

POLIS

# As it Happens

How live news blogs work  
and their future

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# 1. Executive summary

- The live blog is a relatively new, web-native format that has special possibilities for creating journalism. It is an example of networked journalism that puts an emphasis on aggregated material from different sources such as social media and user-generated content.
- Live blogs are usually heavily dependent on other mainstream media as well as social media to function.
- News consumers appreciate the format of the live blog. They sometimes prefer it over other formats such as a conventional news articles and sometimes consume types of content they would not normally have chosen because it is presented in a live blog.
- The use of live blogs has sparked conflict and debate, mainly because of the speed at which they are written and how this leads to publishing unconfirmed information which has occasionally put people at risk of harm.
- Live blogs change the way journalists work: they have more (or less) to do, they use a different tone of voice and they might not always be able to verify the information that they share. Reporters take on a new role, that sometimes might resemble that of an editor, curator or moderator.
- Verifying facts in real time is one of the biggest journalistic challenges when working with live blogs. Other challenges include the live blog taking up a lot of resources and keeping the narrative structure clear.
- Live blogs can be used as a way of engaging with readers, making it easier for the newspaper to receive useful user generated content.
- Live blogs might change how media companies act towards news consumers and increase the level of engagement with readers.
- Live blogs open up the journalistic process to readers, so transferring some of the journalistic responsibility towards them. Live blogs change the way the reader consumes the news – the reader has to act like an editor.
- The live blog is an evolving format that we will see more of in the future.

# Preface

## By Charlie Beckett, Polis, LSE

All the talk is of a crisis in the news media, but we sometimes forget that digital technologies can give us better journalism, too. A great example of this is live blogging. Everything from football matches to parliamentary debates are now routinely covered by a range of live blogs.

In a 2010 Polis report on networked journalism we hailed it as 'the new front page' and for some readers this is now the most visible part of their online newspaper. It is the bit where traditional journalism is transformed into a mixture of broadcasting and instant storytelling. It is a narrative form that can combine tweets, audio clips, photos, video and graphics. It can draw material from social media or direct sources. It can cite learned academics, rival reporters or citizen's emails. It's fast-moving, interactive and very accessible.

Yet it is not easy to do well. How to verify facts in the heat of the battle? How do you paint a balanced picture of an event that is still unfolding?

This report by a working online journalist asks whether live blogs are good for journalism. It looks in particular at two newspapers who have pioneered the format in two countries. It looks at a couple of contentious news stories in more detail. It sets out the key opportunities and challenges facing anyone who is live blogging and suggests that this format is going to develop in the future.

Live blogging takes a combination of old and new skills. It uses different resources and it poses fresh ethical and editorial challenges. But I would argue that it gives more depth and breadth to instant journalism. Journalists are better for doing it and the reader likes them. Live blogging is just one of many inspiring new formats for online journalism, but it will remain central to the offering of any news brand that wants to be fast, alive but also adding value.

"It's fast-moving, interactive and very accessible."

We hope this report will help anyone involved in live blogging. We think it will help newsrooms shape their tactics or strategy for live blogging. We welcome any thoughts you have on this or associated issues.

We are grateful to Journalistfonden for funding this annual Newsroom Fellowship at LSE and we welcome other proposals to support similar research. I am also grateful to the interns who helped on this project and all the academics and journalists who gave their time to be part of the research.

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## 2. Introduction: What is a live blog?

“The live blog has been described as a ‘new journalistic genre’<sup>1</sup> and as one of the emerging ‘web native’ formats”

**January 25, 2014, 2.48 pm (GMT):**

Hello, and welcome to this study on live blogs and their impact on journalism.

If this study were a live blog, that is probably how it would begin. A clear time stamp and a more informal yet correct tone of voice, rather than the more formulaic language of traditional mainstream journalism.

The time stamps and the language of the live blog are two of the features that distinguish it from regular news articles published on a news website. Another is the live blog's narrative structure. The live blog consists of constant updates with new bits of information such as quotes, tweets, pictures, or links all being added as they become known over a finite period of time. It leaves a distinct narrative legacy.

