

MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: SOCIAL MEDIA AND NEWS

By Paul Bradshaw



Social Media and News

WRITTEN BY

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The incredible growth of social media has dominated the Web 2.0 decade. With research showing that most internet users stumble across news online while looking for something else, news organizations can no more ignore social media than they can ignore the communities they seek to serve (and the markets which its advertisers seek to reach).

News organizations are being sidestepped by newsmakers that use social media to communicate directly with audiences; news products are being unbundled across multiple platforms; and production processes are becoming more networked.

New devices—mobile and tablets—are shifting consumption further into public and private work and leisure spaces, and there is still an enormous amount of innovation to come. Yet social media have not (yet) replaced other media. Television remains the most consumed and trusted news medium.

In this paper, Paul Bradshaw surveys the ways that news occurs in social media, and examines the implications for media-related values. It will, he concludes, become more important than ever to identify what exactly the role of journalists—and the news they report—should be, regardless of platform. Is it to hold power to account, give a voice to the voiceless and a platform for national, international, and local conversations? Or separate rumour from truth, or create well-informed citizens? New technologies provide new dangers along with new possibilities, and it will take governments, media and citizens some time to address them.

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Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines these changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policy-makers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world.

The project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switchover from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

As part of this endeavor, the Open Society Media Program has commissioned introductory papers on a range of issues, topics, policies and technologies that are important for understanding these processes. Each paper in the **Reference Series** is authored by a recognised expert, academic or experienced activist, and is written with as little jargon as the subject permits.

The reference series accompanies reports into the impact of digitization in 60 countries across the world. Produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country, these reports examine how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide – news about political, economic and social affairs. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The **Mapping Digital Media** is a project of the Open Society Media Program, in collaboration with the Open Society Information Program.

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I. Introduction: From Publishing to Participation

The incredible growth of social media, web platforms which facilitate the sharing of content primarily for social purposes, has been the dominant characteristic of the Web 2.0 decade. Startups such as Last.fm (launched in 2002), LinkedIn (2003), Flickr (2004), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), and Twitter (2006) have all risen to dominant positions.

For a news industry used to controlling its own distribution, the rise of social media has brought significant change. Where media owners previously looked to the power of dominant portals such as Yahoo! and MSN as channels for attracting users, they now have increasingly to adjust to the rising power of users themselves as distributors not only of traditional content through social media, but also of independent publishers and individuals on social media platforms. Traditional media continue to dominate these spaces, but they are no longer the only operators.

This development is just one of a number of changes that have eroded news businesses' traditional competitive advantages. Those who bundled content in print have found it unbundled online; those who enjoyed the protection of real-world geography have found themselves exposed to global competition. Those who acted as intermediaries between sellers and buyers have found themselves disintermediated. And those who relied on high entry barriers to justify their advertising prices have found those barriers much lowered.²

This move from gatekeepers to “gatewatchers”³ has meant an increased role for media, not just in processing copy but in reacting to, verifying, and contextualizing stories already spreading across social media platforms. Some argue that the increased availability of eyewitness and expert accounts on social media makes traditional media less relevant; others, that it makes them more needed than ever. Both arguments have merit: at the base of each is the idea that assumptions of information scarcity can no longer underpin media production processes.

2 See Simon Waldman, *Creative Disruption*. Pearson Education, Harlow, 2010.

3 See Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching*, Peter Lang, New York, 2005.

These changes have created new opportunities and challenges for news media, individual journalists, and those with a wider interest in freedom of expression and democratic engagement. As a result, we see an escalating clash between those who wish to remove obstacles to commercial and editorial innovation, and those others who rely on such obstacles for their market or political position. It has also created a global content and communications market subject to local laws, and vice versa.

This paper explores the opportunities and challenges being played out in the social media environment, identifying the areas that are most strongly contested and hold the most importance for the development of news reporting.

