

Social Media and Journalism Practice

In January 2016, the online aggregator and news site, *The Huffington Post*, announced that it would be adding a disclaimer to all election reportage about the Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump. Every time a reader clicked on a *Huffington Post* article about Trump, they would find the following message: ‘Note to our readers: Donald Trump is a serial liar, rampant xenophobe, racist, misogynist, birther and bully who has repeatedly pledged to ban all Muslims—1.6 billion members of an entire religion—from entering the U.S.’ (Sterne 2016). Each of the claims was linked to *Huffington Post* reports that evidenced Trump’s transgressions. Not only is it unusual for a news organisation to use such overtly subjective language to describe a presidential nominee, it is also a significant change from the relative objectivity expected of contemporary political journalism. For *The Huffington Post*, one of the most popular political sites in the world and the first digital news site to win a Pulitzer Prize (Calderone 2012), this lack of political objectivity would once have been a jarring reminder of the online aggregator’s lack of journalistic sophistication. So how is it possible that one of the bedrocks of traditional journalism—the practice of objectivity in reportage—could be so blatantly pushed aside? Some of this oppositional reportage was certainly influenced by the strategic positioning of media outlets competing for attention during an increasingly partisan presidential election—and even the discursive style of Donald Trump himself. But these strategic and political tactics are only one part of the explanation; the apparent acceptability of such overt subjectivity

in the reportage of the presidential election is also framed by the culture of communication on social media, which has created opportunities to disrupt seemingly inviolable norms of reportage.

This chapter explores the transitions occurring in some traditional norms of journalistic practice: maintaining objectivity in reportage, using processes of verification and, finally, asserting professional autonomy over individual work practice. Norms of practice can be defined as the behaviours continually represented as the ideal standard for professional journalism. For example, maintaining ‘objectivity’ in journalism practice is framed by belief in journalism’s social role to inform the public without partisanship. Thus, norms of practice are also ideological, allowing journalists and news organisations to claim jurisdiction over a particular body of knowledge and practice (Lewis 2012, p. 840). While this chapter explores the representation of ‘ideal’ norms of practice, it does so with implicit acknowledgement that ‘actual’ practices are very much influenced by a confluence of organisational, technological and other factors.

This chapter will argue that norms of journalism practice have transitioned in response to the social and technological affordances enabled by increasing use of social media. This has allowed traditional norms of objectivity, verification and professional autonomy to transition into new forms of journalistic practice that are increasingly collaborative and prioritise authentic and transparent processes of presenting the news. Some of these innovations in everyday journalistic practice include the potential for collaboration with online sources, the immediate and global distribution of source materials, and the prioritisation of an ‘authentic’ authorial voice. It seems that journalists who are using these new practices have been influenced by social media cultures that prioritise sharing, authentic self-expression and the rejection of notions of a universal truth. However, the transition of professional journalistic practice to social media environments has also challenged legacy news organisations and the overall constitution of journalism as a professional institution. Indeed, these new forms of practice suggest that the biggest change in journalistic practice is actually the broader institutional understanding of journalism itself—from an autonomous authority to an important, but nonetheless collaborative stakeholder in creating the news.

To explore these changes, this chapter utilises a historical and social framework to trace the transition from traditional to social media-enabled norms of practice. These changes are contextualised as part of a number of interconnected changes occurring at the level of the

journalistic practitioner, as well as news organisations and the institution of journalism itself. As suggested in the introduction to this book, while the focus on journalistic practice is important, it is only one aspect of the complex changes occurring in journalism due to increasing use of online and social media technologies. Instead, this chapter shows that journalistic practice is in a state of transition, with a number of different professional interests, organisational policies, professional norms and social, cultural and political environments shaping the ways journalists are able to practise. While it would be impossible to outline every single influence on individual journalistic practice, this chapter will illustrate the way three dominant, traditional professional practices have been actively mediated and negotiated by journalists in the midst of a profession in transition.

JOURNALISM NORMS OF PRACTICE: AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though many journalists have integrated social media into everyday practices, there remains scepticism about whether the quality and veracity of information found on social media platforms could ever equate to traditional reporting practices. Journalists often appear to rely on established norms of practice to produce news, simply transferring traditional journalism practices to new communication tools (Singer 2005; Hermida 2012). In the short term, it makes sense that journalists would view social media through the same conceptual lens as other communication tools, and work according to the established practices through which they define their professional status. However, as Paulussen (2016) suggests, the accumulation of these changes over time shows that the evolution of journalism is actually quite dynamic, incorporating new individual practices, new organisational strategies and new understandings of journalism as an institution.

