'Random Acts of Journalism' Redux: News and Social Media

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Introduction

'Citizen journalism' is a term which emerged in the early 2000s to describe a range of new, largely Internet-enabled practices of engaging with the news that were led not by professional journalists and editors, but by individuals and groups who often volunteered their time because of a deeply-felt belief that the coverage available from conventional news media was inadequate or biased. As an online phenomenon that sought to critique, supplement and even supplant traditional news sources (then still predominantly in print and broadcast forms), citizen journalism inherently featured strong cross-media elements; arguably, early citizen journalism used the affordances of Web-based media more effectively than the contemporaneous online offerings of mainstream news media.

Notable moments such as Indymedia's groundbreaking crowdsourced coverage of the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization summit, and of the protests associated with it, kickstarted the first wave of what soon became known as citizen journalism (Meikle, 2002). In subsequent years, a range of citizen journalism websites and projects emerged, and journalism and Internet studies began to develop the conceptual frameworks that were required to investigate these emerging phenomena. However, in spite of a number of

significant successes for citizen journalists, the widespread adoption of citizen journalism practices by a large group of online participants failed to eventuate, and the vision of a myriad "random acts of journalism" committed by citizen journalists, which early advocate and practitioner J.D. Lasica presented in 2003, did not materialize. For the most part, citizen journalism has remained the domain of a class of followers of news and politics who were already deeply committed to this field of interest, and did not substantially broaden the base of such endeavors.

This limited success of citizen journalism in attracting a sufficiently broad base of actual citizens to participate in journalistic and para-journalistic activities was due in large part to the considerable barriers to entry which early citizen journalism practices and technologies continued to present. With the latest wave of participatory social media platforms that is represented in the first place by market leaders such as Facebook and Twitter, however, the underlying conditions for engagement in citizen journalistic activities have changed considerably, and a number of recent events clearly show a much broader uptake of citizen journalism practices and principles by social media users, as well as growing collaboration between citizen and professional journalists in "working the story" (Bruns, 2012) by using social media platforms. This chapter traces the trajectory from early citizen journalism platforms through to social media-supported citizen journalistic practices, and examines why the latter enjoy more widespread participation in the crucial journalistic activities of reporting, evaluation and dissemination.

Citizen Journalism: Early Successes

Arguably, the emergence of citizen journalism is closely linked to the development of the Independent Media Center (IMC) network at the turn of the millennium. "The first IMC was established in Seattle for the World Trade Organization events of November 1999. In the ten

months following Seattle, a network of more than 30 such IMCs had been set up, each using the same freely circulated software, and each relying on individual participants or visitors to submit content" (Meikle, 2002, p. 90). The common software platform provided a technological foundation for Indymedia volunteers to publish the fruits of their citizen journalism labor: it embraced 'open publishing' principles that allowed any user to post news stories instantly, and such functionality was used to significant effect during the 1999 WTO summit to post reports, transcripts, photos and even links to early attempts at streaming audio from the accompanying events organized by 'alternative globalization' activists, to cover and comment on the official summit program, and to document the clashes between Seattle police and anti-WTO protesters. Focusing on the political arguments behind protests and debates, Indymedia's coverage of the event was widely lauded as an important alternative source of coverage of the summit and related events, in comparison to mainstream U.S. and world media which mainly presented the conflict narrative of protests and riots.

Subsequent developments during this early phase of citizen journalism similarly drew substantially on the availability of key online publishing technologies that enabled the publication and dissemination of quasi-journalistic content by a broader range of actors than represented in the mainstream media. In addition to the IMC platform and other open publishing systems significantly influenced by it, the emergence of blogging platforms over the same period, and their popularization especially through the advent of major blogging hosts including LiveJournal and Blogger, provided a further significant boost to the development of citizen journalism. The arrival of blogs meant that aspiring citizen journalists no longer depended on membership in the collectives of Indymedia or other more formally constituted citizen journalism projects, but could easily establish their own individual online presences.