II. The Changing Environment

II.1 Copyfight

Social media make it easier not only to publish content, but also to discover when that content has been reproduced without permission. As individuals become publishers too, news organizations have to be more careful how they obtain material for publication. When the Irish *Daily Mail* used an image of an air traffic controller from an online magazine, it faced a social media backlash after claiming that the material was “in the public domain.” A small U.S. magazine faced a similar backlash after its editor wrote unrepentantly to a blogger whose article the magazine had reproduced without permission, and more than one major broadcaster has had to pay out after using images from photo-sharing websites without permission. The ease of syndication can add to the problem: when the *Independent* newspaper published a Flickr feed of UK blizzards on its site, it failed to realise that some images would have “All Rights Reserved” licenses.

The copyright situation is further confused as media-hosting services seek ways to support themselves by claiming rights over the content that they transmit. Plixi, a service used to share images on Twitter, claims full rights to sell them in its terms and conditions, and Twitpic, which hosted the iconic image of the plane landing in the Hudson River in New York, had to backtrack when a change to its terms and conditions appeared to restrict users from selling their images to agencies. News organizations may find themselves increasingly caught between individuals and social media platforms both claiming rights to newsworthy images.

II.2 New Scales, New Structures: Hyperlocal, Collaborative

As traditional publishers withdraw from smaller areas, social media have provided a platform for an explosion in new startups and community publishing projects, increasingly in partnership with local or national media organizations which see hyperlocal as one way to establish a social media presence and attract user-generated content (UGC) without enormous investment.

One hyperlocal training program in the United States drew journalists from ten South American countries, while organizations launching hyperlocal projects include the Telegraaf media group (Netherlands), Trinity Mirror, Northcliffe Media, Johnston Press (UK), Iindaba Ziyafika in South Africa, and the now closed Naše adresa initiative in the Czech Republic.

Meanwhile, some independent hyperlocal publishers are exploring how to maintain a sustainable news business on social media by using the reputations built on these platforms to sell services (another instance of the disintermediation of publishing). Very few are selling significant amounts of content or advertising, suggesting that these traditionally dominant sources of income may not be as dominant online.

Many online news operations are also exploring the new efficiencies offered by collaborative journalism facilitated by social media. News websites that operate solely online, such as France's Rue89, Small World News in the Middle East and beyond, Talking Points Memo in the United States, OhmyNews in South Korea, xmerinews in India, and Malaysiakini in Kuala Lumpur, actively involve users in news production, from identifying leads for stories through to distribution, lowering their costs and increasing user engagement. Multiplatform players, meanwhile, including the *Guardian*, the *New York Times* and Singapore's Razor TV,⁴ look for new value in their content by opening it up to developers through application programming interfaces (APIs), a technology driven by social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which are often "mashed up" with these news APIs to offer increased functionality and personalization (see section III.1).

II.3 Privacy versus Free Speech

Social media are not only becoming a key platform for publishing and distributing news: they are also becoming a source of customer data, whether this relates to the route taken to content through "key influencers" in particular networks, or to the demographic profile that each news consumer volunteers on these networks. An increasing number of publishers are seeking to leverage social media to provide a more personalized news experience, allowing users to experience news issues based on their social data. This is also creating conflict with third-party agencies over who gains access to customer data, most visibly in publishers' frustrations with Apple's refusal to pass on customer data.

The rise of social media publishing is also highlighting a conflict between U.S. principles about free speech and European concepts of privacy,⁵ and challenging the effectiveness and relevance of legal measures such as

4 J. Kaye and S. Quinn, *Funding Journalism in the Digital Age*, Peter Lang, New York, 2010.

5 James Q. Whitman characterizes the tension between the two systems as being between a desire to protect against corporations, including the media, and a desire to protect against the state: "The core [European] privacy rights [are] all rights to control your public image ... By contrast, America, in this as in so many things, is much more oriented toward values of liberty, and especially liberty against the state. At its conceptual core, the American right to privacy still takes much the form that it took in the eighteenth century: It is the right to freedom from intrusions by the state, especially in one's own home." "The Two Western Cultures of Privacy: Dignity versus Liberty," *Yale Law Journal*, available at <http://www.yalelawjournal.org/pdf/113-6/WhitmanFINAL.pdf>.

injunctions, including the notorious UK category of “super-injunctions”.⁶ The EU’s data protection goals for 2011 included the “right to be forgotten,” illustrated by a series of cases which included German criminals suing Wikipedia to have their names removed; the Spanish Data Protection Agency’s requesting that Google remove 90 links from its index; and the European Court of Justice’s ruling that the EU must stop publishing data about individual farmers who receive farming subsidies (the subject of cross-border investigative journalism published on the site farmsubsidy.org).

