The development of journalism in the face of social media

A study on social media's impact on a journalist's role, method and relationship to the audience

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ABSTRACT

Journalism is a long-established profession prevalent in society in the vast majority of the world. The rise of social media over the last ten years has seen a significant influence on the way in which news is reported and digested by all parties within journalism, with traditional journalists taking on a developed role utilising social media as both a way to deliver and to promote their work.

Several studies have been conducted on what the rise of social media does to journalism, and from the perspective of various positions within the industry. However, there has been little in-depth qualitative research into what journalists themselves actually feel about their professional interaction with social media.

This study investigates the journalists perspective on the impact social media has had on their profession, and on how they perform their role. A series of interviews conducted with journalists also look at the participant's beliefs about the change in audience interaction. Interactivity with the audience, and the rise of the citizen journalist, as well as the journalist's preferences for working with social media, are all investigated and implemented as part of the study. In conclusion, the paper validates that social media has drastically altered journalism as it once was, with contrasting beliefs on whether it has interfered with or advanced the profession.

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INTRODUCTION

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The role of news and journalism in society

News can be interpreted as some kind of information that is of importance to another individual (Hughes 1981), and is something that people have come into contact with at some point in their lives (Barker 2012). Historically, language and gestures have been methods employed by our ancestors to convey information to one another, an imagination-instructing communication system (Jahlone et al 2012), so in some sense they are the precursors to modern news broadcasting means. Though they do in fact remain as methods of passing on news and information, it is increasingly evident, even among those with minimal contact with technology, that the formats with which news is passed has developed considerably throughout history, and will continue to develop long into the future. Indeed, as news and communication have evolved, they have tended to do so via technology.

Defining newspapers as the oldest constituent of modern media (Boczkowski 2004) it is easy to underline their importance in the history of communication, being considered one of the original models of information conveyance (e.g. in 1994 there are over 1,400 newspapers representing a $55 billion industry) (McQuail 1994).

By the nineteenth century, and complimented by further technological advancements in printing and telegraphic communication, as well as huge advancements in speedy and effective transportation, news was more accessible than ever before. As Muhlmann wrote, "the newspaper ceased to be simply a forum for the expression of diverse opinions and became a source of news […] gathered by people who began to call themselves reporters" (2008: 1). For press agencies, this notion of reporting would come to be central to journalistic identity, and in turn set journalism on its route to the professional identity and influence it has enjoyed for most of the last two centuries (Muhlmann 2008).

Traditionally, journalists have utilised status and power to reinforce society's perception of the merits of professional journalism: "I share with thousands of others in journalism a sense of mission that I have seen in only two other professions. One of them is teaching and the other is the ministry" (Sigelman 1973: 105). And yet, recently journalists have had to deal with a certain level of infringement on such status and power, and it may have changed their role forever.

Previous research and motivation

There has been an escalating level of interest in the impact of social media on the news industry over the last few years, especially since it has become more apparent that it has radically and irrevocably altered the industry from what has been the norm in the twentieth century. The Internet, so central to the effectiveness of social media, has brought the world and its inhabitants closer together, and the field of news, where there had been such notable distance between broadcaster or journalist and reader, has also found itself more familiar.

The various previous researches that have been conducted on social media and the news have addressed many different perspectives and interests (Deuze 2003, Chung 2007, Hermida & Thurman 2008, Domingo 2008, Robinson 2010). From the audience to the editor, from the newspaper manager to the media professor, many opinions have been sought, with minimal interest in what the traditional authorities in news may think. This paper, perhaps some would say somewhat ironically, gives the journalist the chance to publish their opinions. These pages will seek to be their soapbox.

This investigation seeks to find out what the journalists, those involved in contributing work, and now often embroiled in aspects of social media, think of the phenomenon of its impact on their profession. If the reader has narrowed the gap to them compared to previous decades, how does this affect them and their beliefs about news? Naturally, it is of great relevance to look into what the journalists themselves feel about this new influence on their profession, especially considering that they are an active group who may have had to adapt significantly from their traditional position. Such a study may also provide a documentation of this particular period of social media advancement in relation to journalism, helping to understand how journalists feel at this point in time, and anticipating what may come next. It was necessary when processing the interviews to take into account the answers as coming from

individuals who are both informants and respondents, where responses can be dually factual or an opinion.

The paper will look at the ways in which social media has impacted news broadcasting. It will focus both on its affect on the practical ways that news is broadcast: what changes have been made to the process of transmitting news as a result of the rise of social media, as well as its influence on the theory behind news culture: has social media literally changed the notion of news, compared to what beliefs were held about it previously? Are these new contributor's comments actually part of a new kind of news?

THEORY

The theoretical perspective will consider the prior research on the subjects of: news, the traditional notion of journalism and journalists, and the audience, specifically considering the communication and interactivity between them both. This is anchored in definitions of news and social media, with an ongoing focus on the impact of social media on journalism, and how journalists perceive this transformation. Pulling on these previous studies will provide a foundation for the discussion of results that follows later in the thesis.

The evolution of news

As already mentioned, news has naturally come a long way since methods such as screaming, listening out and smoke signals. Despite this though, it has also somehow managed to maintain a close relationship to these tried and tested tactics, and this is basically due to the fact that we are sensory creatures according to Empirical philosophy, forming ideas through the processing of information through experiences obtained through our sensory organs (Locke 1836). We learn about our world through our senses of sight, hearing, feeling, tasting and smelling, and concurrently, these are also the senses we appeal to when trying to pass on information. We show things to enlighten others, we say things or make noises to inform and so on. News is clearly attributable as being a key aspect of communication, as seen by consulting one of the original communication models (below), designed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949:
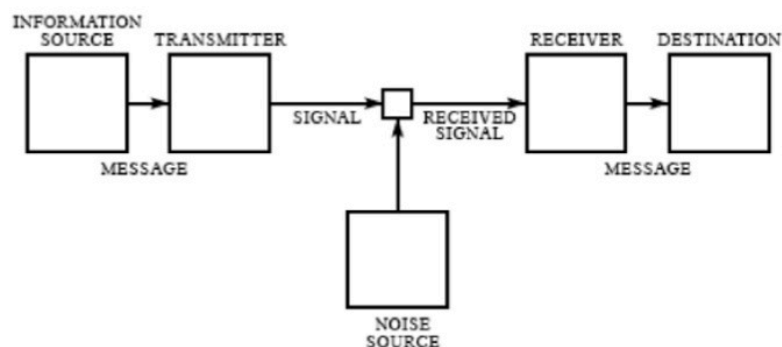

Fig. 1

Here news is the message that passes from the information source, through the transmitter, and to the destination. As history has unfolded we have come up with more and more

methods and technologies in which to transmit news, in which to pass on information to other individuals.

Definition of Social Media

Social media is an application resulting from this technological advancement. It is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated-content [also known as UGC]" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010: 60). When trying to define social media in relation to communication, researchers have come to describe it as "alternative platforms of public communication" (Poell and Borra 2011: 696). Manuel Castells explains what he calls the rise of 'mass self-communication' in his 2009 article, this being a process of users building their own mass communication systems, via SMS, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis (2009). Other researchers have commented that this mass self-communication actually makes each individual a media outlet in him or herself, and that such methods have led to the diminishing of journalism as a profession (Poell and Borra 2011).

Like news, social media has become an integral modern method of communicating with one another (Kaplan and Haenlein 2012). In fact, it could be argued that social media itself is a form of broadcasting news, albeit a particularly technologically advanced one (Poell and Borra 2011) given the ever-developing platforms and tools that users are able to employ. What is telling about social media, as a phenomenon, is its affect on traditional ways of broadcasting news across all manner of mediums. On television news, presenters will often end a segment on a particular subject by reading out certain comments obtained from Twitter from viewers. In newspapers, readers will be encouraged to offer their comments through a certain social media channel on certain hot topics, with such comments appearing as part of another days news story. And online, many news articles have links and logos to share stories on a particular social network site, as well as a box to comment on the story above, so that to some extent the hundreds of people's comments may appear as a continuation of the news story itself. This opportunity to give feedback can be seen in the updated version of Shannon and Weaver's previously seen communication model:
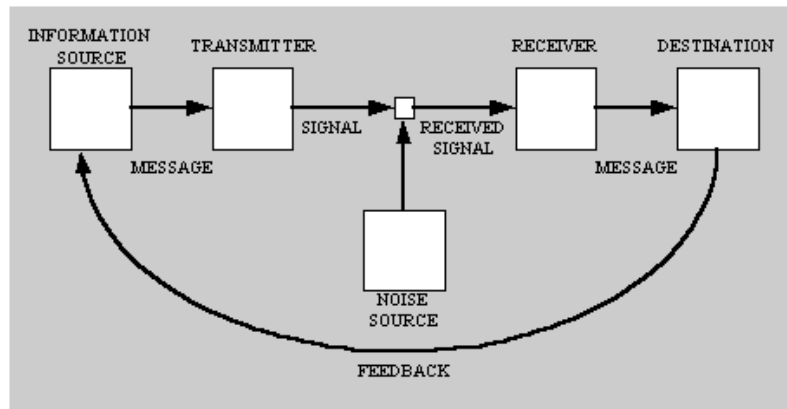
Fig 2.

A basic definition of social media was provided earlier, but we can now break it down to understand it to a greater degree. Kaplan and Haenlein consider it to be made up of: collaborative projects such as Wikipedia, blogs and micro-blogs (eg.Twitter), content communities (eg. Youtube), social networking sites (eg. Facebook), virtual game worlds (eg.World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (eg. Second Life) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2012). Each of these is a platform that allows said creation and sharing of UGC. With the onset of social media there has been a shift towards its use as the powerful alternative platform of public communication Poell and Borra highlighted. Essentially, theorists believe, there has been a shift away from news existing to provide information, to the ability for everybody to have an opinion on news, with certain theorists even arguing that the profession of journalism as we know it is in decline (Kaplan and Haenlein 2012).

The tradition of journalism

The journalist has several obligations tied up in their professional identity, rules to be followed that are integral to their success within the field. Writing the objective truth is chief among them, and is supported by a necessity to use predominantly qualitative subjects, while showing respect to the audience. Sigelman pinpoints the primary public function of the journalist/reporter as, "the operational one of disinterested objectivity" (1973). Running parallel to these obligations is the journalists inherent right to be free to collect information and express ideas to the public, in a critical, informative and entertaining manner: "Journalists see themselves as engaged in criticism, entertainment and information rather than scholarly communication and paternalistic public education on behalf of science which is desired by scientists" (Peters 1995, cited in Reed 2001).

Within journalism, and between journalists, there are contrasting positions when it comes to the relationship between the journalist and the audience. Robinson (2010) conducted ethnographic research into the commenting policies of online news sites, and uncovered two perspectives: 'traditionalists' and 'convergers'. The 'traditionalists' favor the continuation of a hierarchical relationship between writer and reader, with a restricted level of input on behalf of the reader within news sites. They are at odds with the 'convergers', who felt that increasing reader involvement was the way forward.

Communication flow within journalism

In Habermas (1989) media is criticised for promoting a one-way communication pattern, producing messages with no direct implications from their readers. This is conveyed in the lack of topics with strong political affiliation or citizen opportunities to express discontent. The notion of civic journalism, an ideological movement which throve in the 90s, is based on trying to reconnect with audiences by communicating with the readers and considering their popular inclinations towards certain topics (Rosen 1992, Charity 1995, Merritt 1998). Nowadays, civic journalism can be translated into participatory journalism, an online community that promotes involvement between the media and their communities of readers (Bowman & Willis 2003).