When reading a live blog, one of the things that usually appears sooner or later is some kind of qualification about facts presented. ‘There are unconfirmed reports that...’ Due to the speed with which a live blog is usually written, reporters simply do not have time to verify everything, but instead they rely on their journalistic judgment and a transparent and open relationship with the reader.

The live blog has been described as a “new journalistic genre”<sup>1</sup> and as one of the emerging “web native” formats. Journalist and digital strategist Nic Newman writes that “the range and type of content being produced [by the media] have undoubtedly changed because of the Internet”<sup>2</sup>, which he says applies to live blogs as follows:

**“A lot of what happened first was that newspapers or broadcasters put what they produced for the old media on the Internet. But people have discovered that what works is thinking for a different medium and producing content differently. The live blog is one of the first true formats of the medium, that has been created off the Internet's ability to update quickly and people's desire and ability to access news in any place at any time. It is not something that has been done on television, not something that has been done on radio, not a format that has ever been done in print. It is born of the web and its capabilities.”**

Accessibility is key to the idea of the live blog. Social media consultant and researcher Claire Wardle puts the live blog at one end of a scale of useful journalism today. At the other end are long-form explanatory articles. She talks about “the death of the middle” regarding online formats:

“I think the idea of a 600 word article or a two and a half minute tv package is being squashed, quite dramatically.”<sup>4</sup>

In an academic study of live blogging at *the Guardian*<sup>5</sup>, a live blog is defined as:

**“a single blog post on a specific topic to which time-stamped content is progressively added for a finite period – anywhere between half an hour and 24 hours.”**

That definition is largely accurate. However, the “single blog post” part could be varied due to the different tools with which a live blog is produced – in some cases it could be described as several blog posts, each time stamped. 24 hours could also be seen as a relatively short upper limit. There are examples of when content have been added to the same live feed for a number of days.

### 2.1 Different kinds of live blogs

This study would like to define six distinct types of live blogs:

- Scheduled news (both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news events. Examples: Trial on the Utøya massacre, British Princess Kate Middleton giving birth).
- Breaking news (Examples: Navy yard shootings in Washington DC, engagement of Sweden's Princess Madeleine).
- Reader live blog (for example traffic and weather news).
- Series/Subject (politics, Middle East, finance).
- Sports (both single matches and ongoing events like the Olympics).
- Entertainment (TV programs, concerts, ongoing events like the Swedish qualifiers for Eurovision).

Some of these are based on Thurman and Walters' definition.<sup>6</sup> I agree with their categories, but have 1) replaced ‘Other scheduled event’ with Entertainment and 2) added a category: the Reader live blog.

Several news websites, among them *Aftonbladet*, which this study will focus on as well as *the Guardian*, have live blogs that put a strong emphasis on taking in contributions or questions from readers. These range from pieces of information that can be described as actual reporting to small talk. Staff at *Aftonbladet* interviewed for this study mention holiday traffic<sup>7</sup> and weather news as examples

that have generated that kind of live blog. This type of live blog is more like a live chat. At *Aftonbladet* both live blogs and live chats are conducted by using live blogging tool 'Cover it Live'. Staff tend to speak of their live blogs as "a Cover it Live" rather than "a live blog."

It should also be pointed out that readers' comments are used in many live blogs. In Reader live blogs however, they are deliberately requested by the newspaper's reporters. The Reader live blog differs from a live chat in the way that readers contributions are not simply questions being answered, but also factual contributions, for example reporting their experience of road conditions during a severe weather situation.

Of course, the Reader live blog can fall into Thurman and Walters' definition of a semi-scheduled News live blog, but its character is quite unique and therefore deserves a category of its own.

"More and more elements are being included, such as photos, videos, maps and aggregated material from social media."