Despite measures such as these, it was relatively easy for social media users to find out the name of a footballer who had successfully sought a super-injunction in relation to stories about an extra-marital affair, or to circulate documentation from the *Trafigura* case that was also subject to a super-injunction.⁷

II.4 Controlling the Internet

A final key theme is the increasing number of governments around the world seeking to control, monitor, and influence how people communicate online, with social networking sites being blocked during periods of protest and public campaigning in countries such as Uganda, Swaziland,⁸ and Iran. Governments that have shut down access to the internet entirely during periods of unrest include Egypt, China, and Burma, while filtering is exercised by Ethiopia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Cuba, and journalists’ email and social network accounts have been hacked in Tunisia.⁹ In Australia, the UK, and at the EU level there have been plans to extend website blacklists (which have previously resulted in the blocking of Wikipedia in the UK, for example) obliging service providers to prohibit user access.

So far, these strategies have had limited success, and news organizations have still been able to access information and sources on the ground. However, it is difficult to predict how this may change as systems become more sophisticated and more global, or users become more aware of the risks involved, and hence more cautious.

Aside from blocking websites, methods of state control such as propaganda and surveillance are made easier by internet technologies,¹⁰ varying from proposals for a central monitoring system able to intercept communication services (including social media) in India,¹¹ to U.S. military software that would allow it to use fake online personas (known online as “sock puppets”) to influence internet conversations on social

6 Super-injunctions are injunctions whose existence and details may not be legally reported, comprising facts or allegations which may not be disclosed.

7 Alan Rusbridger, “Trafigura: anatomy of a super-injunction,” *The Guardian*, 20 October 2009, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/oct/20/trafigura-anatomy-super-injunction>.

8 See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13786143>.

9 See <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2011/05/the-10-tools-of-online-oppressors.php>.

10 Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, Penguin, London, 2011, p. 99.

11 For an overview of how different countries treat internet freedom, see the “Freedom on the Net” report at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/images/File/FotN/FOTN2011.pdf>.

media. A similar practice, “astroturfing,” is already used by commercial organizations that pay individuals to defend their products or services online, or attack critics, while pretending to be genuine consumers: a practice which journalists are not currently well equipped to combat.

III. Implications for Values

III.1 Pluralism and Diversity

Social media platforms appear to offer a new pluralism and diversity compared with traditional forms of mass communication. Journalists who blog talk of having access to a wider range of voices and opinions which provide not only leads for new stories, but also suggestions on ways to approach work in progress. There is an argument that, in cases such as these, search engine and social media optimization (configuring news content so it is more likely to be found via search engines or shared on social media) have a public service value in improving the accessibility of journalists for potential sources, experts, and witnesses. The first people to be affected by a particular story or issue are also likely to be among the first to search for it online: being the journalist or news organization that tops the list of results can therefore have editorial benefits in addition to the obvious commercial ones.

Amplification remains a particular problem. While many previously silent sections of the population are now able to publish online thanks to lower barriers to entry and enabling projects such as Global Voices and Talk About Local, being *heard* is a separate issue.

Concerns have been raised that social media contribute to an “echo chamber” where users only access voices that reinforce their own opinions and interests. This fear is, however, as Axel Bruns points out, far from new:

Such threats have been thematized ever since taste subcultures first came to be studied, and have as yet failed to materialise as dramatically as may have been expected; a reason for this is that no taste subculture ever operates on its own, and that no one community member ever serves as part of only one taste culture. In reality, our tastes and interests are always multiple, and more or less diverse and contradictory, our personas never unified or uniform; through our everyday interactions with others, and with culture itself, we sustain the continued engagement between the different cultural and social perspectives and communities in our society.¹²

12 Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond*, Peter Lang, New York, 2008, p. 271.