News credibility represents one of the contemporary issues, which became apparent with the engagement of journalism in online platforms. While online journalism is developing into a web practice adopted by all newspapers, the concept of interactivity arises naturally from the news industry. This quality of new media platforms promotes the endorsement of a two-way communication model, challenging the traditional practices of journalism that are based on one-way communication. This modern journalism allows its readers to participate actively in the production of news and allows the sending of their personalised feedback to key writers from the industry.

The online newspapers follow the choices of interactivity, rapidity and selectivity, with users being able to select their favorite topics through the aid of hyperlinks or newsletters. In this way, newspapers open an ongoing communication channel between them and readers, which permits a live flow in conversations and in opportunities to give feedback to stories. This creates the basis for personalised journalism.

The idea of collaborative news has clearly continued to be on the rise in the last few years, and is a shift away from the one-way communication method of traditional journalism. The distance between professional and amateur journalists has shrunk because of the power of the Internet, and there is a sense that there is mutual benefit in both parties working together to get the quickest and truest news. Deuze et al (2007) forecast a new form of journalism, where an interactive relationship with audiences granted readers more authority in the public sphere, and therefore the means to contribute and publish news across multiple media platforms. Defining this as participatory journalism (one of a number of terms used to describe it), Deuze et al go on to describe its online use as being the news organisation's initiative to promote interaction between journalists and their audience, a development that scrutinises journalist's established notions of professional identity and gatekeeping (Chung 2007).

Zvi Reich reports that this new, citizen-led media, links traditional media with types of civic participation. Such is the shift away from tradition and towards the influence of the individual, the field of journalism is undergoing a "reformation moment", where the authority of the journalist may be diminished and bypassed (Reich 2008).

Interactivity

Steensen outlines the two features essential to the nature of online journalism as being immediacy and interactivity. Immediacy is historically a very important aspect of journalism (2011), linked as it is to the idea of getting something of interest to an audience as swiftly as possible. It is natural that as delivering news became profitable and competitive, how quick one can publish that news plays a significant part in its success or failure.

The interactivity prevalent on online news sites was thus the key matter of debate between the opposing journalist groups of 'traditionalists' and 'convergers'. Traditionally, there have been few routes for the reader to communicate with their newspaper. 'Letters to the editor' tended to provide this route, upholding both journalistic authority and community values (Robinson 2010), as well as influencing editorial writing and, it is feared, applying editorial bias when it comes to selecting letters to print (Hannah and Gandy 2000). The internet could be said to offer much more open channels for readers to interact with anything they wish to, with publishing companies being forced to recognise the role of the consumer within the production process. This in turn encouraged these companies to incorporate a higher level of

interactivity into their policies (Poster 2001). Despite interactivity growing in importance for publishers, Domingo (2007) describes a theory called the 'myth of interactivity', where there is much discussion about developing a relationship with the reader, without an appropriate altering of policy.

In theorizing the concept of interactivity, researchers have tried to differentiate between human interactivity, also known as user-to-user, and medium interactivity, user-to-medium. The main distinction can be made through the understanding that human interactivity deals with interpersonal communication patterns and medium interactivity is more related to the content of the transmitted message (Massey and Levy 1999). Furthermore, human interactivity happens on a communication line where users can generate information by message boards or emails. On the other hand, medium interactivity relates to the communication processes that take place when users interact with all the technological means on webpages, such as hyperlinks .

Deuze (2003) tries to define interactivity further, by drawing its dimensions into: navigational interactivity, adaptive interactivity and functional interactivity. Navigational interactivity can be explained as an area that allows users to move on the page through hyperlinks and menu bars. Adaptive interactivity is understood as a mixture between the medium and the human interchange, giving the possibility of feedback on site content. Functional interactivity is seen as the closest model to human interaction, giving users the chance to offer real time feedback and live communication.

Literature suggests that few studies have approached the analysis of various interactive features of the online papers, or the motivation in pursuing these qualities by the readers. The study performed by Chung (2008) tried to gather information through an online survey and discern a variety of categories of online interactivity.

Looking at the two sides of news: the journalists and the readers, it is apparent that the arrival of higher interactivity may be more difficult to process for some than for others. According to the development of online newsroom policy, despite the significant influence of technology in revolutionising the way news passes through the newsroom, the "traditional routines, standards, and other cultural components of a particular newsroom dictate the company's

policies and, ultimately, the product consumption" (Robinson 2010: 127). In contrast to this is the inevitable shift in the attitude of the readers, which though more eager than those in the newsroom, still often needs some guidance or pressing. Carlin et al (2005: 633) looked into online communal engagement and discovered that an "assertive moderator" helps readers adopt a more collective position, whilst also respecting established norms such as respect and acknowledgement of diversity. Such policies, in part enforced by the moderators, dictate whether, and how much, individuals are prepared to participate in that online community (Hurrell 2005). As the Internet grew, and the opportunity to comment on articles increased, so did the journalistic influence of people such as moderators and readers, therein increasing their influence as writers. The shift resulting from this has caused the entire infrastructure of news production to move from a "hierarchal, centralized, onto-many, unidirectional information flow to something more distributed, decentralized, poly-directional, many-to-many pattern" (Robinson 2010: 141).

When referring to interactivity and online journalism, the consequences of having an interactional model of communicating with readers can be represented by the outgrowth in immediacy, readers' collaborations and personalised experiences on stories. The Internet reaches unlimited audiences, erasing geographical borders and increasing readership.

Globalisation

When talking about the globalisation of media markets we can say that when media change is brought into the world of journalism, the information content changes due to different target audiences underlining the need for a very diverse range of media instruments: from social media platforms to official web pages of news papers or unofficial news blogs.

The advent of the Internet, and the digital technologies that it can use, has also ensured that any member of the public can access the information present online, and therefore the outer world in general, to the same degree that the traditional news media are able to (De Keyser et al 2011). It also leads to the blurring of what were previously national frames of reference, meaning that regardless of location, user, creator and news subject have a greater reach (Reese et al 2007). This means that there has been a natural adaption by the media of these individuals as sources of information for news, despite there being a traditional preference for more established sources. In this age of camera and video phones, and permanent Internet

access, there is the very reliable possibility that whenever a newsworthy event occurs somewhere remotely public, it is recorded and reported by a technology wielder that just happens to be present.

Despite the opportunity this glut of possible new sources may bring, it is not necessarily for everyone. Certain studies show that particular specialised areas of journalism, such as political and economic journalism, prefer to stick to elite contacts as sources. The motivation here is that this can minimise the gathering and checking of usable information (Keyser et al 2011), which is a necessary aspect of utilising unconfirmed amateur sources.

In this way the concept of communication transforms itself into a new form, which tries to explain the rise of multimodalities and interactive design in transmitting news. So, mass communication becomes "the communication processes taking place in a global web of horizontal communication networks that include the multimodal exchange of interactive messages and documents from many-to-many in chosen time" (Arsenault and Catsells 2008: 710).

The standard interpretation of news broadcasting has changed from a consistent traditional dissemination of information for a targeted audience, towards an exploitation of online platforms for a more global readership. To accept the informational change as media progress means also to admit the online dominance over classic ways of transmitting news. This analysis contrasts with the theoretical perspective on online news broadcasting and underlines the role of social media in propagating information. Also, research focuses on the differences between traditional communication techniques and the new emerging ways of sending out information, which can represent a significant trait of the new global identity.

The transmission and re-transmission of the same message through different channels produces not only a news globalisation, but also a commercialisation of the used channels. As a result the individual is subject to a continuous buy-sell process (McLuhan 1995).

Change is a general idea explored by McLuhan, the technological transformation causing the alteration of the media environment, the individuals, as well as of the perception of reality. The production of messages has become a real cultural industry, a business that treats concepts such as identity and culture as key selling mechanisms. The confrontation between unaltered spaces in the transmission of news, and the online platforms that sustain a

revolutionary informational phenomenon, could be translated in terms of new emerging cultural industries such as blogging, tweeting or podcasting.

The invasion of the audience

With the rise of the Internet era, traditional news faced many challenges in transmitting the messages to their audiences. This change in delivering news to certain target groups brought the transformation of the top-down model of journalism, with writers as gatekeepers of information, to a decentralized system where users have a more active role in the formation of news. One of the main features of the online publications is that interactivity represents the attribute that made online newspapers so popular among readers (Chung 2008). Journalists use this quality in order to keep their audiences closer to their writing (Brown 2000). Furthermore, readers also find the new relationship between them and journalism a valuable one, with the ongoing interaction being appreciated (Chung 2008).

The Digital Journalism Credibility Study (2003) asserts that through the aid of e-mail links, chat rooms and message boards, online newspapers create communities of readers strongly linked to each other. Also, Rafaeli (1988) mentions in his paper that interactivity brings along satisfaction from users and the motivation to keep on reading the same publication because they get a sense of entertainment and learning at the same time.

But the modification of journalistic methods to connect with their audience wasn't the only thing that changed. The idea of content production in the traditional sense needed to be challenged according to Bruns (2007). He posits that established sectors were threatened from online technologies that utilise UGC as its lifeblood, listing Wikipedia, Google earth, Flickr and YouTube as prime examples of medias that have superseded their outdated alternatives. This new kind of user-led content creation he labels *produsage*, "a hybrid mixture of simultaneous production and usage" (Bruns 2007: 2).

Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMPORGs) such as World of Warcraft and Mabinogi utilise the user by enabling them to create and distribute items within the game world, as well as choosing their own route in which to navigate the game. These ideas, where the user can enrich the experience of the gaming community, as well as take on some of the

burden of its development, help involve the user to the degree that they co-create to a reasonable degree.

This is the kind of *produsage* that Bruns mentions, and he goes on to describe four key characteristics of the term:

- A shift from dedicated individuals and teams as producers to a broader-based, distributed generation of content by a wide community of participants.
- Fluid movement of *produsers* between roles as leaders, participants, and users of content – such *produsers* may have backgrounds ranging from professional to amateur.
- Artifacts generated are no longer products in a traditional sense: they are always unfinished, and continually under development – such development is evolutionary, iterative, and palimpsestic.
- *Produsage* is based on permissive regimes of engagement which are based on merit more than ownership: they frequently employ copyright systems which acknowledge authorship and prohibit unauthorised commercial use, yet enable continuing collaboration on further content improvement.

(Bruns 2007: 4)

Yet, there are several pitfalls that have been encountered by the age of *produsage*. Because the product, as Bruns sees it, is in a constant state of revision or development, a flowering into something that will only flower into something else, the tracking of intellectual property in the process is difficult. Bruns even argues that our belief systems have been so shaken by creative engagement in content development, that many of the problems affecting the software, journalism, music and broadcast industries can be in part attributable to it (2007). The public's general relaxing to the pirating of these medias, as well as the difficulty with which these industries have held on to and developed their markets indicate that. Inevitably, this has led to a "mainstreaming of *produsage*", where large media corporations have acquired the rights to the very sites that contrasted them e.g. MySpace to News Corporation, Flickr to Yahoo and YouTube to Google (Bruns 2007: 6).

The impact of social media on journalism

The Internet and social media have only increased the ability to bring many different kinds of news to its audience, and significantly quicker than had before been possible (Steensen 2011). Having been previously restricted to morning newspapers and on-the-hour news broadcasts, which only presented a selection of news stories, now access to this information is only a mouse click away. Interactivity, as has already been covered, ensures both access to the audience as users and producers, and the development of a relationship with sources that can publish news off their own back.

"In our digital age, anyone can do what journalists traditionally have done" (Steensen 2011: 688)

Gunter (2003) associates the role of the journalist in the new cyberspace era as related to the freedom of the reader in choosing what to read and when to participate in the construction of news. The traditional top-down model of communicating with readers does not apply any more to the online spaces. The interaction between journalists and sources can be skipped, with information being spread directly by sources on online pages. Thus, the role of the journalist as a mediator between the external world and the audiences is withdrawn from the professional world of journalism (Gunter 2003: 171).