If we take a long-term, historical view of journalistic practice, we see that seemingly indispensable norms of journalism practice, such as objectivity, verification and professional autonomy, are not only socially and culturally constructed, but have also been continually negotiated over time. The industrialisation of news—that is, the payment of people to find and report on news events—has a relatively short history of about 200 years (Schudson 2011, p. 64) linked to the technological development of fast printing presses and the social development of increased literacy, especially amongst middle-class populations. For example,

the first newspapers in Australia in the early 1800s simply printed governmental notices to the colonies and four-month-old news from England that arrived via convict and supply ships (Walker 1976). However, two important social and cultural changes occurred as a result of increased printed news production and distribution. Firstly, at an organisational level, publishers began to pay journalists to write news, and to consider the production values and popularity of their content against other newspapers. Secondly, at a broader cultural and social level, the wide readership of newspapers created a sense of a 'reachable' public that shared a community sentiment, morals and social and cultural norms. Benedict Anderson (1983) famously conceptualised newspaper readership as an 'imagined community'. Describing reading the newspaper as a kind of 'morning prayer', the reader believes that 'the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion' (Anderson 1983, p. 46). The creation of a community around the distribution of news created a sense of shared culture and knowledge. It is these two social and industrial changes in the development of newspapers that also created a foundation for commercial and professional development of journalistic practice.

The first real push towards professionalised journalistic practice did not come until after the 1920s. Indeed, early newspaper and journalism history is marked by editorial partisanship, commercial and government influence and sensational news content. Early newspapers created gossip and colour stories, mixed with copious advertising and political news (Schudson 2011, p. 65). The development of the 'penny press', the telegraph and their associated shorter writing styles improved the distribution of news, but not the partisanship of the content. The number of paid journalists also increased as better printing technologies allowed the small press to flourish, but the reputation of these 'correspondents' was never complementary to the trade. Despite this, the popularity of news content meant that journalists had become a large and distinct occupational group, and soon demanded better pay and public image. Thus, the emergence of journalism as a profession began, coupled with the rise of professional associations and a focus on ethical codes of practice and training that determined more precisely the boundaries of journalism's professional role.

After the First and Second World Wars, a strong social belief in the scientific method also began to emerge, expressed as the prioritisation of objectivity, professional autonomy and verification in journalism.

Schudson (1978, p. 141) suggests that while verification and neutrality promoted use of ‘straight facts’, objectivity was seen as an important journalistic method in a post-war society weary of pro-government reportage. These practices offered a way to gain critical distance and regain the audience’s trust in the seriousness of journalism. These seemingly ‘scientific’ modes of practice became what Lippmann (1920) called the ‘cardinal’ part of training professional journalists. Coupled with the increasing professionalisation of news came a broader social reliance on professional media-makers and journalists to decide on, and represent, the news of the day. Even when objectivity was attacked in the 1960s and 1970s as a refusal to critique the traditional structures of power in society (Schudson 1978, p. 160), it remained one of the most important tenets of the increasingly investigative and specialised reporting practices of journalists. News was, and continues to be, decided on, produced and disseminated by professional workers in complex, hierarchical and commercialised organisations, using norms of practice that have been routinised and institutionalised (Tuchman 1978).

Simons (2007, p. 245) refers to the strength of these institutional norms and behaviours when she describes the ‘religiosity’ with which journalists understand their profession. These core practices have been ascribed this religiosity through continual enactment of ‘rituals’ of practice (Schudson 1978, p. 192) in journalism education and training, newsroom organisation and representation in various media. The adherence to professional norms and ideologies has even been characterised as a kind of journalistic personality trait; for many years, journalism education and employability guides described journalists as having an inherent ‘news sense’ that enables them to understand and decide what should be considered news (Vocational Guidance Bureau 1964). It is therefore understandable that, in this context, journalists and news organisations have not easily adapted to the changes brought to journalistic practice by adoption of online and social media, and that newsroom culture has been found to be ‘marked by reactive, defensive and pragmatic traits’ in regard to changes wrought by social media (Boczkowski 2004, p. 51). However, as journalism transitions into digital, online and social media-enabled environments, small changes and negotiations have eventually contributed to significant shifts within the industry and to journalism practice (Küng 2015). Nowhere is this more evident than in changes to journalistic use of objectivity.