Research on the subject suggests that while there is some evidence of homophily (bonding with similar others),¹³ online consumption of news may be more varied than, for example, consumption of news in print—at least on a brand level, with “promiscuous” consumers switching between numerous publications with differing political orientations.¹⁴ Social media routinely play a visible role in introducing users to stories that otherwise would not be encountered: one particularly relevant example was the spread of the hashtag #CNNfail, to highlight the lack of coverage of the Iran elections by that news organization. A study of political bloggers has found “no clear trend” of becoming more politically isolated over time.¹⁵

More broadly, research by the Pew Research Center in 2008 found that almost three quarters of U.S. internet users said they stumbled across news online while looking for something else,¹⁶ and further research the following year concluded that “Social media activities are associated with several beneficial social activities, including having discussion networks that are more likely to contain people from different backgrounds.”¹⁷

III.2 Transparency and Accountability

Much of the initial drive towards blogging lay in seeking transparency and accountability by holding the media to account, asking questions of sourcing, omission, and expertise.¹⁸ Blogging journalists have expressed a feeling of being more accountable as a result of the practice.¹⁹ In China, meanwhile, there is a suggestion that blogs may be taking on a watchdog role of sorts, both of the internal and external media.²⁰

Conversely, there is a concern about a lack of accountability on the part of individuals who use the speed and anonymity of social media to spread misinformation and propaganda. In Venezuela, emergency lines collapsed and “dozens of car crashes” resulted from the panic that followed false reports that gunmen were attacking schools.²¹ Two people were charged under terrorism laws with spreading the rumour. Riots across the UK in summer 2011 were followed by suggestions that social media services might be shut down during periods of unrest. However, the range of bodies objecting to the idea included the police, which stated that social media had actually allowed them to correct misinformation in a way that was previously not possible.

13 See danah boyd, “Streams of Content, Limited Attention: The Flow of Information through Social Media,” available at <http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/Web2Expo.html>.

14 See “Newspapers online: the promiscuity problem,” *The Economist*, 3 December 2009, available at http://www.economist.com/node/15017453?story_id=15017453.

15 E. Hargittai, J. Gallo and M. Kane, “Cross-ideological discussions among conservative and liberal bloggers,” available at <http://www.eszter.com/research/pubs/A22.Hargittai.EtAl-ideologicaldiscussions.pdf>.

16 See “Audience Segments in a Changing News Environment,” Pew Research Center, 17 August 2008, available at <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/444.pdf>.

17 Pew Research Center, “Social Isolation and New Technology,” November 2009, available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/18--Social-Isolation-and-New-Technology.aspx?r=1>.

18 Scott Rosenberg, *Say Everything*, Crown Publishers, New York, 2009.

19 Paul Bradshaw, “Blogging journalists : the writing on the wall,” in S. Tunney and G. Monaghan. *Web Journalism: A New Form of Citizenship?*, Sussex Academic Press, Brighton, 2010.

20 See C. Paterson and D. Domingo, *Making Online News*, Peter Lang, New York, 2008.

21 “Twitter terrorists face 30 years after being charged in Mexico,” see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/04/twitter-terrorists-face-30-years>.

As 24-hour news reporting moved from being the preserve of a few television channels to being the default mode of production for most news organizations, a need emerged to address how those organizations straddle the need for speed with the need for depth, both of which the online medium caters for particularly well. The ephemeral nature of real-time accounts, for example (tweets older than a few days are not easily accessible) requires both agile reporting and technical expertise to ensure that real-time reports are stored for future analysis. The *Guardian's* storage and analysis of 2.5 million riot tweets may be a sign of things to come.²²

III.3 Professionalism and Editorial Independence

The professional ethics of traditional journalists are often contrasted with those of bloggers. The value of objectivity, for example, is seen by many journalism bloggers as inherently problematic,²³ resulting in unhelpful “he said, she said” journalism and in “Views from Nowhere.”²⁴ Transparency about both journalist and sources, it is often argued,²⁵ is a more realistic value, and is one of the areas of relative consensus across diverse attempts to draft a code of conduct or ethics for bloggers.²⁶

Another such area is their assertion of independence. Editorial independence is both furthered and challenged by the increasing role of real-time publishing through platforms such as Twitter. As media organizations find it harder to ignore what everybody is talking about, whether it be protests in the Arab Spring, the UK phone-hacking scandal, or the causes of a high-speed train crash in China's Zhejiang Province, the news agenda becomes equally harder to manage. In the UK, for example, members of the BBC's UGC team have observed that discussions across social media contributed to taking election campaigns off the tracks laid by campaign planners.²⁷

III.4 Freedom of Expression and Information

The commercial domination of the public sphere online, which characterized the Web 2.0 era, has seen an increasing proportion of news publishing, distribution, and discussion occur in spaces owned by third parties. Companies such as Facebook, YouTube, and Blogger are frequently ranked among countries' most

22 “Don't blame social media,” the sandpit, 25 August 2011, available at <http://thesandpit.com/the-sandpit-blog/2011/8/25/dont-blame-social-media.html>.