The new model of communication, when applied to online newspapers, allows feedback and participation from the receivers, with the distribution of messages being decentralised by the constant involvement from the users through chat forums, blogs or other type of UGC (Bowman and Willis 2003). This leads to and demands changes in the way journalists perceive their role, as well as how they go about their day-to-day job. Gathering sources, responding to feedback, and promoting your work are all specific areas that shift somewhat.

In fact, such is the impact of technology on journalism Steensen argues, that the only thing that separates journalists from the other news bringers in the public eye is their professional identity. This identity is therefore of growing importance to the journalist and his/her success (Steensen 2011).

The role of social media in relation to journalism is manifold though, and offers a variety of pros in exchange for the perceived cons. In Lin Grensing-Pophal's 2010 paper, an executive of a media industry news service based in Cleveland states that social media has a particularly valuable role as a tool for making connections, friends and sources within the profession. The executive also emphasises Twitter's position as a facet for communication with one's audience.

A rise in the way in which Internet users can create online through the growth and variety of user generated content (UGC) has also impacted online journalism. When referring to UGC and the practice of journalism, various studies have tried to analyse and measure the expansion of the readers' diverse contributions on the online pages of newspapers. Hermida and Thurman, in their article "A clash of cultures", revealed a boost in the readers' tendency to comment and participate actively in the generation of news (2008).

According to Paul Saffo (Hermida and Thurman 2008), "the Internet in this new media culture [allows that] the public is no longer a passive consumer of media, but an active participant in the creation of the media landscape". In relation to news, this means that the Internet, through diverse social media platforms, can bring forth messages to a large audience, creating the new type of news characterised by real time updates from journalists or readers. For example, during the London bombings, online media platforms helped the spread of news and information with the "BBC receiving 22,000 e-mails and text messages, 300 photos, and several video sequences on the day of the attacks" (Hermida and Thurman 2008). This shows the direct implication of the reader in the transmission of news facilitated by online platforms, which contribute to making all kinds of important information global, and was the first time material provided in this way was considered more newsworthy than professional content (Douglas 2006). Clearly, and this is something that was understood with a growing level of savviness, news sites could utilise the receiving of information from their readers, at times of both keen interest in a certain event, as well as more ordinary news periods.

The new format of online news broadcasting has come to include various types of UGC such as: polls, message boards, have your say, comments on stories, Q&A's, blogs, reader blogs, your media your story (Hermida and Thurman 2008).

- ''Polls'' are defined by very specific questions that can be answered through a multiple choice or a binary response.

- ''Message boards'' are online spaces where readers can pursue debates and conversations on diverse topics usually instigated by users.

- ''Have your say'' is similar to ''Message boards'' but with the main difference that usually the ones posting a question are the journalists to which readers can send versatile answers.

- The ''Comments on stories'' format permits users to contribute with their own thoughts on a story.

- "Q& As'' represent a certain type of online interview guide, with questions submitted by readers for journalists or other guests.

- ''Blogs'' are generated by one or more writers with shared opinions and interests and allow readers to post comments on each news story.

- ''Reader blogs'' represent a new format launched in 2006 by The Sun, the UK's best-selling daily newspaper, on their official website. This allows readers to create their own blogs on diverse broadcasting servers.

- ''Your media'' is a selection of photographs, videos or other types of media submitted by users on online media galleries and reviewed by journalists.

- ''Your stories'' are online spaces where readers can send in stories that are valuable to them and can be newsworthy for a certain audience.

(Hermida and Thurman 2008)

Hermida and Thurman's 2008 study showed that most journalists feel blogs offer them the possibility to express news freely without the pressure of being part of a corporate news chain. User generated content, expressed on different social media platforms, is mainly seen as complimenting journalism rather than replacing it.

Blogs and microblogs are indeed one of the more prominent new medias that have impacted modern news. According to Habermas (1989), the construct of the public sphere integrates

the emergence of public opinion as a natural law of expressing oneself without any material borders. In this way, the notion of 'blogosphere' can be interpreted as an online space, with no geographical margins, where dialogue and the manifestation of public opinion is strongly encouraged. Journalism appears as a central item inside this communication process.

Carey (1989) indicates that the practice of journalism fosters the emergence of public discussions and stimulates the extension of the public sphere on online platforms. Consequently, the public sphere takes the form of a mediated area, where broadcasting companies distribute and develop the medium for the expression of public voices. In connection with the maturing process of online spaces, journalism takes over another identity when going online: *hypertextuality, multimediality and interactivity* being among its new cyberspace qualities (Deuze 2003). This changes the very nature of transmitting messages to the audience. Aspects of real time feedback, live interaction with the users or the possibility to channel the same information through various mediums become part of the online broadcasting peculiarities.

In this way, the technological evolution has supported the extension of journalistic speech in a new global sphere characterized by an increment in messages and the unsteadiness of its boundaries (Habermas, 1992). In this specific context, the conceptual frontier between professional media and informal, citizen forms of journalism become blurry. The online spaces promote a different type of journalism that is distinguished from the traditional practices of journalism, but at the same time incorporates both into a global network of message sharing.

Summary and expectations

It is hoped that, in relation to the theory, the data uncovered will provide some understanding of the role of social media within modern methods of journalism. It is also the aim of the thesis, through a series of interviews, to investigate how journalists feel it has impacted their profession, particularly considering a possible shift in their relationship to the audience. Such enquiries should yield interesting debates on the very nature of news, and the role of the audience in relation to it and its journalists. The research is nevertheless limited in its scope and any findings unearthed must be digested considering its scale.

Based on prior theoretical research the study can be conducted with several expectations:

I. *Social media has transformed the way in which news is broadcast from one-way to two-way communication.*

II. *Social media has affected the broadcaster's perspective on the process of transmitting news.*

III. *Global news corporations are less reliant on social media as a means to raise their profile than local broadcasters.*

METHOD

The intention of this study is to understand both the rise to prominence of social media as a contributing factor for journalists, delving into what kind of significance this brings to them and the industry, while looking at what it means for the two sides of the communication structure within news: broadcaster and audience. In order to obtain the most rounded conclusions available, both practical and theoretical research methods were employed. Though there are several different channels that can be chosen in order to review the process, a challenging task in obtaining sufficient interview participants led to a mixed methodology. The dominant method of research was looking at how social media has affected professional's ideologies on the nature of news, through a series of interviews with journalists within the industry. Given the difficulty in obtaining participants, the interview methods were split between face-to-face interviews, Skype interviews, and email interviews with follow up opportunities. A supporting literature review was utilised as an on-going second method.

The validity of the study in relation to the chosen methods is relative due to certain research limitations such as: the choice of a qualitative approach, a limited number of respondents, the chosen respondents, and the possibility of subjective debate on certain themes. On the other hand all these methodological issues are difficult to avoid in any type of research that holds validity as the ultimate goal.

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative research is best placed to extract interpretive, theoretical data from a source about their experiences and actions (Brennen 2012). It is distinct from quantitative research, especially in communication and journalistic studies, as it is focused on understanding factors such as the relationships between two parties through different medias, or the variety of meanings and values produced in media (Brennen 2012). Because the focus of the study is on obtaining in-depth ideas and findings from a professional group, a qualitative approach fits aptly. Furthermore, the goals of this thesis are not to generalise the main findings to the whole profession of journalism but to highlight and identify a variety of characteristics and attributes that could apply to some of the professional group. On the other hand, a quantitative approach could be used in further research to validate the findings of this thesis.

Interviews as primary data collection method

Interviews are the ideal method for understanding a social actor's own outlooks on a subject according to Lindlof (1995). Their major purpose is the understanding of the interviewee's experience and perspective through stories, accounts and explanations. As the questions posed in the data collection for this paper are designed to facilitate a detailed enquiry into journalist's opinions and beliefs on certain matters, interviews are the ideal qualitative method to use. The research design took into consideration the main research questions that required a level of disclosure only capable through in-depth questions on the journalist's role, job style and relationship with audience. Other methods such as surveys, questionnaires or observations lack the necessary depth and detail to establish what the interview subjects actually think, while interviews also offer the opportunity to follow up on questions should an interesting answer, or need for clarification arise.

Several interviews were conducted with individuals involved with the news broadcasting industry. These will seek to shed light on how experts perceive the influence of social media on their profession, with inductive coding being used to construct the questions for the interview guide. This provided a guide structured around the main aspects of the research questions encompassing traditional definitions of journalism, other aspects of journalism, social media and audience response. Each of these categories is composed of a set of questions pertaining to extract the interviewee's expert opinion in order to evaluate this research tool it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that a selection of interviews does not promise a full extrapolation of that group's attributes, opinions or beliefs. Every section of the interview guide aims to bring into light information relating to the answering of the research questions. This provided a strong framework to use in order to remain focused on the research intentions, and was able to be refined over the initial interviews to create a stronger guide. The coding of the results allowed for the structuring of both that section and the discussion that followed in line with the research questions.

The applied sampling method has been contacting known acquaintances that are either actively involved within the news industry as journalists, or able to contact a journalist who may be interested in participating in the study. Given the hectic schedule of those working with news, obtaining interviewees through contacting their media organisations proved

problematic. This in turn led to the broadening of interview methods, as to not just include in-person. Where able, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, also being semi-structured in design and audio recorded. Some interviews, with individuals in inaccessible locations, were only feasible through alternate methods such as Skype or email. Interviews were a strong means to extract detailed, expressive opinions utilising the experience of the interviewee and how they utilise that experience as an expert (Di Cicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006). The results were transcribed, coded and reviewed after collection of all interview data. These codes were inspired by concepts prominent within previous research, leading to the development of the interview guide and designation of subsequent results sections.

Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews are one of the most open forms of communication available for qualitative data collection. Utilising a semi-structured approach ensured a probing interview, while allowing for follow up questions where deemed effective (Olubunmi 2013).

Skype interviews

Skype interviews are strong alternatives to face-to-face interviews, and are applied due to time and location difficulties. Like face-to-face interviews, Skype interviews allow for the chance for both interviewer and interviewee to adapt to and follow up on the discourse as it unfolds, often leading to rich and valuable insights. One of the prominent advantages of audiovisual interviews such as Skype is that it essentially allows the advantages of a face-to-face interview with anyone anywhere in the world, proving itself to be both cost-effective and time saving (Olubunmi 2013). Despite this, interviews through Skype or other audiovisual applications are prone to certain restrictions. There may be a lack of natural flow and reciprocation compared to in-person interviews, purely because the communication flows through technology. Certain actors within the process may also be unfamiliar with such methods, inhibiting them and their likely disclosure. The visual restriction to the frame of the webcam, and absence of other sensory modes which usually flesh out communication, may curb the interaction. Technology can also of course literally disrupt the quality of the call,

with time lag, sound and image problems, and Internet connection issues all a possible disturbance.

Email interviews

Email interviews tend to be a more closed interview technique, where questions are structured, and both the interviewer and interviewee have little opportunity to deviate from the questions, and then answers, between email and reply (Olubunmi 2013). With this in mind, the email interviews that were conducted were designed and circulated with instructions to be open about contacting the interviewer for clarification or interpretations of various questions. Interviewees were also notified of the likelihood of follow up questions upon receipt of the answers, a method that was subsequently applied. Advantages of email interviews are that, though they also require some level of computer literacy, they are more readily understood and computed by those unfamiliar with audiovisual methods. They can also be useful in contacting an individual who is hard to reach face-to-face, or by telephone or video call, while allowing the respondent to take their time and provide well-thought-out answers. It is also worth noting that an effective email reply can remove the need to transcribe interview data (Olubunmi 2013).