## 2.2 History of the live blog

Journalists have always been telling news "as it happens" on TV and radio. The new thing is of course, as Nic Newman argues above, the 'web-native-ness' of the format. Thanks to the hyperlinks of web 2.0 the journalist can use aggregated material to a larger extent than say, dial-in radio shows. But there are similarities to the way media reported stories in the past. In a research seminar at The London School of Economics (October 2013) on historical media events, Professor Espen Ydreberg of Oslo University talked about the media coverage of the 1911 Race to the South Pole between explorers Amundsen and Scott, where, for obvious reasons, updates were scarce. Instead

news media focused on speculating about what was happening or going to happen next. Here, a historic parallel can be drawn to how a live blog can be written when information is not coming through fast enough and the audience is hungry for updates. Paul Owen, blogs producer at *the Guardian*, covered the birth of HRH Prince George in a recent live blog. A lot of people at the newspaper did not think it would work because the events were happening out of sight:

**"It was much more like being a radio host or comedian, to try to come up with stuff to keep the readers entertained. There was a tension in the live blog and that was what made it work."**

Live blogs can be traced back to 1999 at *the Guardian*.<sup>9</sup> For the first eight years, the format was mostly used for sports, including cricket, which sometimes lasted up to five days. The London bombings in July 2005 is the first news event that *the Guardian* live blogged.

*Aftonbladet* started using the term "minute by minute" in 2001, where sports and entertainment "minute by minute-reports" can be found. Sport reporter Marcus Leifby was the first one to involve readers in a match live blog in 2007:

**"When reading it like this, six years later, it feels kind of meagre. Back then, the readers sent in emails, nowadays they primarily send in their comments, questions and thoughts via the commentary field and Twitter."**<sup>10</sup>

Live blogs have changed a lot over the last few years. More and more elements are being included, such as photos, videos, maps and aggregated material from social media.

## 2.3 The popularity of the live blog

At *the Guardian*, live blogs get more unique visitors than other material on the same subject, such as news articles (median unique visitor numbers 233 per cent higher for live blogs) and galleries (219 per cent higher)<sup>11</sup>. Thurman and Newman also extended the study of live blogs' popularity to include time spent reading. In two news stories – coverage of a march against public sector cuts and coverage of the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton – their study compares time spent reading live blogs, to time spent reading news articles, picture galleries and an op-ed piece. The results show that the live blogs attracted the majority of the aggregated attention over a 24 hour period. In the case of the demonstrations, two live blogs together got over 500,000 aggregated minutes, compared to just under 100,000 for the op-ed piece, whereas the article and picture gallery got around 50,000 aggregated minutes. In the case of the royal wedding, the live blog got 600,000 aggregated minutes, compared to around 200,000 each for a picture gallery and an article.<sup>12</sup>

So what is so appealing about the live blog format? Thurman and Walters go as far as to say that the format itself "seems to appeal to the mass public as much through its form as its content":

**"When you look at what people usually look at online, sports and celebrity content tend to be pretty popular. But when you ask people what kind of live blogs they look at it tends to be the breaking news, like the political stories. And the sports and the celebrity**



type content like The X Factor comes quite low down.”<sup>13</sup>

At *Aftonbladet*, head of analysis, Johan Liljebo says that the presentation of a story is crucial for the amount of traffic it gets on the website:

**“Headline and photo is essential for click-throughs from the front page. And headlines with a clear news angle/ breaking news/”happening right now” generally work better than others.”<sup>14</sup>**

Which leaves us with a kind of chicken-and egg-question. Is it that newsworthy stories of great interest are the ones that are live blogged, and is that why live blogs get the most traffic?

BBC online editor Steve Herrmann says that traffic analysis has found that live blogs and conventional articles on the same subject draws, roughly, the same amount of readers’ attention:

**“Generally speaking, the bigger, more dramatic and simpler the story is, the more the live blog is likely to be ahead of the article, because not a lot of context is needed and people will be coming back repeatedly for updates. But even on those, the conventional story still gets very big traffic.”<sup>15</sup>**

## 2.4 The new big thing?

Was 2013 the year of the live blog? British media online mag *Journalism.co.uk* certainly thought so. On a list of “10 things all journalists should know in 2013”, live blogging was number 4, giving *The Telegraph*’s new homepage templates for live articles as an example.<sup>16</sup> When news agency network Minds International gathered in Tokyo in April 2013, live blogging was high on the agenda.<sup>17</sup> Swedish news agency TT launched its live blogging service on a larger scale in the same year.