Such opportunities were indeed explored by an unprecedentedly broad range of users, compared to the much more limited number and diversity of mainstream journalistic staff – and indeed, a range of professional journalists also extended their activities beyond their professional commitments by setting up their own news blogs within or outside of their employers' mastheads. One of the first journalists to do so, J.D. Lasica, soon developed the view that this heralded the beginning of a new phase in the historical development of journalism: a phase in which journalism, previously "a mysterious craft practiced by only a select priesthood" (2003, p. 73), would come to be an everyday, mass activity. In this new environment, enabled by 'mass self-communication' technologies (Castells, 2009), participants would regularly commit "random acts of journalism", perhaps even without being consciously aware of the fact:

> citizens are discovering how easy it can be to play reporter and publisher. To practice random acts of journalism, you don't need a big-league publication with a slick Web site behind you. All you need is a computer, an Internet connection, and an ability to perform some of the tricks of the trade: Report what you observe, analyse events in a meaningful way but, most of all, just be fair and tell the truth as you and your sources see it. (Lasica, 2003, p. 73)

What Lasica anticipates here is a demoticization of journalistic practices: a process through which journalistic or quasi-journalistic activities come to be practiced by a greater range of ordinary people as part of their everyday engagement with online media. This vision essentially echoes the Indymedia motto that "everyone's a journalist", and its extension by one of the chief developers of the original IMC platform, Matthew Arnison: "Everyone is a witness. Everyone is a journalist. Everyone edits" (2002). But this everyday, demotic

adoption of journalistic practices should not necessarily be understood as a *democratisation* of journalism: as we will see, popular participation in citizen journalism remained unevenly distributed across the populace.

During the first years of the new millennium, the emerging citizen journalism phenomenon did indeed result in a number of notable successes. Citizen journalists and news bloggers played an important role as a counterpublic to the comparatively uncritical U.S. media in the lead-up and early phases of the wars in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, questioning White House claims of weapons of mass destruction and challenging the administration's strategy of going to war on two fronts at the same time. They also engaged with key domestic controversies well before mainstream media did, ultimately keeping alive the stories that eventually led to the resignations of Republican Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott in 2002 over statements seen to support racial segregation, and of veteran news anchor Dan Rather in 2005 over falsified documents relating to George W. Bush's service record in the National Guard. News bloggers were also accredited for the first time at a status equivalent to the mainstream press at the 2004 Democratic convention, covering the party's presidential candidate selection process. Outside the U.S., similar trends emerged: Korean citizen journalism platform OhmyNews became an influential alternative news source during the 2002 Korean presidential election (Kahney, 2003), while Australian news bloggers with a specialization in psephology (the scientific analysis of opinion polling) provided an important counter-narrative to the biased interpretation of public opinion polls by some partisan news outlets in the lead-up to the country's 2007 federal election (Bruns & Highfield, 2012). Notably, such controversies also often constituted conflicts between different media platforms and their associated working practices: they pitted web-based citizen journalists against print- and broadcast-centric media organizations (with more or less developed online presences).

But such headline successes masked an underlying structural deficit in citizen journalism. Far from being a truly demotic *and* democratic practice which genuinely broadened participation in covering, discussing and sharing the news, in the longer term citizen journalism remained an activity whose practitioners' demographics ultimately differed little from those of mainstream journalism, and which therefore showed similar biases of attention. This is also evident from the fact that many leading practitioners who established themselves in the early phase of citizen journalism, following the IMC moment, either had some journalistic training already or eventually developed affiliations with mainstream news organizations, if they did not establish their own. The founders of Huffington Post (U.S.), OhmyNews (Korea) and The Conversation (Australia / U.K.) had professional experience as journalists and commentators, for example, while prominent independent news bloggers such as Matt Drudge (U.S.) or Tim Dunlop (Australia) were later given opportunities – if sometimes short-lived – to reach mainstream media audiences by working as television or radio hosts or authoring regular opinion columns.

This contraction of citizen journalism, after the initial breakthrough of the Independent Media Centers with their call for truly widespread participation in journalistic practices, around a significantly more limited and conventional group of what may be described as "political junkies" (Coleman, 2003), indicates that the early phases of citizen journalism may have demoticized journalism – enabling political junkies without formal employment in mainstream media to engage in journalistic and quasi-journalistic activities – but largely failed also to democratize it (Turner, 2006, makes a similar argument for new trends in the production of celebrity). Through citizen journalism, credible and influential journalistic voices could now be recruited from outside of conventional skills training pathways, but such voices rarely added significant diversity of experience, opinion, or expertise.