FROM OBJECTIVITY TO AUTHENTICITY

Objectivity is one of the defining norms of professional practice in journalism. It frames a number of behaviours and practices, such as detachment and non-partisanship in reportage, attempted balance in finding news sources, and a distinct style of news writing (Mindich 1998, p. 2). Norms like objectivity are important for a number of reasons. Firstly, they encourage group identification through the articulation of a professional self-identity (Durkheim and Lukes 2014). Through this professional self-identity, norms of practice identify the boundaries of a profession, setting it apart from other professions, as well as amateur practice (see Emery and Emery 1996). Finally, norms of practice register a kind of self-discipline that can be organisationally practised and used to admit new members to the profession—or keep them out. Objectivity is thus expressed as an inviolable tenet of journalism's professional ethics, journalism education and occupational routines—and is strongly defended against challenge (Tuchman 1972, p. 660). For example, when news blogs and bloggers began to gain popularity with new online readerships in the early 2000s, some journalists dismissed this form of news as the 'cult of the amateur', referring to traditional norms of practice to create the boundaries for professional practice—and to keep bloggers 'out' of the profession.

Perhaps some journalists reacted defensively to the introduction of blogging as a new format for news reportage because it fostered practices that so effectively challenged traditional norms of practice. The practices that have emerged from online media production are based on their technological determinants for increased accessibility and participation of audiences in media production and dissemination. These new technological frameworks have centred on audiences' ability to produce, distribute and share these new media forms such as review sites, commenting systems, photo and video sharing, blogging and microblogging (Mandiberg 2012, p. 1). However, these technical affordances have also influenced changes in communications practices, which prioritise sharing of new media forms and cutting out the journalistic 'middle man' by directly engaging with specific content and users. The ability to engage with, and share, content, especially personal news and information, has subsequently led to the emergence of particular social media cultures, based on the articulation of an authentic representation of self-identity, as well as an authentic engagement with 'followers' of these online representations.

‘Authenticity’ is defined as a mode of representational practice that emerged out of blogging culture, describing how online content could be represented as an extension of a blogger’s ‘real self’: a means of self-expression and exploration (Reed 2005, p. 236). Though this mode of self-representation is not confined to online and social media (Giddens 1991), a culture of sharing on social media has meant that ‘being authentic’ has become an important aspect of online self-actualisation and representation of media content. Marwick and boyd (2011) found that by representing themselves online, some content producers saw social media as an intimate space, with an imagined audience reinforcing social connections. Others saw the audience as ‘themselves’ and derided creating content for a particular audience as inauthentic self-commodification (Marwick and boyd 2011, p. 120). Instead, modes of authenticity were deemed important as representations of ‘real’ social interactions in the online space. Similarly, interactions were based on attracting followers of content, rather than ‘fans’ (Marwick and boyd 2011). This eschews the sense of elite social authority that traditional norms of journalism practice might otherwise promote (Abidin 2016, p. 2). While practices of authenticity and objectivity are not necessarily opposed as techniques for representing news, it is the implied social distance that traditional norms of objectivity seemingly promote that is challenged by social media representations of news. Thus, new practices that prioritise authenticity in reportage have shown the limits of objectivity as an ideal norm of journalistic practice.

For example, the changing coverage of global climate change has shown the limits of objectivity as a norm of reportage. While the global scientific consensus is that human activity has contributed to global warming, and that this will lead to significant issues arising from climate change in the future, initial journalistic insistence on ‘objectivity’, especially in reporting the views of ‘climate sceptics’, has been criticised. While the journalistic norms of objectivity and balance would dictate that an oppositional viewpoint be covered in reportage of a news event, the attention given to climate sceptics has been criticised as undermining the validity of the consequences of climate change (Boykoff and Boykoff 2007). John Oliver, a comedian who uses satire of news events on his television programme *Last Week Tonight*, created a humorous critique of mainstream media’s use of norms of objectivity in a ‘statistically representative climate change debate’ (*Last Week Tonight* 2014). The resulting ‘debate’, with one climate change sceptic

debating with 100 climate change scientists, illustrated that reportage of climate science as a ‘debate’ instead of a fact was misleading to the public. Other critiques of enforced journalistic ‘balance’ led to some news organisational change in reportage of climate change. *The New York Times* no longer publishes letters from climate change deniers and the *BBC* has refused to give broadcast attention to climate change denial (Hiltzik 2015).