Literature review of existing material related to present research

Finally, throughout the thesis project, an ongoing literature review was applied in order to keep it grounded in existing studies, as well as to help guide it along the best possible academic route. A literature review can be a method to understand the broad context in which a study is taking place. Undertaking it will bring the reviewer into contact with key theories and contributors to the subject they are focusing on, familiarizing them with terms and giving them firm theoretical ground on which to discuss results (Steward 2004).

Though the literature review was not the chief research method, it was nevertheless a valuable tool for the development of the project. Furthermore, ensured an efficient execution both during the writing of the thesis and analysis periods, and also during the drafting and refining process.

Ethical considerations in research

Interviews

Saunders et al outline ethics in a research context by describing it as the application of appropriate behaviour in line with the rights of those that are involved in, or affected by your investigation (2003). Ethical considerations when undertaking interviews include considering the possible power imbalance that may be present between the interviewer and interviewee. As a result, it may be possible to influence individuals to disclose personal information beyond what they are comfortable with. This is of course not the intention of the interviews, and the power structure of the interaction should be considered both during the interview, in the careful choosing of what questions and avenues to pursue, and subsequent to the interview, when deciding what information is to be made available through publication (Brennen 2012). Brennen goes on to stipulate that all qualitative interviewers have a "moral responsibility to protect their respondents from physical and emotional harm. There should be absolutely no deception about the scope, intention, […] or any aspect of a qualitative research study" (Brennen 2012: 29). Naturally then, it is essential to ensure informed consent from any potential interviewee, and to uphold their privacy upon publication of the research.

Participant selection

The gathering of interviewees was a process of investigation through individuals and organisations as to who was available and interested in participating in the study. The respondents available come from a variety of different journalistic backgrounds, and are of varying ages, genders and nationalities. Given the demand of the industry, obtaining the involvement of participants was not without difficulty. Nevertheless, the eight interviewees adequately presented enough data for a thorough study.

Below are the summaries of the journalists that participated in the study, each code relevant to an individual will be used to relate them to quotations in the results section:

Participant 1 (P1): An established journalist who has been working for a popular, national entertainment publication for several years. For much of that time they have also been

involved with the online publishing side of their publication, and thus have a strong familiarity with social media.

Participant 2 (P2): A journalist by education, who has been in and out of journalism since becoming involved some years ago; has written for both medium sized papers and magazines, and smaller burgeoning ones, around the time social media was developing, with recent forays into blogging.

Participant 3 (P3): A journalist who has written for several smaller magazines, as well as for their own burgeoning online news site, which functions predominantly through social media.

Participant 4 (P4): An established journalist with several decades experience in the field, significantly pre-social media and working through its development up to today. Has written for larger papers and magazines.

Participant 5 (P5): A journalist in their twenties that writes within different fields for a variety of large corporate websites, very familiar with social media platforms.

Participant 6 (P6): A journalist in their twenties with experience solely in online news broadcasting on a relatively large national website. Very familiar with social media.

Participant 7 (P7): A recent graduate who has predominantly worked online and is experienced with social media for medium sized national websites.

Participant 8 (P8): An educated journalist in their twenties with experience in several media fields (radio, photojournalism) specialising in social media for regional organisations.

RESULTS

"I wouldn't say social media has improved journalism; it's made it different. In ways of speed and accuracy – speed has improved; accuracy has decreased. Width of information increased, but the depth has decreased. Journalism cannot live without social media, but social media can live without journalism."

Within this section the data uncovered will be presented. An in-depth evaluation of these results will be discussed in the next section. The results obtained via the interview process were two face-to-face interviews, one Skype interview and five email interviews. The eight interviewees come from a variety of organisations in terms of size, to the extent that they can be evenly broken down into writing for national level publishers, and local level publishers. The data was gathered, transcribed and coded into the following sections, while quotes have been placed in text to support the findings. The organisation of the results section, as with the discussion, was made in accordance to the order of the research questions. The first three parts: journalists defining journalism, communication flow in journalism and social media use in journalism are related to the first research question (RQ1) concerning journalist's roles. The fourth part, which looks at journalists work preferences, is connected to RQ2. And the final two parts, interactivity and social media's effect on journalism, address aspects of RQ3, the relationship between journalists and the audience.

Journalists defining journalism

"The role of the journalist is to tell a story."

The journalist's own definition of journalism, as well as the inevitable subsequent evaluation of what a journalist is, helps provide some insight towards the first research question. This self-definition is also a relevant base to consider all future questions that include the journalist.

After coding it became clear that the interviewees perceived at least four types of defining the role of journalist: the first of these is **journalist as storyteller**, where the emphasis is on putting the event into a narrative frame, and on entertaining the audience.

As **communicator of facts**, the journalist is charged with providing their readers with factual information about events, *"if something happens, it's your job to tell the world what happened" (P1)*, *"transfer of only well checked (from several sources), reliable information" (P4)*. Within this popular definition the participants emphasised notions of honesty, *"being a journalist is first of all a job of honesty" (P6)*, as well as managing information without diminishing it *"selecting information and at the same time reducing its volume without damaging its quality" (P7)*.

Another category described was that of the **debate stimulator**, where the journalist should provoke debate through their work, *"people don't always want to make sense of events in the world – don't have time, capacity, wish to do it. Prefer to read papers that say what you should think" (P2)*, *"journalists' activity sets the public agenda on what topics are important" (P5)*.

The final category proposed was that of the journalist being a **watchdog**, *"serving as a watchdog against unlawful activities" (P5)*, where they can operate as *"the voice of the people when they come face to face with people who make decisions that could affect society's everyday life" (P8)*.

The value of the journalist

"I can imagine, though hardly, a world without professional journalists, because after the development of all digital media it became clear that maybe not everyone, but a lot of people want to be photographers, writers, journalists, bloggers, commentators."

When considering the rise in citizen journalism and the rise of social media, the topic of a journalist's value arose, and whether they are in fact necessary for news to be conveyed nowadays. Unsurprisingly the participants had plenty to say on this matter, coming up with three different perspectives that nearly all touched upon it in one way or another.

The professional identity of the journalist was championed in the category; **trained tradespeople.** Here several individuals stressed the need for training in order to be a journalist, *"traditionally, journalists have to have had some kind of training, or some kind of*

formal education" (P1), "I believe that you can learn good journalism only in the editorial office, from experienced people" (P4). This training may be traditional though, with one interview stating, *"this has changed with the web" (P1),* and another saying *"It's important to be trained [in journalism] and then be trained in social media. Social media helps you be first, but not be accurate" (P2).* Nevertheless, there is still value placed on training, particularly in writing *"writing is also a craft. You can't learn it without having a teacher" (P4).*

Journalists also have a role to play as a **delegated news transmitter**, whose task it is to be the professional person involved in and responsible for the gathering of and transmitting of news to the public, *"someone has to write it right?" (P1), "journalists work with selling the news product – you need to be fast, relevant and first. Maybe I'll be first and fail first, or maybe be first and have all success" (P2).* With this role, as one interviewee pointed out, come certain privileges *"in the eyes of state and private institutions which allow them to explain the information delivered by citizen journalists and bring more information on the topic" (P5).*

Communication flow in journalism

"It's a discourse with the reader."

The communication flow within journalism is another aspect that relates to both a traditional and developing role, as is the focus in RQ1. The interviewee's were able to argue whether the communication present within journalism should be **one-way**, or **two-way**.

The majority of interviews were strong in the belief that communication within journalism is **two-way**, with both the journalist and the reader having a certain level of interaction with each other. One participant described that even before social media, and in the early days of the Internet, they were surprised by the level of active participation from the readers, *"people were ringing, sending letters, coming to the office. They should be listened to" (P2).* With others stating, *"it's two way communication because it has to be dependent on what the readers are interested in" (P3), "journalism is by definition, destined to inform the masses. When communicating to the masses, the reactions and responses are as important as the*

message's delivery itself" (P8). A couple of the interviews had a slightly different belief, stating that the rise of social media has altered the nature of journalistic communication, *"the reaction of the audience is of such an importance, as it generates new content, that has to be associated to the article itself"* (P7). The new found ease with which to contact journalists has played a part in this shift to two-way communication, *"journalism was a one-way communication in the past, but with the new technology and the moving on the online environment it has become a two-way communication, because people can easily tell their opinion regarding anything in the media"* (P6), *"it probably has changed. It's much easier to contact journalists now; they're sitting on their emails or twitters. If you don't agree with something they say you can go straight to them"* (P1).

Just one of the participants believed that the communication flowed (or should flow) **one-way**. This was related to their earlier answer that journalists actually set the public agendas, and therefore *"the public's response is not really an important part of journalistic type of communication"* (P5).

Another individual noted that communication has moved from one-way to two-way, but went on to lament the role of social media in this shift. For them, communication **should be two-way, but not necessarily through social media**:

"Now we get bombarded with mails, everyday dozens of them, out of which most are spam or useless information. Many of the topics actually emerge from social media, but often minor topics, that require proper checking before publication. Informants are the most important in journalist's work. Direct contact with readers is priceless! The Internet can not replace this" (P4).

Social Media use within journalism:

The next series of questions investigate the ways in which the participants actually use social media in the workplace, as well as looking at how they relate to it. As this is connected to both the adjusted role of the journalist, and how journalists practically use social media at the workplace, it encompasses both RQ1 and RQ2.

How do you use social media?

"We use twitter to see what people are talking about, to see what other people are writing about."

When queried on how they use social media, the interview guide produced responses from the individuals that could be broken down into four categories. These categories appeared to be overwhelmingly positive in nature.

The first, as has already been covered earlier in this section is that social media can be used as a **source** for writing material. This does of course come with its dangers, with one person describing the potential unreliability of Twitter, *"people are like sheep. They all just retweet what they see or read" (P1).*

Social media can also be used as a method to **communicate/network with peers**, something that was perceived to be easier on certain social media platforms than on others. Nevertheless there are professional relationships that have been honed through Twitter, *"there are a few friends I've made just through Twitter" (P1).* There is also the advantage of connecting with communities via social media, which leads to the next two categories.

The first of the two most popular ways in which social media is used according to the interviewees is the ability to **share knowledge** through it. Though this can of course be done with one's peers, it can also be a general channel in which to push and understand relevant material that is of interest, *"I see it more as sharing links and stories, not that personal stuff" (P1), "I use them to look up trending things or check additional information about a happening" (P4).*

And finally, in particular journalists use social media as a **marketing tool** through which to specifically promote either their own material, *"I'm glad when my work is shared, because it means that what I wrote there is a high quality writing and it interested more people" (P6),* their own publication's work, *"I use social media in order to promote my publication`s fan page" (P7),* or purely to pull traffic to their external site through promoting via social media, *"it's also an important channel to draw traffic to the site" (P3).*

How often do you use social media?

"Twitter is always open on my computer. I always check it last thing at night and first thing in the morning."

All but one of the respondents admitted to using social media constantly throughout the day, with several indicating that they also check outside of work hours in order to stay informed. Some of the subjects are tasked with a more patent social media responsibility as part of their job, so such thorough checking is somewhat unsurprising. The one interviewee who specified that they didn't use social media every day still defined their use as *"very often"*.

How do you present yourself on social media?

"Anything you say could be interpreted as an official opinion."

The identity portrayed by journalists on social media is often conflicted, with an uncertainty in how to balance their professional identity with the distinct identity that comes from a familiarity with more private, or personal online interaction.

There are those that feel that their **identity is distinct** insofar as how they act on personal social medias is not impacted or impaired by their professional role:

"On my personal social media accounts, I do not feel restricted. I am aware of the fact that I, as well, stand for my publication, but I do not completely confound with it" (P7).