23 Jay Rosen, “Objectivity as a form of persuasion,” 7 July 2010, available at http://archive.pressthink.org/2010/07/07/obj_persuasion.html.

24 Jay Rosen, “The View from Nowhere: Questions and Answers,” November 2010, available at <http://pressthink.org/2010/11/the-view-from-nowhere-questions-and-answers/>.

25 Dan Gillmor, “The End of Objectivity,” 25 January 2005, available at http://dangillmor.typepad.com/dan_gillmor_on_grassroots/2005/01/the_end_of_obje.html.

26 See Tim O'Reilly, “Draft Blogger's Code of Conduct,” 8 April 2007, available at <http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2007/04/draft-bloggers-1.html>.

27 Author interviews, March 2010.

popular sites, while online community usage generally is increasing as a proportion of time spent online.²⁸ In China, for example, 41 percent of internet users' time is now spent on social networks,²⁹ and real-time sites such as QQ have provided a key space for journalists to report on contentious issues, while in the United States the time spent on social platforms such as Facebook has come at the expense of the proportion of time spent on the "searchable web."³⁰

As publishing and distribution become less decentralized, new opportunities emerge for governments, corporations, and individuals to monitor, restrict, and subvert communications platforms and those who use them, whether journalists, sources or independent news outlets. In 2010, bloggers and online reporters made up nearly half of the Committee to Protect Journalists' tally of imprisoned journalists, while the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon responded to repeated state clampdowns by underlining that UN member states have a "responsibility to their citizens to keep [the internet] free."³¹

Conversely, Freedom House's "Freedom on the Net" report notes that while

threats to internet freedom are growing and have become more diverse, they also highlight a pushback by citizens and activists who have found ways to sidestep some of the restrictions and use the power of new internet-based platforms to promote democracy and human rights.³²

Copyright enforcement can also affect individual publishers in unintended ways. In Turkey, hundreds of thousands of people using Google's Blogger service, including journalists, found their blogs blocked after a football rights-holder complained about coverage being posted by a few users of the service. The country had previously banned YouTube for two years.

More broadly, tactical accusations of copyright infringement can be used as a way to censor embarrassing footage from image and video hosting services which can be quick to remove content without requiring evidence or a court order, a tactic that has particular salience for journalists as a number of countries consider allowing sites to be blocked on the basis of injunctions by copyright holders.

Journalists relying on such social media platforms to provide access to sources might not be aware of the ease with which users and pages can be removed from sight. Facebook is often criticized for shutting down groups as a result of political, commercial, legal or technical pressure, while accusations of similar blocking and deactivation have been levelled at Twitter, Apple's App Store, and Google's Orkut.³³

28 Ofcom, "The Communications Market 2010," available at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr10/internet-web/>.

29 See <http://thenextweb.com/asia/2011/06/13/chinese-now-spend-41-of-their-time-online-on-social-networks-in-lieu-of-news-sites/>.

30 See <http://allthingsd.com/20110623/the-web-is-shrinking-now-what/>.

31 See "U.N. secretary-general commits to defending press freedom, Committee to Protect Journalists," 23 June 2011, available at <http://www.cpj.org/2011/06/un-secretary-general-commits-to-defending-press-fr.php>.

32 See <http://freedomhouse.org/uploads/fotn/2011/FOTN2011.pdf>.

33 See Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion*, Penguin, London, 2011.

III.5 Public Interest and Public Service

The public service role of journalism is being revisited as information scarcity is replaced by abundance, and the cross-subsidies in bundling public-interest journalism alongside more commercial reporting begin to unravel. In some cases foundations and other funding bodies are seeking to plug public service gaps by supporting blog networks (Global Voices) or local communities in establishing a voice on social media (Social Media Surgeries; Talk About Local). At the BBC, the UGC unit has seen its focus change from handling content coming into the organization, to a more proactive role which involves seeking the voices of communities producing UGC across the wider web. The corporation has also launched projects to provide journalism and social media training to members of local communities, while its College of Journalism website includes resources for the aspiring citizen journalist.