This initial failure to attract broad participation in and commitment to citizen journalism activities can be explained largely by the substantial barriers to participation which continued to exist even after the introduction of modern citizen journalism and news blogging platforms. As a prominent form of what Benkler has described as "commons-based peer production", citizen journalism is subject to the principles which govern it: perhaps most crucially, participation is constrained by the rule that

> the number of people who can, in principle, participate … is … inversely related to the size of the smallest-scale contribution necessary to produce a usable module. The granularity of the modules therefore sets the smallest possible individual investment necessary to participate in a project. (2006, p. 101)

But the problem for news blogging and other forms of citizen journalism was that participation still required a substantial amount of time and effort: potential contributors had to set up their own blogs or become part of the user collectives participating in established sites; they had to set aside the time to gather source materials, compose meaningful content in the necessary formats (which usually meant writing several paragraphs of text), and monitor and respond to subsequent reader comments. Similar limitations also applied to forms of user-led content creation across other forms of media, in fact – wherever the hurdles posed by the prior knowledge, technical ability or investment of time and resources that are required of a potential contributor grow too large, this serves to substantially reduce the likelihood of widespread user involvement. "A successful large-scale peer-production project must therefore have a predominate portion of its modules be relatively finegrained" (Benkler, 2006, p. 101).

For the project of citizen journalism itself, viewed as a distributed practice across citizen journalism sites and news blogs, the smallest useful "module" in Benkler's terminology is the news story or blog post – and in spite of the ease of publishing such posts which the first wave of citizen journalism technologies introduced, the development of the intellectual content of these stories still constituted a significant investment of time and energy, and thus a considerable barrier to participation.

Citizen Journalism as Gatewatching

The effect of this barrier must be distinguished across the three key journalistic tasks of reporting, evaluating and disseminating the news. It is the first of these tasks which presents the greatest hurdle to widespread participation in citizen journalism, while contributing to the evaluation and dissemination of the news may be considerably easier. In the following discussion, we will consider these three tasks in turn.

First, a citizen journalist's ability to *report* the news depends crucially on their ability to either be physically present as news breaks, or to engage in first-hand research and investigation to establish the facts of a possible news story. For citizen journalists working – as volunteers – outside of paid employment in the news industry, neither is likely to be possible unless sufficient other sources of income are available to support the considerable commitment of time and resources necessary, or unless the citizen journalist finds themselves at the scene of an event or in possession of new information by sheer coincidence. Such coincidences *are* possible, however, and can lead to the emergence of important new citizen journalist voices: this was the case for example for Salam Pax, the Baghdad-based news blogger who reported first-hand on the effects of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and later became a columnist for *The Guardian*; or for The Drudge Report's Matt Drudge, who

apparently began his career by gleaning stories from gossip overheard in the CBS gift shop, where he worked (see Weiss, 2007, p. 3).

For the most part, however, citizen journalists lack the resources to engage in first-hand reporting in a way that rivals the work of mainstream, professionally employed journalistic staff. It may be possible for citizen journalists to commit to full-fledged journalistic reporting practices for a brief period of time – and this temporary commitment is what provided the initial impetus for citizen journalism during the 1999 WTO summit – but for non-professionals, such investment of time and resources is usually unsustainable over the long term, and citizen journalistic practice in general, and the Independent Media Centers in particular, could not maintain as considerable a level of activities over subsequent years.

Rather, what emerged as news blogging in the early years of the new millennium was a form of citizen journalism which focused – parasitically, in the view of some journalists and scholars – on the second crucial task of journalism: the *evaluation*, interpretation, and contextualisation of news reports (Bruns, 2006). Using this approach, while some news bloggers "do actual reporting from time to time, most of what they bring to the table is opinion and analysis – punditry" (Reynolds quoted in Bowman & Willis, 2003, p. 33). The practitioners of this form of citizen journalism engage in the practice of what I have described as 'gatewatching' (Bruns, 2005): the continuous observation of the output gates of conventional, mainstream news organizations as well as of other newsworthy sources – government and political institutions, industry, NGOs, research institutes, etc. – with the aim to report, evaluate and discuss on the citizen journalism site any material relevant to the citizen journalist's interests that passes through these gates. Because of the existence of citizen journalism sites and news blogs as entities separate from the sources on which they draw, this also implies the transition of news across media platforms and channels, of course:

snippets of information are selected from the original, mainstream reports, and republished by the gatewatchers.