Others are constantly aware of their **professional identity**, in part represented by their ability as a writer as well as what they stand for, and consistently project this through all social media:

"I always remember that I'm a public person writing under my own name. No matter if I write for the printed or online version of the newspaper. Since I write my name under the articles I never let the quality to be low" (P4).

However, the majority of individuals feel that social media creates a **fusion of both identities**. This is principally concerned with adapting care when it comes to how they

transmit information, *"I'm careful online, and offline, and any way" (P2)*, *"you have to make very clear if you post on an online profile where you are perceived as a public person or as a normal individual with own opinion" (P8)*. It may also lead to inhibiting the discussion or promotion of topics journalists would normally post in more private arenas, *"retweeting certain things that may seem fun may have a professional backlash" (P3)*. Such conflict between behaving professionally and publically is monitored by journalist's superiors says one interviewee:

"My boss can check what I'm saying and I'd get in trouble. On Twitter I have my handle there saying where I work so it's fair enough – in a sense I'm representing the brand when I'm on Twitter so I have to be careful" (P1).

A further question sought to clarify how each participant felt they present themselves and their work when on social media. Each person could select as many or as few options as they liked. The six choices proposed within the question were:

- As representative of employer/paper group 6
- As catering to the audience 2
- As representing your ideology 2
- Interacting with fellow journalists 2
- Promoting yourself 4
- Other (please state)

Six of the eight interviewees saw themselves as representing their employer/paper group in what was the most widely chosen category. The next most popular category, with four selections, was that they were promoting themselves on social media. The other three categories; catering to the audience, representing one's own ideology, and interacting with fellow journalists all received two votes each. Nobody stated an alternative reason.

Pressure to use social media

"Journalism needs to find the most efficient means of communication, no matter how radical it might be."

Each of the participants expressed a belief that there is significant pressure within the industry to utilise social media. This pressure can be enforced directly by one's publication *"our bosses expect us to follow what happens on social media platforms" (P4)*, as well as a

pressure to use it in order to keep up with competitors and peers, *"If you want people to know who you are you have to be on Twitter" (P1)*, *"there is a kind of peer pressure, as the other publications use it for promoting their own content and if one does not use it, he gets a certain degree of handicap in the matter of reaching out to one's public (P5)"*. Most respondents claimed that it would severely inhibit their work if they were without it, *"I'd feel very cut off if we didn't have it" (P3)*, *"it is essential we use social media within journalism, otherwise it would be completely out of date – which would be absolutely incongruent with its fundamental purpose" (P7)*.

Paper media versus social media

"I think eventually most things will be online. You'll be expected to do everything multi-platform. It's not enough to write in a newspaper any more."

When questioned on the differences between writing for newspapers and magazines and writing for social media, the interviewees all emphasised that the writing style for each medium is notably different. The size and language of social media is often abbreviated compared to traditional newspapers, *"on social media it is essential for information to be concise and appealing" (P7)*, while the tone and urgency with which it is made public also contrasts *"social media is a bit more informal, as well as being shorter and quicker" (P3)*.

Journalist's work preferences:

Several of the questions were designed to understand journalist's preferences on a variety of factors and methods they have come into contact with through social media, or have had to reevaluate because of it, specifically in the workplace. This focuses on the second research question.

Sources

"Writing in front of the screen, via telephone, watching the world through Google maps without having any contact with people face-to-face is a disaster. You can easily tell when an article is based on this."

The investigation yielded four methods of obtaining sources that were mentioned in the interviews. **Informants/witnesses** were a particularly valuable source, with meeting them face-to-face being the ideal approach to obtain information, "informers are always the best. You have to get out of your office room, leave the computer, walk the streets, get out to the city" (P4).

Many journalists utilise other **articles or reports** to beef up or inspire their own investigation, often flagrantly and without reference according to some of the interviewees, though this comes with its risks, *"a lot of journalists will quote other things they've read in other publications and take them as gospel, which is a little risky" (P1).*

Official information is also used to confirm information, often through state publications.

Finally, **social media** itself has become a major means to get access to sources, as well as a source in itself, with several participants indicating they often find worthwhile stories by *"using trending hashtags, seeing what politicians, company leaders and individuals are writing about and discussing" (P3).* For some, *"articles have been born of twitter conversations" (P1).*

Comments

"It's good because it invites debate. A lot of issues that you're writing about are affected by opinion and you want to know what people think. If you get nothing you're probably not writing anything decent."

In light of a general belief in journalism becoming two-way communication, the questions focused on the interviewee's attitude to comments being made on their own, and general articles. The responses can be broken down into three categories:

Certain individuals specified that they **want comments** on their work, and that social media has made this form of interaction much more accessible, *"It's an interaction with your readers, its good to know what they think. It's interesting how comments can become part of the news, it could almost be a dinner discussion of informed individuals" (P3), "probably*

more interaction now because you can just tweet someone and say, 'how dare you, I agree, I disagree, I have information on your story'" (P1), "It's very important to know what our readers expect from us, whether they would agree or wouldn't agree" (P2). This last participant went on to indicate their belief that comments validate news even for those that may never comment, *"even if they wouldn't comment but they read the comments they would make sense that it's a reliable source, that people are discussing and making sense of the situation" (P2).*

Other interviewees stipulated that **constructive comments** were the only desired form of response, with experience that *"most comments by the general public are just insults to the journalist or to the way he wrote the story, false facts or illegitimate accusations" (P5), "feedback is always welcome, but productive comments. I don't mind a negative comment but I want it to have a sustaining argument behind. If not, I do not appreciate it" (P6).* The big fear with most of the respondents regarding comments is the chance of excessively unconstructive negative comments, or even worse, trolling, *"we have lots of problems with it on the website (trolling). We used to have to pay moderators thousands of pounds a year to stop it" (P1), "it's a really big problem with trolling and provocations. It's a phenomenon" (P2).*

Further comments of interest followed:
"People have the right to say their mind but of course it can't be illegal. I don't want to let people to take over a commenting field and use it as a platform for propaganda. All major news sites have struggled with that. It loses its purpose if its not a real discussion, which is why they're there" (P3).

"I am perfectly comfortable with negative comments, even though I strongly disagree with them. My natural reaction – if they are completely irrelevant – is to ignore them, because they are nothing but a form of adolescent offensive, which should by no means taken too seriously. Therefore, it is self-evident that trolling is never a valid response. If those comments are completely insignificant in position, I simply ignore them. Not only is trolling entirely unsophisticated, but it is also qualifies its "author" as a minor speaker, with no means of persuasion" (P7).

One interviewee did consider the value of trolling, though only to inhibit an individual who *"is clearly malicious or bad-intentioned and if he intentionally wants to disrupt functionality" (P5)*.

There are also some that **don't want comments**, or pay little heed to those that follow a piece of their work, *"I usually do not read comments under my own articles. Many of them are offensive, swearings, offtopic comments. Useful, relevant, or interesting comments are very rare" (P4)*, *"even though I am content with people reacting to my articles, this is not the reason why I write them" (P7)*.

Moderation

"What was it that someone said? 'The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins.'"

Moderation has become a particularly relevant, and often difficult topic as the level of incoming information from the audience has risen further and further. For the interviewees it is inherently tied into notions of provocative comments or trolling, while also being influenced by the anonymity that many commenters adopt.

Those that are **pro-moderation** are weary of advertising, PR, and inflammatory users abusing the ability to publically comment, while also acknowledging the possibility for unrelated comments *"moderated only in the sense in which many people post inappropriate and maybe even offensive messages" (P8)*. *"Comments should be kept for people that have comments" (P2)*, said one respondent, while another pulled on experience to impart the value of moderation on society, *"I have held many public debates and I know that if there is no moderator then the discussion ends and chaos starts. Often persons with extreme opinions or attention seekers want to speak. It's the same online" (P4)*. It's true that it restricts freedom according to one interviewee, but *"only to those that don't comment in a proper way. There is no unlimited freedom in the world itself" (P7)*.

This wasn't a blanket response across the interviews though, with certain participants **against moderation** approving of the impression it makes of their publication and the communicative

act in general, *"un-moderated interaction gives the public a better impression on the publication and its personnel and as such I prefer it"* (P5), I would prefer un-moderated audience interaction because, beyond its self-implied risks, it authenticates the act of communication" (P7). One respondent felt the problem of moderation was particularly tricky, instead wanting something in the middle, *"probably not moderated, but not anonymous. Anonymity can be dangerous and could be avoided"* (P3). Anonymity is deemed to be a threat in that it allows users to *"put some embarrassing comments and escape the responsibility of such comments"* (P2). For some within the interviews, anonymity is a paradox within the field of journalism, positing, *"journalists disclose their identity, why not all commenters?"* (P2).

Quality versus quantity

"I'd rather spend time to discuss a topic with one smart person than with a million anonyms."

In order to try to understand whether the applicants unashamedly desired a large amount of views with limited or negative responses to a piece of writing, or they valued a much smaller number of quality replies, the following question was asked:

If you wrote an article, would you rather have 1 million views with limited/negative comments, or 10 with interesting debate? Why?

The question yielded an interesting variation of answers. Those that favoured **1 million views with limited/negative comments** mentioned a desire to spread the story, *"the aim is to get the news out to as many people as possible" (P1)*, and to learn or develop from negative comments, in relation to both as a news producer and also learning about your readers, *"in certain periods it is good that you can engage with people, collecting them and interacting with them. If they provide negative comments it shows they care about something" (P2)*. One interviewee expressed a support for their publication as their reason for taking this choice, especially as it will keep him hired, *"in a domain where most publications struggle just to exist and where most journalists are paid poorly" (P5)*.

However, a slight majority chose the **10 with interesting debate**. They cited a belief in the value of the debate on a personal and professional level, *"10 valuable comments are million times more worthy than a million stupid ones."* Further points declared are that interesting

debate allows the writer *"the chance to learn something new" (P6)*, to have a guarantee on the *"accuracy of my message, which would be therefore completely understood" (P7)*, as well as feeling that it's the people, and their honest and stimulating reaction that give the material value, *"it's like on Facebook. As long as you only have a like button, everyone will appear to like everything you post. Just because there is no dislike, it's not like no one dislikes it" (P8).*

Interactivity

The interactivity brought about by social media is naturally a key aspect in the relationship between journalist and reader, the focus of the third research question. Several questions within the interviews were designed to examine this connection further.

Platforms of interaction

"People are reporting the news in their own way, and telling their friends what's going on. As opposed to just sitting there redundantly and waiting for it to be fed to them."

Respondents mentioned three platforms of interaction that they employ in order to reach the other side of the dialogue. **Twitter** and **Facebook** were both particularly popular methods that were in use, with the interviewees indicating that both allowed for a heightened opportunity to respond to public questions in almost real-time. They also use this to encourage readers to react with posts and tweets, and to move forward from a passive form of interaction.

Another more traditional platform still utilised online is **emailing**, which is distinct from posts, messages and tweets in the sense that the time between sending and processing of the information is often longer and much less predictable.

Methods of interaction

"A lot of articles may need more expert opinions, with a bit more backbone, and then I think they should be the dominant influence. But I still feel there is merit in these opinions from "normal" people within the article."

Of the nine methods of user-generated content available for journalists and the audience to provide compelling feedback **(Polls, message boards, "have your say", comments, Q & A's, blogs, reader blogs, your media, and your stories),** seven were identified by one or more respondent.

The most favoured of the methods proposed was undeniably **comments**, which had four of the participants identifying them as valuable, *"I believe that the best methods are comments, because it requires the least effort from the audience, which we all know gets bored real fast"* *(P6).*

Polls and **messageboards** were also selected by two interviewees as being useful, with polls being described as actively encouraging passive users through their simplicity, while messageboards are clear and a good means to share ideas.