In these instances the public interest lies in giving a voice to the voiceless; in others, it is about using social media platforms to better engage citizens with public service stories: individuals using social media's sharing functionality to spread awareness of campaigning journalism, or new investigative news organizations such as ProPublica using Facebook and YouTube to engage users in investigations into education and drawing congressional districts. The list of individuals funded by older organizations such as the Fund for Investigative Journalism, meanwhile, now includes bloggers and multimedia journalists.

There has also been an increasingly explicit recognition of journalism's accountability to its citizens, exemplified in the UK by the BBC's Editor's Blogs (where producers and other senior staff explain the background to editorial decisions), and the Corporation's 2011 research into social media and accountability, which recommended that journalists should respond to blog comments "where new points or questions are being raised," and that some conversations held on the BBC site should be held externally instead.

IV. Conclusions: Key Issues, Key Developments, Forks in the Road

News organizations cannot ignore social media any more than they can ignore the communities they seek to serve (and the markets their advertisers seek to reach). As the “people formerly known as the audience” and their former advertisers both become publishers in their own right, three things are happening: news organizations are being sidestepped by newsmakers who are using social media to communicate directly with audiences; news products are being unbundled across multiple platforms; and production processes are becoming more networked.

But social media have not replaced other media. Even in a heavily connected country like the UK, almost a quarter of households lack internet access; television remains the most consumed and trusted news medium, and interest in social networking is flattening off. Research into social media’s role in the Arab Spring suggests that traditional and new media worked in tandem, rather than one supplanting the other.

And working in tandem is increasingly how news organizations and consumers are adapting to the new environment, publishing to the strengths of different platforms and to a changed rhythm. News consumption is moving from a regular appointment (the scheduled broadcast; the newsstand trip) to something embedded in our environments, as described by social network researcher danah boyd:

To be peripherally aware of information as it flows by, grabbing it at the right moment when it is most relevant, valuable, entertaining, or insightful. To be living with, in, and around information. Most of that information is social information, but some of it is entertainment information or news information or productive information.³⁴

³⁴ Danah Boyd, “Streams of Content, Limited Attention: The Flow of Information through Social Media,” available at <http://www.danah.org/papers/talks/Web2Expo.html>.

Social media make well-established uses of news suddenly visible, while also facilitating those uses: discussing and challenging news reports; combining, contributing to, and building on them. Social media have stimulated particular social spaces for news publishing and distribution. The living room, the car, and the train have been joined by the workplace as a key site of news consumption;³⁵ another such site is the virtual “back channel” of commentary between viewers and journalists on Twitter and Facebook as a news program airs. Then there are the spaces where stories take shape—the blogs of journalists and experts; the tweets of reporters and witnesses—and where stories take on new lives after publication: the comment threads, forums, and hashtags.

These spaces are still in their earliest incarnations: we have yet to see the impact of the spread of APIs that connect the information that we consume with the information we increasingly embody. New devices—mobile and tablets—are shifting consumption further into public and private work and leisure spaces, and there is still an enormous amount of innovation to come. Legal and regulatory change might stimulate new publishing businesses or stifle them. Journalists and judges will have to navigate between the competing demands of free speech and privacy. The new diversity of voices on social media will stimulate a variety of ways to monitor, infiltrate, and censor, presenting journalists with more information than ever, along with an equally increased requirement for verification and debunking, seeking unheard voices, and bridging communities.

During these times of change it will be more important than ever to identify what exactly the role of journalists—and the news that they report—is, whatever the platform. Is it to hold power to account, to give a voice to the voiceless and a platform for national, international, and local conversations, to separate rumour from truth, or to create well-informed citizens? New technologies provide new dangers along with new possibilities, and it will take governments, media and citizens some time to address them.

35 Pablo Boczkowski, *News At Work*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 2010.

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The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

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