Such gatewatching practices, then, extend not the first-hand reporting of such new information, but the discussion which surrounds it: they aggregate and correlate diverse reports on related topics into topical dossiers, juxtapose new information with older coverage, and trace the threads of public debate over longer periods of time than is typically possible in conventional journalism. Especially through the interactions between individual news blogs offering differing perspectives or different expertise, as well as through the on-site conversation threads which are a crucial component of most citizen journalism sites and news blogs, an even greater range of perspectives and opinions on the news is also represented, leading to the development of a more truly multiperspectival (and multimedia) news coverage (as envisaged in Gans, 1980). Early journalist-blogger Dan Gillmor has famously encapsulated this process, and its impact on mainstream journalism, in his statement that

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

But although this second-order processing of mainstream news by citizen journalists does away with the prohibitively large investments of time and effort required for first-hand reporting, it still continues to present considerable barriers to an entry into (quasi-)journalistic

practice for would-be citizen journalists; those wishing to engage in news blogging, for example, would still need to establish their own blog or seek inclusion in established group blogs or multi-authored citizen journalism sites, and – in order to develop a credible presence in this environment – would still have to commit to relatively regular and frequent blog updates which themselves require a commitment to a continuous gatewatching of mainstream news and other important sources. Although in Benkler's terms, gatewatching makes the practice of news blogging somewhat more granular, ultimately it does not yet make it granular *enough* to attract widespread engagement beyond the 'usual suspects'.

At the lowest-involvement end of the gatewatching model of citizen journalism we have therefore historically found a class of news blogs which do away even with the journalistic tasks of evaluation and contextualisation, and focus instead largely only on the third major element of journalistic practice: *dissemination*. These 'filter blogs' or 'link blogs' for the most part simply publish frequent updates which present lists of and links to new material published elsewhere on the web that is relevant to the interests of the news bloggers and their imagined audience of readers, without any serious attempts at interpretation. Such blogs function simply as topical digests, and in doing so still require the blogger to commit to gatewatching other sites, but no longer require them also to do the intellectual work of adding their own commentary to accompany the links they share with their readers. During this first phase of citizen journalism, before the advent of the current generation of social media platforms and the practices they enable, such link blogging constituted the form of citizen journalism (or at least of news blogging) which required the least amount of commitment from participants – but still, it could hardly be seen to constitute the "random acts of journalism" which Lasica had envisaged in 2003.

'Random Acts of Journalism' Redux

Developments in online participative technologies and practices in the first decade of the new millennium have resulted in significant further changes to the status quo that was established by this first phase of citizen journalism, however. The introduction of modern social media platforms, chiefly including Facebook and Twitter as well as more language- and country-specific platforms such as Weibo, has provided significant further impetus to the transformation of both professional and citizen journalistic practices, to a point where the two are beginning to intersect and blend to considerable degree.

The first advantage that such platforms have over the citizen journalism and blogging tools which were used by the previous generation is that they are generic and even quasi-universal services for public and private communication between users, rather than relatively specialized tools for self-publication: even though blog platforms came to be used for a very wide variety of purposes beyond citizen journalism, for example, they still constituted specialist publication tools that resemble personalized printing presses, rather than universal communication systems like the telephone. Ultimately, only modern social media platforms fully realize Castells's idea of mass self-communication (2009), especially as far as the term 'mass' is concerned: Facebook now claims some 1.2 billion "monthly active users" (PR Newswire, 2014), while Twitter reports a figure of 271 million users for the same metric (Twitter, Inc., 2014).

The universality of such communication tools is further boosted by their ready accessibility on the current generation of mobile devices, including smart phones and tablets: not only does a considerable proportion of the global population, and a particularly significant share of the population in developed nations, have a social media presence, but such users are also able to (and in daily practice do) engage with their online social networks in a flexible, always-on manner. For our present focus on citizen journalistic practices, this means that at times when such socially networked and continuously connected users are

directly affected by breaking news events, they are able to immediately share their own impressions and observations from the scene of the incident. We see this especially in the case of natural disasters and human-made crises.