The other four that received a vote did so through a variety of reasons. **Blogs** were said to be a good method to provide more personal perspectives on things. **Reader blogs** were seen to be an effective means to increase the involvement of readers. **Surveys** were helpful to *"find out what people are thinking en masse" (P3).* And "have your says" were an effective tool to give *"the public freedom to express opinions" (P8).*

Validity of the user-generated content

"I always value more feedback from readers which use their full name, and is received face-to-face or during debates. Journalism based only online is not interesting for me."

Throughout the interview several questions and answers pried into the participant's views regarding the validity of UGC (as exemplified above). Though each interview affirmed a belief that audience replies were at the very least of some level of importance, such responses led to the formulation of two not hugely dissimilar categories.

There were those that felt the audience's chance to reply was **very important** to the notion of journalism:

"It's very important for the audience to have the chance to reply to news because, this way you see what is the most important to them, what they want to read next and what are their opinion about things" (P6).

There were others who played down this importance somewhat, and can therefore be categorised as believing it to be **fairly important**. These individuals stressed that what is of greater relevance than the audience having a chance to reply was that the response neither came from an anonymous source, or goes off topic.

Article continuity through user-generated content

"The article is not like dead material. Before it was like dead material, it was finished with the last full stop. But now, people start to discuss and come up with new points of view. You can interact, agree, disagree, but still the article continues living in this digital surface."

The interviewees were questioned as to whether they felt an article or story could actually continue through the comments or other UGC inspired by the original piece. Whether there is in fact a continuation of the authorship or their, or any, article ends once the original writer publishes it.

Most responses believed that **yes**, **an article can continue through comments or UGC**. Reasons for this included stories being an ongoing development over a period, *"quite often stories develop over time, so we may pick it up every week with something new" (P1).* Also, the fact that social media could open up the text to more information or enough information for further articles, so that the story continues, *"maybe a whole new article can be provided from comments, and from information provided" (P2), "relevant comments are added value, not to mention that dialogue is always more productive than monologue is, and that it might sometimes lead to unexpectedly original conclusions" (P7).*

Despite the majority adopting this standpoint though there were still some that felt **no, articles do not continue through comments or UGC**. These respondents did agree that feedback does have a certain level of importance, but seemed clearer in the importance of the journalist's work, and the beginning of the audience's response as being, *"it doesn't have the*

same value, because it's just comments, and not everyone reads the comments" (P6). Another participant was less certain either way, again accentuating the importance of relevance if it was to be considered a continuation, *"I am not sure, but I think it could continue as a story afterwards, if the comments keep on topic" (P8).*

Professional criticism

"The social conveniences were put aside, and my performance as a journalist was, in a way, decontextualized, which, in a way, was a healthy thing to do."

Receiving professional criticism is something that has shifted in lieu of the appearance of social media, according to the interviewees, who had much to say about how they relate to criticism in general, and how it has been affected, by social media.

Certain journalists indicated an absolute **acceptance of criticism**, something that they interpret as being a social convention. For them people are certain to adopt an outspoken avenue if they object to something, but it's not quite the same if they come across something they approve, *"a lot of people don't feel the need to write if they like something, though that's just the nature of something" (P1).* Journalists are also in a much stronger position to deal with criticism if they understand this lesson, and learn to separate critique of their profession from critique of their personality.

Criticism received through social media is of course, a very public form of criticism, something that is many people's worst nightmare. Some participants see this as an opportunity to **discuss out in the open** the problems that the critics perceive, a valuable thing as they see it to learn about the audience. Others though see this as **a permanent criticism that is open to everyone**; it cannot be disguised or forgotten like a verbal criticism may, *"it can be damaging for your branding if you say or receive something on twitter because it is there forever" (P3).*

Finally, many of the interviewees discerned the paradox that criticism through social media tends to be both easier to stomach than face-to-face criticism, as well as harsher than if it was given in person, *"the lack of face to face interaction makes people have the courage to be a*

bit more direct" (P8). This benefits both the journalist's ability to respond without losing face, *"the difference from face-to-face criticism is that you have time to think at your next step" (P6),* and more tellingly, the relationship between writer and audience, *"the social conveniences were put aside, and my performance as a journalist was, in a way, decontextualized, which, in a way, was a healthy thing to do" (P7).*

Social Media's effect on journalism

"The Internet is aiming to make it possible to keep up with the latest news, the printed version to select the most important and interesting, to help understand the meaning of the news that became a hot topic."

There have been several consequences of the rise of social media in relation to journalism, according to the participants. These range from adjustments to the necessary skills of a journalist, to the development of the audience and of the news organisations. This section relates to all three research questions.

The first belief to come out of the interviews was that social media forced news channels to adopt it, to keep them relevant with their younger users and to exploit the **branding opportunities** that appeared online, *"social media is used now mainly as a mean of promoting online content on the publication website and attracting page views" (P5).*

Such branding opportunities have become all the more relevant due to the **heightened competition** social media has brought; *"there's more pressure on getting out first. That changes how you work. If there is a story that might get read, we need to write two lines to get it out quick" (P3), "be the first one that brings the hot news on a plate, or it gets cold and nobody will be interested anymore" (P6).*

Being **technologically literate** is a key aspect of social media influencing the journalists themselves, according to several respondents. Both utilising the new and advanced methods to reach the audience, *"the speed with which information can get to the public and as well, to the journalist, is greater. Everything is accelerated now" (P8),* as well as the impact such necessary skills have on the expectations of a journalist. Here, one interviewee stated that

you're *"expected to be literate in social media [...] you have to be able to market yourself like a product to a certain extent" (P1)*. In their office the general arrival of the social media culture has led to interns being particularly strong in this area:

*"Interns are so savvy with social media because they've grown up with it, and are much better than I'll ever be. It's easy for them to think "let's make a little video about this or put something out on Facebook" because they've grown up with it. **They think in multi-platforms, they don't just think linear"** (P1)*.

Of particular relevance to the third research question, each of the interviewees had something more to say about the **rise of the citizen journalist**, many focusing on its merits as a form of journalism, *"if you're at the Boston finishing line and you film it [the Boston bombings] and put it up on YouTube you've reported that" (P1)*, *"everything can be eyewitness news, that's what you want if you write about a story. Reports from people that are there" (P3)*, *"I believe that with this evolution of social media, any person can bring some news material online and create an almost decent news material" (P6)*, *"everyone has potential to be a journalist nowadays, with the condition to be in the right place at the right time. Journalists can't be omnipresent" (P8)*. While others were more focused on its perceived drawbacks: *"self emerging news, everything for free and unverified news? If you get something for free you can't complain about its quality" (P4)*, *"news can be conveyed without them – for example as a chain of shares on Facebook, initiated by an ordinary user – but it cannot escape the nuance of gossip, not to mention that denaturation of facts is almost unavoidable in this case" (P7)*.

The **power of the audience**, as both digesters of news and reporters of news has been a significant result of social media's rise. They have more say in what they read, *"people should be able to choose what they read about [even though] there may be things that they overlook" (P1)*, better opportunity to access, provide feedback and question the news using trending hashtags. This has happened to such an extent that *"**readers can become producers** [especially] when the traditional media isn't doing its job like in the Arabic spring or in Turkey" (P3)*. The power here for the audience is that on social media such as Twitter and Facebook news *"conveyed by simple users travels much faster than news from a publication to its public" (P5)*.

For another interviewee, there had been **no change** on the inherent role of the journalist, with social media being little more than another tool at the disposal of the trained professional.

DISCUSSION

The information provided from the data collection has provided several interesting opportunities for debate. This debate will then be a significant ingredient in the addressing of the research questions, understanding the rise of social media and its effect on journalism through the journalist's perspective. The understanding of the implications this has on news as an ingredient for communication, will be looked at and analysed through a succession of relations to theory and communication models, with particular attention being given to communication flow within it. Furthermore, ideas relating to the varying perceived intentions, methods and preferences of journalists from their own perspective, will also be addressed, both from a traditional and social media influenced position.

Within the discussion, these results will be looked at in in depth while considering the research questions, and in conjunction with previous studies and researches that can be used to greater understand the significance of the findings.

Journalists defining journalism

In trying to reveal a more personal definition of what a journalist signifies to the general audience, it was discovered that their role fluctuates between entertaining the general public with skillfully written stories, and being a strict watchdog of societal changes. When asked to define the professional identity of a journalist many respondents connected to their abilities to communicate with a larger audience either by stimulating debate and discussion between readers, or simply by exposing the facts in a very objective light. All the qualities of a journalist seem connected to the particularities of a communicator, with most information being valued and transmitted by following the simple codes of a communicative situation. What makes a journalist unique is their ability to evoke certain events, to connect with sources and to keep the audience continuously updated.

Additionally, journalists describe themselves more as critical individuals with formal training and with the responsibility to inform and entertain public masses, rather than scientists with scholarly goals of educating the audiences (Peters 1995, cited in Reed 2001). Their

professional identity is perceived as an operational one, with the main scope of exposing facts in a truly objective way (Sigelman 1973). The respondents referred to journalism as a trade, which requires formal education and insightful knowledge in order to become an accomplished, experienced professional within it. On the other hand, some participants mentioned that journalists could be seen as simple transmitters of news with delegated authority from a broadcasting organisation. The level of authority that journalists use to gather and disseminate information comes in part from the power they obtained through collaborating with political and social institutions.

Another important aspect of journalism and its definition is represented by the confusion between the rise of citizen journalism and a more conventional way of understanding the role of journalist. Respondents brought up the growth of this new type of journalism as being a result of the social media invasion, leading to citizen based journalism. In this case, every individual can take their part as a communicator to a different level by actively posting and participating in news formation and broadcasting processes. Also called the *accidental journalist,* the participant finds himself in the position of conveying important information to a large audience through social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube or Facebook (De Keyser et al 2011).

The interviewee's perception of this, and the influence it has on their profession indicates that this is a significant development that is here to stay. It is much like several of the respondent's points on receiving comments on their articles. They are open to such an expansion, though clearly are able to enforce their professional identify, in this case through their own journalistic training compared to the amateurishness of the audience, when confronted with the possibility that citizen journalists have consigned traditional journalism to obsoleteness.

The civic participation in news production emerges as a new form of media, reforming the traditional definitions of journalism and allowing participatory involvement of the audience. As a result, the conventional media institutions are creating new ways of incorporating citizen involvement in news broadcasting on online platforms. In this respect, the benefits of having unlimited news transmitters can be found in the increasing number of events

addressed on social media platforms, and in the real time stories disclosed to journalists right from the source (Reich 2008).

Participatory journalism redefines the normative practices of writing and publishing relevant information, creating diffusion between the audience and the professional sender. So the public is reinterpreted as being both user and producer of news, the sources becoming often identical with the person conveying a message. The digital world offers the possibility for multiple identity changes, with non-professionals distributing information being interpreted as valuable press messages. On the other hand, journalists will continue to be defined by their normative professional code and the degree of adherence to the new professional culture (Steensen 2011). According to Singer (2006), what makes journalists unique from other information providers is their independency from other structure's interests, *trustworthiness, credibility, fairness and balance* being the most valued qualities in a professional journalist (Singer 2006, Steensen 2011).

Communication flow in journalism

Taking into account that journalism is in its very nature an act of communication we can try to describe the various communication intricacies as a convention between the journalist as a sender and the audience as a receiver. But this simple expression of a communicative act does not satisfy the reader's needs to gain control over the message and reenact the transmission of the message on their own terms. In this way, the communication process changes with the participation of the audience in forming and sending information or by simply offering feedback to the sender.