## 2.5 Two live blogs that sparked the debate

There have been many live blogs that have caused conflict and debate. Critics of the format tend to point to the greater risk of getting things wrong due to the writing speed – sometimes putting lives at risk. There are two examples that stand out, both terrorism-related: the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013 and the Mumbai attacks in 2008.

### 2.5.1 The Boston Marathon bombings

In the case of the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013, the police hunt after the two bombers was reported in real time by both mainstream media and social media networks like Twitter and Reddit – the former frequently quoting the latter. Several people were wrongly linked to the bombings by Internet users picking through photos, videos and eyewitness accounts and drawing their own conclusions about who was behind the attacks.<sup>18</sup> Theories about several “suspects”, nicknamed ‘Green Hat Guy’ and ‘Blue Duffel Bag Guy’ emerged on Reddit. Among those wrongly accused were 22-year old Sunil Tripathil, who was reported missing since mid-March 2013. It came to the point where these false reports were condemned by President Barack Obama:

**“In this age of instant reporting, tweets and blogs, there is a temptation to latch on to any bit of information, sometimes to jump to conclusions.”<sup>19</sup>**

Only when the FBI released photos and names of the actual suspects, the two Tsarnaev brothers, did the Reddit discussions fade and were replaced by apologies from the website administrators.

### 2.5.2 The Mumbai attacks

In the case of the Mumbai attacks in 2008, citizen journalists also felt that mainstream media was not fast enough. The real time reports created a real risk for the hostages. Mainstream media made serious mistakes when picking up reports from social media. One piece of information that turned out to be false was that the Indian authorities had called for an immediate stop of live Twitter updates on the situation, a detail that was picked up by, among others, the BBC. This generated a blog post on the broadcaster’s Editor’s Blog on how they made use of Twitter reports during the attacks, in which online editor Steve Herrmann explained how the BBC works with live pages, that they move quickly, and that not everything that is published is confirmed:

**“Should we have tried to check it and then reported back later, if only to say that we had not found any confirmation? I think in this case we should have, and we have learned a lesson.”<sup>20</sup>**

What is interesting about these two examples is that non-journalists reporting the news think that traditional media is too slow and want to be first with the news. This tends to speed up the mainstream media reporting process as well – with an increased risk of getting facts wrong.

## 2.6 Key questions

Speed, accuracy, verification of sources and the quality of the outcome of the journalistic product seem to be the key challenges for journalists and newsrooms working with live blogs. This is an evolving, “web native” format, with all the challenges that come with a transitional format. This paper will aim to answer the following questions:

- Does live blogging give us more diverse, well-sourced, deeper, more participatory, interactive, accurate, accessible journalism?
- Does the format offer any promising prospects for the future or is it merely a passing trend – and what are the challenges for journalists and media companies who work with them?

**“Speed, accuracy, verification of sources and the quality of the outcome of the journalistic product seem to be the key challenges”**

### 3. Liveblogging at *the Guardian* and *Aftonbladet*

While Section 4 will look at how to live blog this section will first provide a technical description of how a Swedish and British newspaper organise their live blogging and the production systems they use.

#### 3.1 A live blog at *the Guardian*

At the time of this study (October 2013), here's a short description of what a live blog at *the Guardian*'s website may have looked like:

- Headline – similar to articles.
- Preamble (A red "Live" vignette when the live blog is active. Usually includes short roundup in list-form with a couple of key points of the event covered.
- Byline(s) – with or without photos.
- Photo/video element.
- Sorting/auto updates (Can be set by reader).
- Blog feed. Includes text, maps, tweets, photos, video, readers' contributions. Posts can have sub-headlines. First and last posts in inactive live blogs tend to be summaries.

- Reader comments.
- Links to other articles on the subject in right-hand column.