Such practices have been observed for a wide range of situations since the introduction and popularization of the current generation of social media platforms. Notably, the user-introduced concept of the Twitter hashtag – designed to tag individual tweets as being relevant to specific topics – was created in the first place to cover the 2007 San Diego wildfires (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008), where it enabled affected residents, firefighters and other relevant authorities to share information about the current situation on the ground. From here, the practice spread to the coverage of events such as the 2009 emergency landing of a commercial airliner on the Hudson River in New York City (Subasic & Berendt, 2011), the 2011 Queensland floods (Bruns, Burgess, Crawford, & Shaw, 2012) and Sendai tsunami (Hjorth & Kim, 2011), and the disappearance and downing of Malaysia Airlines passenger flights MH370 and MH17 in 2014. Indeed, even compared to the more popular Facebook, Twitter appears to be an especially important medium for the coverage of breaking news events – and was recognized as such by the U.S. State Department's request to Twitter, Inc. to delay a scheduled maintenance outage at a time when Twitter was used by local citizens to cover the protests following the disputed 2009 Iranian election (Pleming, 2009). Twitter's particular relevance in such events is due to its comparatively flat and open network structure and the ease with which users are able to introduce new hashtags as a rallying point for participants interested in covering, and following the coverage of, specific events. These features enable the rapid emergence of *ad hoc* publics on Twitter (Bruns & Burgess, 2011).

The ready availability of Twitter (and, with limitations, Facebook) as tools for this ad hoc public coverage of breaking news events by affected social media users thus serves to lower the barriers to widespread demotic participation in first-hand reporting far further than the

earlier phase of citizen journalism tools and practices had been able to do. Users are easily able to construct a brief message covering an event (possibly even including an eyewitness photo, taken with their mobile device), connect it with an existing interest community and discussion thread as gathered around an existing hashtag (or suggesting their own where none exists yet), and disseminate it to a potentially platform-wide audience on Twitter or Facebook. This results in a considerably greater granularity of participation than was offered by those earlier publication tools; indeed, in the case of Twitter the 140-character limit imposed on individual tweets effectively enforces this more fine-grained nature of contributions.

Again, it becomes possible to examine in turn how the specific affordances of this current generation of mainstream social media platforms intersect with the three key tasks in journalism – reporting, evaluating and disseminating the news – and to what extent they enable everyday social media users to practice these activities. Further, in doing so these ordinary social media users may also engage with the personal and professional accounts of mainstream journalists and news organizations, many of whom have by now also established their own presences on Facebook and Twitter.

To begin with, based on the preceding discussion social media platforms enable the participation of a much broader and more diverse group of participants in the first core task of journalism: *reporting*. Studies of Twitter's role especially during breaking news events (Subasic & Berendt, 2011; Bruns et al., 2012; Hjorth & Kim, 2011; Murthy & Longwell, 2013; Osborne & Dredze, 2014) also demonstrate that this opportunity is typically taken up by a large number of users whom we may therefore describe as citizen journalists in the most orthodox meaning of the term: these users are everyday citizens who when faced with unexpected events choose to cover and share them as ad hoc journalists with their social media networks. They are, thus, committing random acts of journalism in the literal sense of

that phrase, and in combination (perhaps facilitated by the aggregating effects of a shared hashtag or other platform affordances) these random individual acts of journalism result in a multi-authored, multiperspectival stream of live coverage for breaking news events. Hermida (2014; 2010) and Burns (2010) both describe such practices as the 'ambient journalism' function of social media: although such media may be used for a range of other, non-journalistic activities in everyday practice, their potential for journalism remains available, ambient, and moves to the foreground when required. The users of social media, in turn, may be seen as a kind of global network of journalistic 'sleeper agents' who activate themselves when there is news to report.

This is not meant to imply that such individual random acts of journalism are always committed consciously, with the explicit intention to act as a citizen journalist. Rather, users may simply choose to report on the events around them as part of their everyday social media practices, directed in the first place at their imagined audience of friends and followers – their "personal public", in Schmidt's terms (2014). The journalistic function of such reports emerges in that case only as an afterthought, precisely through the aggregation and correlation of these many individual and random acts into a more coherent whole. Such aggregation is performed, as we have already seen, at least in part by technological interventions such as the hashtag as well as keyword search mechanisms that are available on social media platforms; however, here too there is a further role for social media users themselves, beyond aggregation algorithms.