Challenges to traditional norms of practice, as well as increasing social media engagement by some journalists, have developed into opportunities to present more authentic forms of presenting news online and on social media. The most obvious change is the increasing prioritisation of the social or personal aspect of news stories posted on social media, as well as engaging directly with followers by responding to queries, posting links to other sources and asking the audience questions about stories. Another important part of this change is increasing use of affect and emotion, rather than objectivity or neutrality, as a way to ensure a more authentic engagement with audiences (Russell 2016). While emotion has always been part of journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen 2013), online and social media communication cultures allow much more for emotional or political positioning of news content. A recent example of this shift is the positioning of the journalist in the popular podcast series, *Serial*. The podcast launched in 2014 as a spin-off to the popular podcast series, *This American Life*, and almost immediately broke download records. The series follows producer Sarah Koenig’s investigation of the murder of teenager Hae Min Lee and whether the convicted murderer, Adnan Syed, was actually innocent of the crime. This deceptively simple premise is produced with a mix of high-quality, ‘television drama’ style episodic storytelling, as well as ‘authentic’ emotional appeals that serve to involve the audience in the investigation. The language of the podcast is intimate and conversational in tone: it ‘sounds like your smart friend is investigating a murder and telling you about it’ (Larson 2014). Indeed, the producers—who never describe themselves as journalists—did not complete the investigation of the murder before editing the episodes together.

Whereas a traditional journalistic investigation would generally compile all the evidence and interviews needed to make a decisive representation of the facts, *Serial* allows the producers and the audience to participate in the investigation together, sharing the drama of new discoveries and continually debating theories about Syed’s guilt or

innocence. The investigation is never actually conclusive, and while that would often mean failure in traditional journalism, in *Serial* this is celebrated—and promoted—as testimony to the audience’s intimate relationship with both the subject matter and the producers themselves. This is seen from the first episode of *Serial*, in which the host, Ira Glass, describes the producers as having ‘flipped back and forth, over and over, in their thinking about whether Adnan committed the murder. And when you listen to the series, you experience those flips with them’ (Koenig 2014). The positioning and tone of the *Serial* investigation and its reportage illustrates the way forms of authenticity are making their way into journalistic work. These developments in journalistic practice, popularised by online and social media use of emotion, intimacy and modes of authenticity in representations of news, have also influenced long-institutionalised modes of professional journalism.

While *Serial* is an example of how some journalists have embraced modes of authenticity in reportage, this has generally also been tempered by more traditional boundaries around what constitutes professional practice (Lasorsa et al. 2012). Representation of self in online environments is mediated by understanding and engagement with an ‘imagined audience’. However, journalists are also mediating the space between personal and commercial modes of authenticity, as well as creating content for a particular professional identification. For example, recent academic research has traced the more commercially viable aspects of this ‘authenticity’ on social media platforms, where social media ‘influencers’ cultivate large audience retention and engagement through the representation of their personal lives. They often seek to monetise this engagement through commercial agreements that are used to promote products in ‘everyday life’ (Abidin 2015). Some social media influencers represent themselves through an everyday persona or give the impression of candid, behind the scenes access to their lives (Marwick 2015, p. 139), creating a sense of closeness or ‘intimacy’ with their online community. Abidin (2015) separates ideas of intimacy and authenticity because in the commercial space of social media influence, it is possible for influencers to be motivated by commerce—and for followers to be aware of this—as long as there is a sense of intimacy shared between them. This sense of intimacy and authenticity is a little more complicated in the professional space, where online and offline work cultures are brought together. For example, Gregg (2011, p. 3) suggests that bringing contemporary work cultures online has created a ‘presence bleed’, in which boundaries

between the professional and personal must be renegotiated. The techniques used in commercial branding are now being employed in both personal and professional use of social media to increase followers and online popularity (Marwick 2013). Thus, Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013, p. 372) suggest that while journalists' 'authentic' use of social media can be seen as part of an increasing audience engagement, it could also be seen as opportunistic; a component of personal career-building or the corporate branding of news organisations. Journalists might actually be responding to organisational pressure to represent themselves as a media 'brand', especially if their follower numbers might benefit their news organisation (Tandoc and Vos 2016). Similarly, Holton and Molyneux (2015) suggest that journalists 'feel pressure to stake a claim on their beat, develop a presence as an expert and act as a representative of the news organisation'.

