issues with the evolution of branding. On the one hand, they clearly wanted their reporters to have a robust social media presence, but on the other, they were simultaneously concerned that reporters who developed an independent following could potentially pose a challenge to newsroom management. As one editor for a top national paper put it:

As reporters become brands in and of themselves they can write their own ticket anywhere ... that makes them a lot more valuable to us but makes us more beholden to him.

Technology as Challenge: "Social Media Policy Made Up On the Fly"

Another source of newsroom tension identified by journalists was the existence of hazy and often shifting policies on social media use. Indeed, the terms "not well-defined," "made up on the fly," "evolving" and "ad hoc" were used repeatedly by reporters in response to questions about their outlets' social media policies. Indeed, while reporters widely acknowledged that the ability to post to Twitter gave them the opportunity

to “get the news out,” and above all, drive traffic to their stories, many asserted that the platform remained a double edged sword which had the potential to land reporters in trouble. In this regard, a veteran Washington, DC-based database reporter for a major national daily said that he had tweeted about a missing fact in an op-ed published by his paper and was chastised by his supervisor who told him that “Twitter was not the place to voice such things.”

Meanwhile, a reporter who has been a journalist since the late 1980s and now works for a major international wire service said that while her employer wanted her to be active on social media, she has been “called on the carpet twice for engaging in a conversation on Twitter.” In one case, she said, she was reprimanded for sending a tweet congratulating a government spokesman on a promotion to a new job, while in another case her supervisor objected to her calling out a competitor on Twitter for failing to credit her news organization with breaking a story. In her view, news organizations thus “send out very mixed messages” to their reporters. This view was shared by other reporters as well who said that while their news organizations constantly underscored the significance of a strong social media presence in order to enhance the organization’s news brand as well as build audience engagement—the current mantra in a newsrooms—they provided little explicit guidance on what was acceptable/not acceptable, thereby creating uncertainty for reporters.

Further, reporters said while they were expected to be active on social media and reach out to audiences, they remained quite unclear about how their performance was evaluated. A reporter who has covered both technology and economic issues for a daily newspaper said that while editors constantly emphasized the importance of “being part of the digital conversation,” she had no knowledge of how “participation in the digital conversation was being measured.” As she put it, “In the past it used to be that if you had a few blockbuster projects a year it was enough ... now that is not enough as things are moving away from straight news and reporting.” The reporter said that when she asked how her social media performance was being measured, she said that her supervisors provided answers that she termed as “nebulous.” “I was told that it was based on how their sense of how engaged reporters were online ... I think it’s legitimate that we ask how we are being judged but I have no idea.”

Interestingly, editors also agreed that there was a considerable lack of clarity about how reporters’ digital engagement was measured. In this regard, an editor for a leading paper said that while a strong Twitter following (which he defined as a thousand or more followers) was very important from “a hiring standpoint,” and reporters were expected to “be constantly on Twitter,” the paper had no way to measure what reporters were accomplishing. Explaining this he said:

Tweets have become the new way of getting the news out like headlines on a wire service ... I oversee a team of 10 reporters and if news breaks and they aren’t tweeting it immediately I get a little jumpy. But we have no way of evaluating how well they do ... we know Twitter is important but there is no way to quantify it.

Aside from voicing concern about the manner in which their performance in the social media realm was being evaluated, many reporters said that its constant demands led them to feel exhausted and overwhelmed. As one reporter put it, “With Twitter, you are always on the grid,” while another complained about being “closely connected to work even at nights and weekends and constantly feeling burnt out.” Meanwhile, a

third said that the “fire hose of information created by Twitter” caused her to feel anxious as “there are suddenly so many more things for me to keep an eye on.” Reporters also expressed some resentment about the manner in which new technologies like Twitter had expanded their workload, as they tried “to manage the competing demands of Web reporting, newspaper reporting and demands of social media,” as one reporter for a national daily said. Yet another commented that whereas two decades ago he had had to balance daily stories *vis-à-vis* longer-term projects, the current situation was far more complex and stressful. As he put it:

There’s a lot more tension in the newsroom now. We are expected to produce headlines for the wire, then the first couple of paragraphs tweet it out ... then write something for the newspaper version ... there is a push to build out the story throughout the day.

In fact, a few reporters even questioned whether the time devoted to social media was even worthwhile. A reporter for a West Coast paper commented, “even when I read stories that I feel were heavily helped by Twitter, I feel a lot of time more fluff than substance”, while one reporter for a leading national daily said:

The jury is still out ... there are times when I am tweeting and I’m doing everything I’m told is going to help but how important is it, I don’t know. I’ll put up something and look at the analytics and see how many people clicked on the link that I put out and sometimes it’s like 10 or 15 or 20 ... is 10 or 15 or 20 going to save journalism?