This secondary role, then, resembles that of the gatewatchers we have already encountered in the first phase of citizen journalism, carrying out the second key journalistic task of *evaluating*, interpreting and contextualizing news reports. Much like their news blogger predecessors, social media users may watch the gates of news organizations and other sources external to the social media platform itself, and post links to and comments on

such materials – and again, in comparison to news blogs and citizen journalism sites the greater ease of conducting such activities within the always-on, highly accessible spaces of social media lowers the granularity of such practices (and thus the barriers to widespread participation) considerably. As a result, sharing newsworthy content from external sources that is deemed to be 'interesting', in the form of links, with one's own friends and followers is now a very widespread practice for social media users, as several studies of such practices indicate (Horan, 2013; Bruns, Highfield, & Harrington, 2013). Especially where social media users engage with and correlate the material being shared, they provide an important evaluative and contextualizing function. Collectively and collaboratively, these users may be able to establish the full facts of a story, to juxtapose conflicting accounts or debunk misinformation, or to place individual news updates in a wider interpretive framework.

But in addition to the introduction of external material into the ongoing exchange of news and commentary through social media, more internal practices of gatewatching *within* social media spaces have also become prevalent. Such practices utilize standard facilities for sharing other users' updates with one's own followers (on Twitter, for example, through the popular retweet functionality) and thereby afford these updates greater visibility. Studies of retweeting during major crisis events (for example the 2010 Chile earthquake or the 2011 Queensland floods) have documented clearly that such selection practices boost both the visibility of individual news items, and the social media status of their original senders (Mendoza, Poblete, & Castillo, 2010; Bruns et al., 2012). This, then, also especially addresses the third key task of journalism, *dissemination*: retweeting and other social media sharing mechanisms seek to ensure that the material posted by individual users reaches as wide an audience as is appropriate for its relative importance in the context of the news event or topic.

First-hand social media news reporting as well as these external and internal gatewatching practices, especially also when connected with more automatic aggregation

facilities such as hashtags, can thus be seen as a collaborative effort at a fourth type of journalistic task which have not yet encountered in this form: news *curation*. By preferentially sharing and discussing specific news reports being posted on social media platforms, the crowd or community of participating users collectively evaluates the relative importance of individual contributions (and contributors) to the unfolding news reporting effort. In their contribution to this shared effort, even individual retweets can thus be regarded as committing random acts of journalism in Lasica's definition.

Notably, persistent participation in such collective curatorial efforts also affords greater status to the users engaging in such acts, within the social media space but potentially also beyond it. Hermida et al. (2014) document this for the case of U.S.-based National Public Radio social media strategist Andy Carvin, whose ad hoc engagement as a prominent Twitter-based news curator during the early phase of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010 and 2011 positioned him as a *de facto* authority on these events. From their study, "Carvin emerges as a central node in a networked media environment – one trusted to authenticate, interpret and contextualize information flows on social awareness streams, drawing on a distributed and networked newsroom where knowledge and expertise are fluid, dynamic and hybrid" (2014, p. 495). Beyond the use of hashtags as a coordinating mechanism (which, especially in the case of major news events, may quickly become overloaded by the sheer volume of information being shared), such individual news curators thus take on the role of temporary one-person news outlets which other social media users interested in the continued coverage of the event may subscribe to by following or friending the curator's account (Lehmann, Castillo, Lalmas, & Zuckerman, 2013). In doing so, they follow a similar logic as the special event "live blogs" which some leading news organizations run on occasion – and which often also source their updates from well beyond the organization's own sources.

Reshuffling the Boundaries between Citizen and Professional Journalists

The fact that, in this particular case, Carvin happens to be a professional journalist is only of secondary importance, since similar news curation roles during other news events have been performed also by non-professional actors, and thus by true citizen journalists. However, Carvin's engagement in the coverage and curation of Arab Spring-related news well beyond his brief at National Public Radio demonstrates the increasing overlap and blending between the citizen and professional journalistic activities conducted through social media. In his Twitter activities, Carvin operated, in the first place, as a volunteer gatewatcher, both sharing externally-sourced news reports and increasing the visibility of other users' social media updates through retweeting and commentary; he thus employed a style of journalistic evaluation and dissemination more commonly associated with citizen journalism than with the gatekeeping of orthodox professional journalistic practice. Notably, too, he did so under his own imprint as @acarvin on Twitter, rather than under the professional auspices of NPR.