This suggests that for a journalist attempting to use social media in their practice, there are competing priorities and demands in organisational and institutional contexts that complicate representation of professional work. While these modes of authenticity have been used in a number of complex ways, including for professional and commercial benefit, they point to the new interconnections between audience need, technological change, organisational structures and institutional norms that affect journalistic practice in a social media age. Most importantly, however, some journalistic practice has begun to incorporate a patchwork of journalistic endeavour, curatorial effort and collaborative construction. Without the expectation of objectivity in the news, some journalists are now using a number of other approaches to assert their public credibility—most notably, use of so-called 'transparent' reporting practices.

FROM VERIFICATION TO TRANSPARENCY

The first principle of ethical journalistic practice espoused by the Australian Journalism Code of Ethics is: 'Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis.' According to this code, journalists should, above all else, strive for honesty and accuracy; traditional journalistic practices sustain this through processes of verification. Verification and objectivity are linked as central aspects of journalistic professional practice; where objectivity asserts the credibility

of the journalist, practices of verification assert the credibility of journalistic content. There are no standard practices that make up a ‘scientific method’ of verification; rather, journalists adhere to an abstract ethical commitment to truth and accuracy that makes up an important part of their professional self-identity.

In the post-war period, the focus on investigative processes of journalism elevated truth-telling to the realm of ‘god term’ (Zelizer 2004), where a verifiable notion of truth, devoid of influence or patronage, could seemingly be excavated from falsehood through the professional practices enshrined in journalism. These truths would then be delivered to the public as journalism’s most important service to democratic function. This type of journalistic practice represented truth as a unitary ‘thing to be found’ by the journalist—an objective, verifiable version of the news that would be the sole understanding of the event. This kind of ‘truth seeking’ has been an enduring norm of journalistic practice, despite the sustained academic criticism of the epistemological concept of a ‘stable’ notion of truth (Zelizer 2004). Theorists such as Derrida (see Caputo 1997) and Foucault (1980) questioned the notion of a universally understood or ‘knowable’ truth, in favour of the subjective representations and politicised relations that create dominant discourses. Nonetheless, verification and accuracy have persisted as professional norms, requiring a journalist’s commitment to finding ‘a kind of “pure” accuracy (literal truth), an accuracy of what is told (uncritical reliance on an attributed source), a larger accuracy (concerning a story’s overall thrust in context), and accuracy of interpretation’ (Shapiro et al. 2013). Thus, verification defines an ‘essential nature’ both of contemporary journalism, expressed through a methodological commitment to accurate truth-telling, and to notions of truth itself (Shapiro et al. 2013). By determining a universal truth in news events, journalists continually assert their jurisdiction over the definition of news and its meaning; thus, verification is both a self-disciplining and self-defining practice.

Verification has been central to the understanding of ethical journalism but new voices in online and social media have challenged the representation of universal truth in the news—and the centrality of the journalist in presenting it. Importantly, the prioritisation of authentic self-expression on social media does not mean that representations of news do not adhere to particular standards of practice. Indeed, even the early emergence of citizen journalism blog sites like *OhMyNews* in South Korea and independent news websites like *Crikey* in Australia showed

strong commitment to standards of ethical and professional online news reporting. While traditional journalistic norms of objectivity and universal truth were positioned as the ideal of more elitist, broadcast-style practice, early online news reportage instead prioritised transparency and inclusion of audiences in the news reporting process as a more authentic way of demonstrating how an online journalist arrived at a particular ‘truth’. Importantly, this representation of news was necessarily unfinished and subject to the additional commentary and fact-checking of interested audiences. Of course, just like traditional journalism, transparency is an ideal of online journalism and not always adhered to by bloggers and citizen journalists in reality. Nonetheless, processes of transparency have become an increasingly important part of engaging with social media news audiences.

The increasing use of social media has presented both opportunity and challenge to traditional processes of verification used by journalists. On the one hand, quick access to sources, short video and eyewitness content has made it easier than ever before for journalists to verify news reports. On the other hand, instantaneous publishing and the viral effects of popular social media content have meant that false and hoax news have become ever-growing problems for journalists. Accessing other forms of news and representations of truth also creates an institutional challenge for journalism—even when news is ‘fake’, or partisan, audiences do not always rely on the social authority of journalists to point this out. In this context, some journalists have considered it important to exhibit how and why their news stories should be seen as credible. Processes of transparency have been referred to as a kind of ethical salve to criticism of mainstream news reportage as elitist, homogeneous and scandal-driven (Karlsson 2008).