Several of our respondents, both reporters and editors, also pointed to the existence of friction between those who were Twitter-savvy and others who were reluctant to use the platform intensively. In many cases, they pointed out that these tensions were also generational as those who tended to be more technologically adept were also younger. Indeed, some of the older and more established reporters believe a significant proportion of the recently hired journalists were selected because of their specific technical skills. As one senior reporter ruefully stated, “it’s a children’s army out there,” while an editor for a major national paper admitted that resources going to social media and by extension to less-experienced reporters caused friction in the newsroom. In her words:

Every now and then you hear people who are like, well we are hiring social media people but we don’t have an XYZ reporter? It’s hard for people to wrap their heads around it. They don’t quite understand what these people do all day.

Discussion

Persistent references to “challenges” and “tensions” related to the growing use of Twitter thus emerged as a recurrent theme in our interviews with journalists. Specifically, reporters associated the increasing use of the platform within the newsroom with growing incursions by editors into the reporting process as well as constant pressure to quickly deliver stories that reporters often perceived to have limited significance. They also described pressures that they faced as a result of editorial directives to constantly “match” competitors based on Twitter feeds. Expressed differently, many reporters criticized Twitter for *enabling* constraints on their ability to exercise control over the news agenda, by editors who increasingly took story cues from material published on Twitter

or pushed reporters to mimic competitors' agendas in ways that the latter felt limited their autonomous functioning. Indeed, the limitations that journalists identify complicate notions of autonomy that constitute a bedrock concept of journalistic claims to professionalism (Beam 1990; Hallin 1989; McLeod and Hawley 1964). However, it is important that these observations should be leavened with some perspective. Reporter complaints of editors interfering with their work are well documented in the pre-Twitter and pre-internet era (Breed 1955). Disputes over directives to match the competition go back many years as well, thereby indicating that, new technologies notwithstanding, organizational structures continue to wield considerable power by setting routines and limiting the agenda for journalists as in the past (Cook 1998). To this point, a reporter at a national daily said the lack of autonomy was "a lot less about the technology than with the culture of the newsroom." Many others, however, argued that editors' ability to monitor the development of issues on social media platforms enabled them to surveil reporters to a far greater degree than in the past, thereby producing a greater loss of autonomy over the scope of their reporting as well as creating tensions within the newsroom.

As Jaffee (2008) points out, all organizations contain what he calls "conflict creating tensions," that typically arise from differences in individual resistance to organizational goals, division of work and authority, and newsrooms have not been exempt from this tendency. Indeed, even researchers who otherwise emphasized that newsrooms operated on the basis of the socialization of news workers (Breed 1955) and compromises between reporters and management (Gans 1979), recognized the existence of newsroom conflicts over news goals, norms and practices. Subsequent research has identified the existence of struggles over priorities and policies (Bantz 1985; Shoemaker and Reese 1991) along lines of race (Lule 1992), ethnicity and gender (Johnson *Forthcoming*) as well as technology (Cottle and Ashton 1999; Garcia Aviles and Leon 2002). As such, these conflicts speak to the long-running contests over reporter autonomy. Indeed, while reporters may be insulated from certain types of external pressures, they nevertheless have to conform to the institutional imperatives as defined by their employers who retain final authority over their work process and product (Breed 1955; McLeod and Hawley 1964). According to our respondents, the use of social media platforms like Twitter has emerged as a new focus for the long-standing contests for power and control that have existed within newsrooms.

While the shifts in the media landscape, especially the migration of audiences to multiple platforms, have led news organizations towards the large-scale deployment of social media platforms like Twitter, the latter represent a significant paradox for news outlets. On the one hand, Twitter can aid news gathering and dissemination, but it can also increase homogenization and limit journalists' ability to pursue stories. It can help reporters to establish their own personal brand, which can increase a journalist's employment options in this turbulent modern media market. Creating the personal brand, however, is controversial in the newsroom and raises issues of group cohesion and collegiality. In all of these aspects, our interviews showed how Twitter operates as a disruptive force, reshaping relationships between editors and reporters, reporters and reporters, and reporters and their sources. Thus, journalists find themselves in conflicted terrain. On the one hand, they are clearly aware of the potential benefits of the affordances of social media technologies, at the same time, however, they find many implications of these technologies quite challenging. Thus, contrary to deterministic

accounts, which tend to perceive technology almost exclusively as a force that enhances journalists' abilities to gather and produce news, our exploratory study argues that technology represents a contingent and often unsettling force in contemporary news environments—one that merits further investigation. Since our study is limited by its focus on large national and regional outlets and wire services, which are at least arguably more rigid in institutional terms, future research should look at how the dynamics of technological innovation play out in smaller regional or local news outlets.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Both authors know of no potential conflicts of interest in relation to this paper, nor will they benefit financially through this research. This research did not receive any funding.

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