This reflects a wider trend for individual journalists in social media spaces to become personal news brands, independent of or at least at some distance from their employers. Similar tendencies could be observed during the protests against the police killing of unarmed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on 9 August 2014: in addition to their conventional reports for television, radio, print and online outlets, journalists covering the protests and caught up in the heavy-handed police actions against both residents and media also engaged in the live coverage of events through social media, from personal as well as institutional accounts, through activities including both first-hand reporting in brief text, photo, and video updates, and sharing and commenting on other social media users' updates – including those of everyday citizens, local community leaders and other authorities on both sides of the protest, and fellow journalists. In turn, these other stakeholders in the social media coverage of the events also engaged with the personal and official accounts of

journalists, resulting in a collaborative and multiperspectival coverage of the protest events which none of these actors could have achieved in isolation. Much as everyday social media users act as gatewatchers to curate the news updates from mainstream journalists and news organizations, so professional journalists are now also gatewatching the contributions made by ordinary citizens, at least during such extraordinary breaking news events.

Such blurring of the boundaries between citizen and professional journalists demonstrates the leveling effect which social media environments create, well beyond the citizen journalism platforms and news blogs of the first phase of citizen journalism. In this second phase, the online platforms through which citizen journalism is conducted no longer exist as stand-alone publications which resemble, but because of their lack of institutional history and operational resources usually fail to match, the well-established mastheads of professional journalism. Rather, these social media spaces exist as a shared meeting space in which citizen and professional journalists congregate but which neither party are able to control. On this at least theoretically level new playing field, institutional histories and operational resources mean comparatively little, as they do not automatically translate into inherently greater visibility or authority: news organizations, journalists and everyday users are equally subject to the restrictions imposed by 140-character limits and the voluntary efforts of other users in disseminating their updates through wider social networks, for example.

This does not mean that in the spaces of Twitter and Facebook, the demotic participation practices arising from these fundamental features also translate into an inevitable democratization of journalistic participation and impact, however: the professional and personal track record of individual social media users outside of their social media activities themselves does impact on their status within the social media space. But the wealth of recent studies into the use of social media as tools for reporting on, evaluating, discussing

and disseminating the news also demonstrates that at least for the duration of specific news events and topics, new and non-traditional actors can emerge as influential voices in the coverage and curation of the news, and that such actors may potentially assume positions of influence and authority well beyond the initial event itself.

In this context, it may no longer be appropriate to speak of *random* acts of journalism, conducted as if by accident by social media users who were merely going about their everyday business on Twitter and Facebook but somehow managed to connect with a current news story. The fact that such acts make a (perhaps unknowing, but nonetheless meaningful) contribution to the continuing, collaborative and multiperspectival coverage of the news is due in large part to the fact that social media posts may appear in a wide variety of contexts at once: a retweet to one's followers may also show up in a hashtag feed or a keyword search, for example, or may boost the visibility of the original tweet to a point where it or its author are included in Twitter's list of trending topics or recommendations of users to follow. But while such further repercussions may be invisible to and unintended by the retweeting user, their own actions are entirely deliberate: sharing links to news stories, sharing other users' news-related posts, commenting on and discussing the news have now become everyday practices even for social media users who are far removed from being committed "political junkies".

What this chapter has demonstrated, then, is that the ambitions associated with the early phases of citizen journalism, then left largely unrealized, may now be revisited in the context of modern social media platforms. But rather than being driven mostly by a self-selecting group of citizen journalists, recruited mainly from the usual suspects, this new wave of news engagement represents a more truly demotic (if not necessarily entirely democratic) practice: reporting, evaluating, disseminating, and curating the news are now becoming fundamental aspects of what social media users do in their everyday activities on platforms

such as Facebook and Twitter. Further, the specific affordances of these platforms mean that ordinary social media users engaging in such practices are often working immediately alongside the professional journalists and news organizations who have also come to adopt these platforms, and that their respective activities play off and cross-influence one another: the gatewatching which is a fundamental element of these practices has become a bi-directional process. This demoticisation of what can still be seen as citizen journalism practices may realize J.D. Lasica's vision of widespread user participation in journalism, then, but as such processes of engagement with the news have become part of the core vocabulary of social media it may no longer be appropriate to describe them as 'random acts'. At this stage in the development of online media, it may instead be more appropriate to speak of small but *habitual* acts of journalism when we consider the contributions of everyday citizens to journalistic practice through social media.

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