Transparency thus relates to the openness of both the journalist and the news product to scrutiny from audiences. This might come in the form of presenting or explaining the processes of news source selection, or justification for the particular representation of a news event. Journalists have practised this transparency by publishing links to source materials, publishing entire interviews, or even creating separate websites dedicated to publishing extra materials and ‘behind the scenes’ discussion of larger news stories. This kind of transparent practice was used in the production of ‘Curious Chicago’, an experimental news-making project supported by *WBEZ* public radio. The project is run through *Tumblr*, where interested locals post questions about Chicago.

The platform essentially allows audience members some control over editorial processes, as well as some participation in the creation of a story. Journalists demonstrate their processes of investigating a story, inviting discussion, correction and additional information. The results of the investigations are then broadcast on a weekly programme and published on a website. This practice of transparency also has an effect on the news reports themselves—the tone of reportage is intimate, playful and immediate, putting the spotlight on those reporting what was happening to them, rather than on journalists, as the centre of knowledge.

The importance of transparency has been central to contemporary debate by journalists about ethical practice; for some, transparency is a new mode of accountability that replaces the critical distance of objectivity (Vos and Craft 2016). For others, transparency is a naïve form of deference to the audience that results in obfuscation of important information (Cunningham 2006). While transparency has been prioritised as a form of openness and accountability in the decisions and relationships that produce reportage, the affordances that have emerged from social media platforms have situated transparency slightly differently as ‘making visible’—engaging with audiences during or after the publication of a news story through source material and social interactions (Chadha and Koliska 2015, p. 216). While this approach still prioritises the public role of the journalist in a functioning democracy, it does so by asserting this role as part of a community of interested stakeholders, rather than an unquestioned expert. This mode of practice focusses on the individual audience members as part of a conversation—some have expertise, some are interested observers and some are merely finding the conversation as part of their daily news diet, but all are part of news dialogue. Despite the fact that transparent processes do not require input from the audience in principle, the popularity of social media engagement has fostered participatory forms of transparency. These have included more opportunities for interested audiences to discuss and challenge particular representations of news, or to participate in creating the news story itself. This ‘transparent’ approach to journalism and media production means that audiences are now engaged in the traditional backstage creation and ‘sewing together’ of news events. Rather than simply having access to the news as a finished product, transparent journalistic practices engage interested stakeholders in the news event by sourcing, verifying and discussing what should be incorporated into a representation of news. This

is the key to transparency in new modes of journalistic practice using social media: the understanding of news and information as necessarily iterative, to be corrected and updated as new evidence and knowledge come to light. This is also an institutional shift in the constitution of journalistic social authority; the construction of news is seen as a collaborative effort facilitated by a professional journalist, rather than the sole decision of a trusted—and unquestioned—media authority.

These reporting practices suggest some of the institutional changes that have come alongside the individual practice and organisational changes in journalism, especially the more active and dominant role given to various publics on social media (Russell 2016). In this environment, journalists are becoming more cognizant of how social media cultures differ in expectation of engagement with the audience. It has become more acceptable for a journalist not to report news as a ‘finished product’ because the immediacy of web content allows for constant addition to, and correction of, stories posted online. This has nonetheless also created some issues about the veracity of information posted on social media. Some news organisations have balked at any large-scale participatory production processes in the newsroom due to the number of falsified documents, images and eyewitness accounts posted and shared through social media. Larger media organisations, especially those that utilise user-generated content, have used a variety of tools to verify social media content. For example, the *BBC*’s Verification Hub sifts through about 3000 user-generated contributions sent to the *BBC* (Turner 2012) or posted on social media every day. Approximately 20 staff use a number of tools to verify content, including talking to journalists in the field, cross-checking other social media reports, using photo metadata or triangulating locations to verify information provided to them. They will also use search terms to see what is trending on *Twitter*, and whether the material is being discussed by their own contacts. Perhaps the most interesting verification technique used by journalists at the hub is simply contacting whoever posted the material—the staff suggested that a traditional interview with an informant can often help the journalist find out more about the material and whether the source is credible (Turner 2012). These issues and negotiations are nonetheless productive tensions—they demand the development of better traditional practices and new innovations in response to changing modes of communication. While the number of voices on social media has meant that an objective representation of a single truth is no longer expected or viable, the increased possibility

of false news warrants immediate and public censure of unprofessional conduct. What constitutes professional conduct, however, is also changing in social media environments and journalists are using new forms of verification—alongside traditional forms of journalism—to ensure their credibility to an increasingly discerning and empowered audience. In this way, transparency also relates to accountability; engaging in online communities and showing the process of reportage can be seen as a new ethical ideal in a networked social media environment.