The majority of the respondents emphasised that journalism is a discursive act, a two-way communication with the reader. The involvement of the public can be interpreted as a reaction to the news, materialised into direct comments or other personal contributions on online platforms, via telephone, letters or during face-to-face meetings. On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned an evolution in the communication patterns, relating old-fashioned journalism with one-way communication, while the new type of citizen journalism embraces a strong two-way communication flow (Deuze et al 2007).

This type of collaborative work between the journalist and the reader encourages the two-way nature of communication, eliminating the boundaries between sender and receiver and recognizing the benefits of a complex process of transmitting news (Deuze et al 2007). The focus shifts from the person that conveys information to the receiver who can easily participate actively in the transaction of messages. The direct participation of the audience, sometimes even with the possibility of real time feedback, reveals the cross functionality of online publications with concern for interactive relationships with their audiences (Deuze et al 2007). This emphasis on feedback is illustrated in the model below:

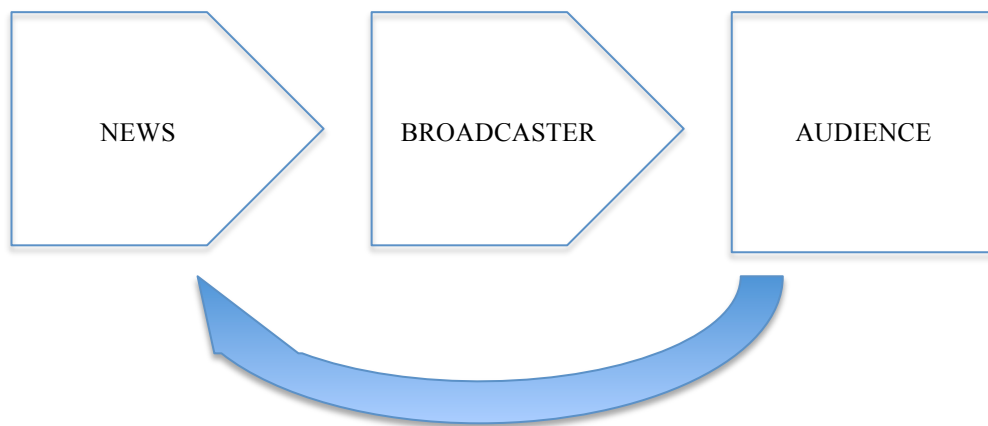NEWS   BROADCASTER   AUDIENCE

Fig 3.

In this first model, news, as an act of interest that has occurred in the world, is picked up by broadcasters who are professionally trained to transmit the message to a targeted audience. The direction of this message ends with the audience, although this group can then take on the role of messenger of the news, broadcasting it to others in their social circles.

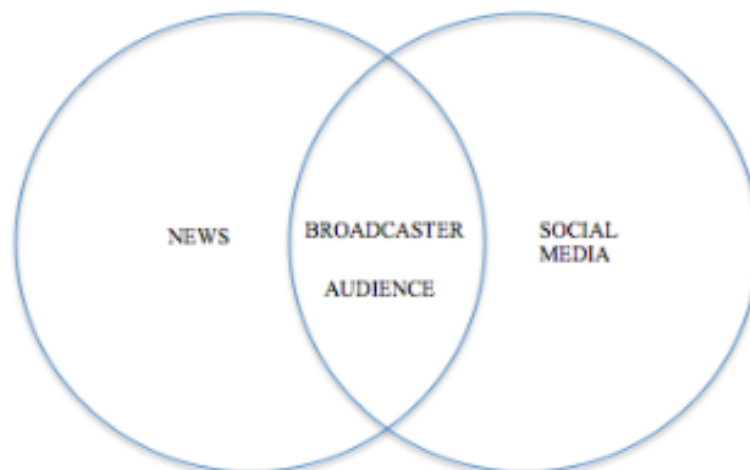NEWS   BROADCASTER   SOCIAL MEDIA

AUDIENCE

Fig 4.

In the second model, news, as an act of interest that has occurred in the world, is conveyed by the broadcaster and to the audience through social media. What is significantly different from the first model is that the role of broadcaster and the role of audience are not dependent on each other, and actually interchangeable with the means of social media.

Social Media use within journalism

Using social media

Social media is portrayed as *the* new source for journalists, being one of the widest network methods of newsgathering. Respondents describe social media not only as a way to communicate and keep connections with stakeholders and peers from the media industry, but also as a well-developed system of sharing knowledge and building communities by disseminating information. The interviewees emphasised the importance of social media as a marketing tool, specifically mentioning the opportunity for personal branding on new media networks like Twitter or Facebook. Encouraging the emergence of an identity on media platforms is a consequence of sharing specific information on personal blogs or social media accounts, and is the journalist's choice to brand themself as freelancers.

The importance of social media is clearly visible through the emphasis on regular social media use, with most of the respondents being active users of social media platforms in order to communicate with their main target group. This type of newsgathering and disseminating stories has become an integrated part of online journalism, fostering access to information and becoming a particular form of broadcasting (Kaplan and Haenlein 2012). Allowing everyone to an opinion through a global sharing system, social media changes the traditional perspective on the journalist's identity, with some theorists referring to it as the professional decline of journalism (Kaplan and Haenlein 2012).

Social Media Identity

The identity portrayed by journalists on social media is often described as a balanced choice between professional identity and a personal one. With the sharing capacities of social media, the preservation of a personal identity has become almost an impossible fact, especially when

working on new media platforms on a daily basis. Regarding the professional identity of the interviewed journalists, most of them keep a mixed identity, with professional life blending into their personal values, attitudes and behaviors. This fusion phenomenon can be explained as a consequence of intense social media interaction through sharing personal stories and expressing your strong opinions, or by having a common list of virtual friends for work and family life.

On the other hand, that does not necessarily mean that professional identity becomes somehow insignificant, but in contrast, it increases the journalist's awareness of ethical and professional details when posting or commenting on social media. This type of behavior grows from the journalist's need to adapt their personal values to the professional ones in order to survive as news representatives in the industry. Furthermore, taking into consideration their professional identity as a journalist when using personal social media accounts is thought to be, from the respondent's point of view, a way of protecting their work identity or their paper group brand. The concepts of professional and personal identity are coming closer and closer together, with social media representing the perfect platform for creating and promoting any type of virtual character.

Social media pressure

In comparing the traditional ways of transmitting news with the new technological advancement in news broadcasting, most of the respondents emphasised the differences in the writing style, language and article size as being modified characteristics of journalism on different types of communication platforms. The use of social media becomes almost a social pressure, a push to be integrated in an ever-changing society, with journalists feeling the risks of refusing to adapt to the new media content.

Journalist's preferences

Sources

The respondent's preferences for a variety of sources can be translated as a consequence of the new media emergence into the professional space of journalism. Most of the interviewees mentioned their preferred sources as being: social media, other articles or reports found online, official information from certified institutions or information from witnesses or personal informants.

Traditional sources are changing and journalists no longer operate a gate keeping mechanism between themselves and the audience. The Internet offers the possibility for the public to communicate directly with news sources and the other way around, eliminating the mediating role of the journalist (Chung 2007). On the other hand, professional journalists still show a preference for sources that indicate a certain degree of authority, coming from established public or political institutions. By using these types of *elite sources* journalists base their research process entirely on official information, skipping basic procedures of searching and checking information. Moreover, the introduction of citizen-based journalism produced an increase in using citizens as news sources, rather than the traditional ones. Research suggests that sources vary in accordance to the type of news you are transmitting, with political and economical news being associated with traditional, official sources, while entertainment magazines take their sources from a wide range of individuals online and offline (De Keyser 2011).

Social media has made informants and witnesses more accessible to journalists. One can view what they are saying and have a possible story. The key thing here is having a *possible* story, with the validity of such sources often being uncertain. A particular opportunity to reach out for more sources is also made available through social media, with several interviewees claiming to have seen, or made use of methods to reach out for a more varied *expert opinion* (e.g. female football commentators, multi-racial and religious perspectives).

Comments

There is a variation in the amount of interest in reader's comments. It is clear that some find comments a regular inconvenience, while others specify the value of constructive comments.

Despite most interviewees valuing constructive comments and intelligent debate, unconstructive comments are also a consequence of news interactivity on online platforms, and therefore appreciated by some. In general, user's comments are seen as an indicator of newsworthiness and a way of benchmarking readership, with most journalists wanting the freedom to interact with their public. On the other hand, the audience's interventions and interruptions can be seen as a disruption between the established identity of a journalist and their now diffused power over the society's norms and values. This can lead to a conflict between traditional journalists who want to keep a hierarchical order and their readers (Robinson 2010).

The concept of interactivity arises when we discuss user-generated content in relation to the transmission of news. Interactivity can be understood as the capacity to alter or transform the content of a message by removing parts of it or adding new information as a member of the audience (Robinson 2010). This results in real time conversations between journalists and readers and can sometimes endanger the traditional perception of journalism.

Moderation

The moderation phenomenon is just one of the features of online journalism, appearing to be the limit to a consequential freedom of expression born at the same time as the explosion of social media. When asked about their preferences with regards to moderated content, most journalists agree that the value of moderation is a symbolic token of the journalist's authority to generate and disseminate news. The pro-moderators argue that the values of our society are still in the hands of professional institutions that can establish what goes online and what is censored, while the ones against moderation bring into light the paradigms of freedom of expression. In the case of online comments, the idea of anonymity is looked upon as a paradox, being the one that empowers readers to express their true feelings and at the same

time the one that encourages the trolling phenomenon and a need for moderation. A further paradox is that social media itself can be used to enforce a level of moderation. An example of this is that registration to Facebook is necessary in several instances in order to interact. Several respondents point out that people using Facebook are much less likely to say something antagonistic given its registration procedures.

Quality versus quantity

In regards to quantity and quality, the main preference was for qualitative information and constructive debates with the audiences. Those who favoured a limited number of views, but with interesting debate, value a certain level of professionalism when generating news, considering their audience's reactions more important than a viral spread of the article. On the other hand, journalists that preferred a high number of views and no debate in relationship with their article are considered promoters of their publication, supporting the broadcasting organisation that hired them in order to generate readership, or simply branding themselves as online journalists. This last point was a particular matter of debate, with some seeing fewer views but quality debate as a badge to be professionally proud of, while others see getting it to as many people as possible more noteworthy. Essentially, this idea is intrinsic to each interviewee's belief as to the function of news.

A prediction was that people working for smaller publications may be more enthused about getting their message to as many people rather than creating stimulated discussion, while more established writers would want more high brow debate. If anything this is the other way round, where newer writers tend to desire interesting debate while higher profile writers propose the advantages of reaching a larger audience, and the monetary benefits of this for their employer/paper. Though this wasn't the case for everyone, it did seem that newer journalists value the ethics of the journalist in a way, while the seasoned journalists are desensitised to the ethics somewhat, maybe through proximity and familiarity to the more cut-throat and competitive end of the business.

Interactivity

One of the main features of online journalism is the interactivity aspect of social media platforms, with respondents highlighting the opportunity it presents in platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Some other journalists also use emails in order to receive and give feedback from their readers. The favoured methods of interaction with the audience are comments, message boards and polls, all of which are used to keep in touch with the public's preferences. The simplicity of giving feedback, sharing opinions and expressing oneself on online pages creates a new medium of involving readers to participate in the construction of the professional message. The validity of user-generated content was also a constant factor in assessing interactivity, with respondents agreeing that the audience's comments have a certain degree of importance in news transmission (Deuze 2003).

Chung (2007) describes interactivity positively, highlighting advantages such as immediacy, a better communication flow with readers, and a multimodal communication experience that gives birth to a new type of journalism: the personalized journalistic writing. The continuity of the journalistic writing experience is thought to be a consequence of user-generated content, with an article continuing through audience's comments, opinions and impressions on different online messages. When talking about UGC, we can underline that it is a complementary way to transmit information, not a replacement for news broadcasting. By giving readers the chance to be part of the new media transformation, UGC allows them to actively participate in the formation of news, even if earlier research shows that people are keener on consuming media than taking the role of the sender in the communication model (Hermida and Thurman 2008).