FROM PROFESSIONAL AUTONOMY TO COLLABORATION

Contemporary journalism is represented as a privileged role, because a journalist is able to independently and autonomously decide what information makes up their reportage of a news event. Journalism makes its institutional claim to professional status through its autonomous jurisdiction over the selection and prioritisation of news events. While journalists commit to not prioritising their own views in reportage by practising objectivity, they nonetheless choose the context, sources and mode of representation of events. It is through this autonomy that journalists claim their professional knowledge and authority. By the late 1950s, accountability was also an indicator of a journalist's social and cultural power—journalists were represented as ‘gatekeepers’ for the public; they decided what the public needed to know and how they should know it (Domingo et al. 2008, p. 326). In asserting this authority, the individual journalist was represented as being responsible for ‘selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news’ (Shoemaker et al. 2009, p. 74). In reality, news production is the collective effort of the newsroom, with individual expertise utilised, but also shaped by norms of practice and organisational routines. However, ideals of journalistic practice prioritise representation of the journalist as the gatekeeper autonomously controlling whether information is important enough to be communicated as news.

While independence and autonomy are important markers of professional practice, they are also an important part of the ‘boundary keeping’ (Lewis 2012) that ensures no encroachment on the social and cultural power journalists enjoy. The right to control what the public understands as news assumes autonomous power, even if it is expressed as a public service or gatekeeping role. However, as we have seen, social media prioritises public participation, and audiences are more involved in the

process of creating, shaping, and sharing information about events they witness (Hermida 2012). Interested audience members even become users and co-producers in news by participating in collaborative processes of making or sharing news (Heinonen 2011). Thus, in the context of asserting autonomy, journalistic practices have been seen to shift in social media environments, accommodating and negotiating the views and input from engaged news audiences. Singer (2007, p. 79) suggests that the move to online and social media-enabled news environments has not devalued the professional practice of autonomy; rather, the expression of autonomy has shifted from a focus on external modes of power to a critique of all expressions of social and cultural power, including journalism. This critique has emerged through the successful use of collaborative reportage practices to create shared, collective knowledge and ideas (Singer 2005). These collaborative forms of news illustrate that contemporary journalism can comprise the collective decisions of those affected by news, rather than one autonomous individual or news organisation. Journalists become less autonomous, but more curatorial in their approach, interweaving different eyewitness statements and translating news narratives into a coherent shape and context for their particular readership.

A more curatorial approach by journalists means that news is constantly re-articulated through the addition, re-interpretation and correction of information. Subsequent to this change is the broader shift in the professional authority of journalists; there is no longer one autonomous, ethical, professional approach to news production in this environment. Instead, journalists and audiences are collaborators, who also share oversight and correction of professional behaviour (Singer 2007, p. 79). Collaborative practice also means that boundaries of professional/non-professional practice become blurred; focus is instead diverted to how particular news events foster relations between different media producers and publics invested in news production, witnessing, interpreting and disputing common news narratives. Thus, collaborative journalism practices increase possibilities for more diverse, open and transparent forms of journalism online.

A good example of this is *Al Jazeera's Sharek* network, which facilitates the use and distribution of user-generated content through an accreditation system. Content on *Sharek* is available in several languages and in regions from which it is difficult to report. *Al Jazeera's* journalists work to moderate and distribute content submitted from social media through its online portal. Regular and reliable contributors are

accredited and trained, and their content is made available on the *Sharek* website without moderation. Accredited citizen journalists are also able to apply for journalism training, and their content is more likely to make it on to the *Al Jazeera* network. *Al Jazeera*'s head of social media, Riyaad Minty, said the network's comprehensive coverage of the Arab Spring was made possible due to the collaborative nature of reportage during the event; much of the network's imagery and video came from citizens and activists, many of whom were credited in official reports (Bartlett 2012). While the incorporation of *Sharek* content into *Al Jazeera* shows organisational willingness to foster collaboration, this is tempered by strict editorial controls over how and when the content is utilised by journalists. Thus, the transition from autonomy to collaborative journalistic processes cannot necessarily be seen as relinquishing overall control of the editorial process; so far, it is a more complex transition of the social role of the journalist from the sole gatekeeper of truth to a collaborative facilitator of public dialogue.

The inherent complexity of collaborative approaches to news-making is most obvious when journalists lose control of their facilitation of the news narrative. For example, the reportage of Irish Australian Jill Meagher's rape and murder in 2012 horrified Australians and galvanised many into political action. Thousands gathered in the suburb where she was abducted, marching in support of Meagher's grieving family, but also in protest against violent behaviour towards women (Zielinski 2013). However, the arrest of a suspect in Meagher's murder was increasingly problematised by the intense social media interest and discussion of her disappearance (Lowe 2012). Jill Meagher was mentioned almost every 11 seconds on *Facebook* and *Twitter* once news of the arrest was confirmed. Despite public pleas from the police, Meagher's husband and family, and even some sections of traditional mainstream media, social media hatred sites directed at Meagher's accused killer published images of his face and details of his private life. Media law experts warned that comments posted on blogs or social media could be subject to defamation or contempt of court proceedings, and could jeopardise the prosecution of the case. The social media buzz around the case became so prominent that the magistrate hearing the case made the unprecedented move of banning all publication of information, apart from the accused's image, from all media, including social media (Lowe 2012). What this example shows is that the speed, intimacy and easy dissemination of content creates both challenges and opportunities for collaboration practices using social media.

The disruption that social media discussion of news events can create is perhaps indicative of why journalists and news organisations have been so hesitant to innovate practices that do not fit standardised and institutionalised news routines (Domingo 2008). Indeed, change to journalism practice appears to be slow, reactive and often far from innovative due to perceived risks. However, issues in journalism practice such as lack of verification, the ‘media pack’ mentality and creating sensationalist or exploitative news content are not new issues in journalism practice. The growth of social media use in news means that these types of issues now have instantaneous and global audience reach. Utilising the benefits of the social media community without compromising the quality of journalism is possible—and some innovative journalists are adapting traditional modes of journalistic practice to do so. The journalists and media organisations that have benefitted from shifts in traditional production practices have continued to recognise the importance of journalistic expertise, but this is foregrounded as a mode of public engagement to create increased value for the community it serves. That is, professional journalism utilises social media to foster connection to communities and these connections are best maintained when journalists, sources and interested stakeholders in the news are working together, not so much to create a unified representation of truth, but to create conversation. While conversation is not constitutive of journalism’s social importance, it is the societal actions that stem from these conversations, whether in the form of activism, public outcry or other forms of political and cultural change, that illustrate journalism’s social value. Traditional journalism once brought the information to create those social changes; now, journalists and audiences create that information together. Thus, the biggest change in journalistic practice is not so much the practices themselves, but the broader institutional authority of the journalist.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, changes to journalistic practice have been explored through transitions in three seemingly sacrosanct processes of reportage: objectivity, verification and professional autonomy. While the historical context for the development of these practices shows that they are arguably new to journalism, they have nonetheless become entrenched in the description of individual, organisational and institutional cultures of journalism. Processes of objectivity, verification and professional

autonomy are as much a part of the professional self-identity and social authority of journalism as they are ideals of practice. While it is arguable whether these ideals of practice are actually achievable in the reality of everyday journalism, they can be considered ‘strategic rituals’ of journalism (Tuchman 1978), represented as the essential characteristics of good journalism practice, and defended as the markers of journalism’s social and cultural authority.

This chapter has shown how objectivity, verification and professional autonomy are transitioning to incorporate practices of authenticity, transparency and collaboration. Examples in this chapter show that particular social media cultures prioritising openness and collaboration with audiences are being adopted by journalists and challenging the way traditional practices are valued in this space. This is not to say that professional journalists are being left behind by the changes to journalistic practice. Indeed, some professional journalists have been at the forefront of innovation in traditional journalistic practices within social media environments, or have been key actors in ‘normalising’ new processes, negotiating their use to fit into particular organisational or institutional norms of practice. Many of the issues faced by journalists using social media in their practice are necessarily productive; they highlight how journalism, like all communication practices, must respond to technological changes, as well as the social and cultural changes that emerge alongside them. Thus, it is not necessarily the expertise or skill of the journalist that is being renegotiated in social media environments, nor the need for professional journalism overall. Rather, the transition in journalistic practices is due to the changing relations between journalists and their audiences and, thus, their changing role in social life. Indeed, it is impossible to understand journalism and social media without understanding the processes of collaboration, engagement and sharing that now mark journalism and audience relations. The next chapter thus focusses on the relationship between journalists and audiences on social media.

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