The importance of feedback is one of the ideas underlined by the respondents, with most journalists indicating a high level of acceptance when dealing with criticisms from users. Furthermore, interactivity encourages: open debates on various topics, the acceptance of taboo stories and reveals new characteristics of the target groups. As a situational finding, interviewees consider online criticism as easier to receive than face-to-face criticism, explaining that they see the virtual world as creating a gap between personal emotions and professional identity.

Social Media's effect on journalism

That several respondents identified a difference between journalism in a social media age, and journalism pre-social media is telling. One interview provided an interesting model in which to understand the differences between them, with variables being heightened access to news and sources, and quality of message. This can be seen below:
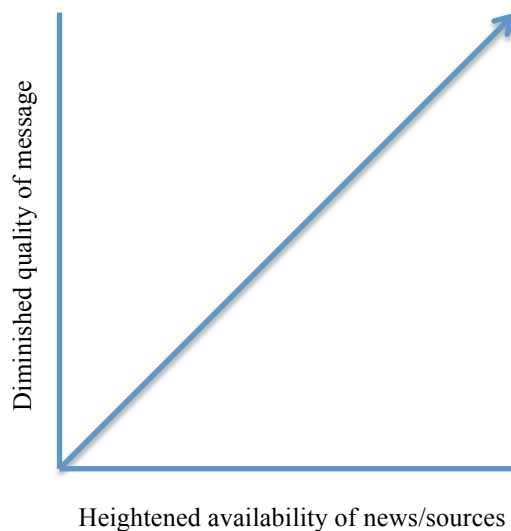

Fig. 5

The utilising of social media when reporting can then can be argued to provide greater accessibility to news/sources for both journalist and audience, but a lower level of message quality. This lower quality is related to several things; a differing style of reporting because of a competitive urgency to report, a diminishing of personal interaction in obtaining information (a certain level of uncertainty when using social media as a source that must often be double checked for validity), and a perceived cheapening of work identity (because of the ease for anyone to report news). Whether this is as clear-cut a conclusion as proposed here is a matter of debate and opportunity for future study.

Social media has set society away from traditional journalism, creating both a pool to give birth to the social media savvy youth, and the ability for readers to go out there and publish content. The social media age affects a traditional, well-established profession like journalism by creating unlimited access for users to the information flow. On the other hand,

traditionalists are concerned about the value of the journalistic messages, a loss in quality being one of the related consequences. This research followed the answers of journalists, who agreed that the power of social media is the vocalisation of the audience that comes with the emergence of interactive platforms, that in-turn allows real time feedback and the rise of citizen journalism. Social media, in relationship with the changes that are taking place in journalism, is thought to create a transition inside the professional identity of a journalist, cheapening the uniqueness of what was thought to be a traditional news broadcaster. The new media explosion allows for the audience to actively participate by taking the role of information sender, and publishing newsworthy information on various platforms.

Another consequence of the social media outburst is heightened competition, with more online newspapers appearing due to the low costs of online publishing. Furthermore, journalist's blogs, or even personal blogs, are posting more and more newsworthy information that increases the market's demands for information. The audience has the possibility to choose form a very wide range of sources, meaning journalism as a profession is losing some of its delegated authority over the masses. On the flipside, this new media phenomenon also brings great possibilities for professionals to start branding themselves as freelancers. Exhibiting their individuality and freedom of expression can be considered positive outcomes when using a separate identity from global broadcasting networks. The requirements for each professional identity are increasing with the emergence of social media, with most employees finding themselves in the situation of learning how to become technologically literate in order to keep up with the market's requests.

Steensen makes an essential point when he outlines immediacy and interactivity as the new attributes of online journalism, the internet not only succeeding in bringing people together, but also increasing their ability to keep connected to information and to each other (Steensen 2011). The participation of the public in the formation of news is built around debates or the gathering of critical news materials, which are published by mainstream journalists on online platforms. This allows space on social media for commercial operations such as targeting possible customers or raising awareness for new products (Bruns 2007). The rise of social media also produces changes in the communicational flow of journalism, known as a top-down model in traditional media, and has now converted into a decentralised system of sending and receiving information. The audience has more opportunities in gaining control

over the communication process, having an active role in the news consumption experience (Chung 2008).

Social networks are considered as valuable tools in gathering information, but they can also create a communicational chaos when professionals do not correctly use them. One of the main benefits of online platforms is the networking option through which participants can build communities and share knowledge based on mutual interest. In this sense, social media eliminates geographical distances and creates an electronic world where we get the chance to meet everyone. Journalists take advantage of the virtual world, where each person seems more approachable, in order to gather information and identify reliable news sources. Another aspect of the new online reality is the possibility of joining in, participating in discussions, debates and engaging in real time conversations. So in this way, social media is all about generating relationships and finding other individuals who share the same values and attitudes regarding a specific subject (Grensing-Pophal 2010). In relation to news, social media opens the opportunity for real time participation, a faster connection with the entire world and a great chance to share what is happening in your corner of the world.

Concerning the research questions, it is evident that the data provided significant answers to all three areas of interest. The journalists clearly identified several ways in which their role has changed because of social media. The accessibility of sources has greatly increased, leading to a diminished need to be a "journalist-about-town", but also an ease to cut corners with regards to the validity of the information one could use for a report. For most this means a necessity to be more scrutinous of sources if they obtain them via social media, while for others it has merely emphasised that such a method is not true journalism.

It is not just sources that are easier to get in touch with. Social media also allows for the journalist's audience to get in direct contact with the writer of an article, be it to give positive, negative or inflammatory feedback through comments and messages. This is something else that is deliberated within the various interviews: how to balance this new role as a minor media celebrity that may be approached through social media, with the integrity and professionalism of traditional journalism.

As the citizen journalist continues to gain influence in the news circuit there is a difference of opinion as to their validity as a journalist in the traditional sense of the word. Several interviews posit that although they can perceive this as possessing a certain amount of merit, their own professional training sets them apart from the citizen journalist. It is interesting that this is despite an ongoing increase in the inclusion of audience interaction features on news sites. One can only wonder if a future where these features are pointedly more popular than "traditional journalists" work would lead to a further shift towards audience input.

CONCLUSION

The data obtained and subsequent data analysis certainly emphasise the fact that social media has had, and continues to have a strong influence on the field of journalism. Interactivity with the audience and potential sources has led the journalist away from merely being a reporter of news. In fact, the notion of the journalist has moved so significantly away from aspects of its traditional basis through these influences that it could be said to be a different role altogether in today's social media age. They now have a responsibility to pursue stories quicker, strengthen networks, encourage sharing of articles, and respond to their readers, and because of the nature of social media, they are expected to do this in near real-time.

As citizen journalists gain more power and influence in online media and as an outlet for news, one can only wonder what will happen to the journalist and their publications in the future. The audience has gone from merely being a feedback-giving element of news transmission to being a broadcaster in their own right. Online journalism has already affected the local news scene with many local papers unable to afford to continue printing, and the fear is now that larger scale publications will diminish or become exclusively available online. With this move it is very likely that there will be an even greater shift away from the traditional role of journalism towards that of a social media writer.

Though the number of interviews compiled were of sufficient number to validate the study, it is likely that more data, of a more varied demographic of journalist, or a study into several highly established journalists, would deliver stronger data. Unfortunately, news reporting is such a breakneck industry as to leave little time for such requests, so stronger contacts may be necessary to pursue such an enquiry.

The industry seems to be moving away from traditional aspects of journalism with increasing fervor. As the next generation of journalists come through there will be an even greater capability to exploit social media in order to report news and to market and distribute it. As those familiar to the traditional aspects of it leave the industry there is potentially nothing to stop a move to championing speed and coverage of report over quality of message.

Proposals for future research

The many opportunities for further research have been one of the successes of this investigation. Some of these have come directly out of the data, indicating a chance to dig deeper in a specific area that was not one of the original focuses, while addressing a similar field to that of this study.

The data implied that younger journalists, who had spent a larger part of their working and personal life familiar with social media, were much more receptive and accepting of the impact of social media on journalism. This was not an area of focus in the study, just as considering the amount of time as a professional journalist wasn't, but both these factors likely possess significant enough influence to warrant their own investigation, or at least a broader study encompassing looking into it.

Originally there was an intention to include a comparison of what the interviewees said they used social media for, and a series of social media observations to establish whether they did in fact utilise it as they described. Due to time constraints, and the amount and strength of data collected purely from the interviews, this was deemed too great an investigation, but is certainly an interesting study in its own right.

Another branch of research that could be pursued is including audience members in the investigation, aside from or as well as the journalists. The fact that the audience was a particular focus of one of the research questions, meant that they in themselves inevitably would have much to say if they were interviewed on both the shift in journalism as a result of social media, and the rise of the citizen journalist and how they as the audience felt about that.

Other future research opportunities have merely been inspired by such topics arising from the interviews. For example, the case for and against moderation is an enticing subject, and one that several of the interviewees defined as an interaction between journalist and reader that nevertheless elicited some uncertainty and intrigue in the respondents. A careful planned exploration into this, through the lens of other factors such as the journalist, the audience, or

social media, would likely yield interesting debate. The phenomenon of trolling is also a fascinating aspect of the problem of anonymity and moderation, and could likely be developed into a study in itself, though this may be better suited to a psychology paper on what drives Internet users to troll others.

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APPENDIX: Interview guide

(Please state your answers below each question)

Theme: *The development of journalism in the face of social media.*

Research Question: *How does social media influence traditional roles of journalism? The relationship with the audience? And methods in which journalists go about their job?*

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer the questions.

A) Traditional definitions of journalism

1. What publications have you written for?

2. Could you define the role of journalist to me?

3. Do you think that journalism is one-way or two-way communication? Why?

4. How has the role of a journalist changed since social media appeared?

5. Are journalists necessary for news to be conveyed nowadays? Can you think of an example where news can be conveyed without journalists?

B) Journalism

1. What sources do you normally use to obtain information for a news story?

2. Do you want comments in relation to your articles in the first place?

3. How do you feel about negative comments or those that you strongly disagree with? Is trolling a valid response?

4. As a journalist, in what ways are you more careful with what you write online than a normal user?

C) Social Media

1. In what ways do you use social media at work as a journalist? And out of work? Do you use it exclusively to convey news or for other purposes?

2. How often do you use social media at work? (Roughly)

3. Do you think there is a pressure/importance to use social media within journalism and

why?

4. Are you happy for your work to be shared by readers? Does this affect intellectual property ownership?

5. Do you feel that you convey information the same whether you write for a "paper" or for social media?

6. How do you present yourself on social media? Choose one or more from below:
- As representative of employer/paper group
- catering to the audience
- representing your ideology
- interacting with fellow journalists
- promoting yourself
- Other (please state)

D) Audience Response
1. In what ways do you interact with your audience? Are there social media platforms you utilise for this purpose?

2. In your opinion what are the best methods to facilitate social media interaction/social networking – from polls/message boards/"have your say"/comment on stories/Q&A's/blogs/reader blogs/your media or your stories? Why?

3. Have you ever received professional criticism through social media? In what ways does it feel different to face-to-face criticism?

4. Do you think it is important for the audience to have a chance to reply to news? Why?

5. Do you think an article continues as a story when comments, and maybe even replies from the writer, follow it? Has this happened to you?

6. Would you prefer unmoderated audience interaction or moderated? Why?

7. If you wrote an article, would you rather have 1 million views with limited/negative comments, or 100 with interesting debate? Why?