#### 3.1.1 Working with live blogs at *the Guardian*

*The Guardian* published an average of 146 live blogs a month between April 11 2011 and June 11 2011<sup>21</sup>. *The Guardian*'s Paul Owen thinks the decision to live blog a news event or not is a matter of "journalistic instinct". He describes the case of the Woolwich murder – where a soldier was violently beheaded in the middle of the day in London – and how it was reported at the newspaper's website at first, not in the form of a live blog. This was because of his sense of it being a criminal event that was over and done with. The beheading element was not immediately known. The attack was first reported as a stabbing. But, says Owen, rumours emerged on Twitter about the beheading. The staff realised that it could be an 'Islamist' attack. Again, the decision was not to start a live blog, because the event was thought to be over. It was when it emerged that there might be some kind of statement from the attackers that *the Guardian* staff decided to start up a live blog, says Owen:

**"We needed to know: what was the statement, who is he, what is going on, will something else happen next? I think that is a sort of rare example of when we have been late to it – it seemed to us and the readers once we started that we were late."**<sup>22</sup>

Usually, just one reporter is involved in a live blog at *the Guardian*, though there might be several on big events. For events that continue for a longer period of time the live blog might be passed on between the newspaper's offices in Britain, the US and Australia.

Live blogs at *the Guardian* are written in the newsroom as well as on-site. For example, the subject live blog 'Politics Live' is usually written from the newspaper's political correspondent Andrew Sparrow's office in Parliament. Being in-office has technical advantages such as several bigger computer screens for monitoring lots of different news sources, TV and other media close by. There used to be a special live blogging desk near the editors' desk but nowadays people usually sit at their own desks, explains web news editor Jonathan Haynes:

**"This is partially to make it more accepted that it is not just some people who live blog but everyone can do it."**<sup>23</sup>

#### 3.1.2 Technicalities at *the Guardian*

*The Guardian* uses its own, in-house-built, CMS for publishing articles as well as live blogs. The live blogging tool has a unique interface that has been optimized for the speed that is required when working with live blogs, explains Jonathan Hyde, product manager within the development team of *the Guardian*'s digital CMS:

**"We have a very structured linear tool that encourages the live blogger to follow a specific path to allow the live blog to be creative as fast as humanly possible."**<sup>24</sup>

This includes, among other features, automatic settings of slugs when the editor or reporter types in the headline, so reducing the steps you have to go through.

Here is how a live blog's usual elements are dealt with at *the Guardian*:

- *Bylines*: The reporters that write the live blog are not presented with avatars by each post, but in a combined byline at the





start of the blog. It is therefore not always clear who wrote each specific post.

- *Appearance on the site:* A *Guardian* live blog can be described as looking like an article divided into posts with more graphic elements. For instance, it uses the same fonts as articles, and runs on one page – it is not divided into several pages.
- *Visual elements:* Jonathan Hyde divides the live blog's content into three distinct classes of element: text, images and embedded material. He claims to have made it easy for the editorial staff to embed: rather than having to pick through HTML code, they can just grab the URL of the object they want embedded, such as a tweet or a *Guardian* video page, and paste it in a box and it turns up in the live blog
- *Time stamps:* Depending on which *Guardian* office opens up the live blog, its stamps are set to GMT, US Eastern time or Australia time. That can be changed when a live blog is passed on to another office.

## 3.2 A live blog at *Aftonbladet*

As of the time for this study (October 2013), here is what a live page on the *Aftonbladets* website might have looked like. (*Aftonbladet* has some specific URLs for live coverage called *Aftonbladet Live*, hence the term 'live page'. The live blog frame is usually incorporated into an article after the event is over, when the next live event goes on to one of the live pages.)

- Header with newspaper's usual logo, accompanied by the "Live" logo.
- Pages divided into two columns.
- Links to other articles on the subject at the end of the page.

### Columns:

- A normal news article on the subject, with or without a headline, in one, topped (below or above preamble) by photo gallery or video. Live blog in its own frame, sometimes several separate live blogs (one with readers' thoughts on the subject, for instance) in their own frames in other columns, also topped by image or video elements. Elements are separated by vignettes.

### Live blog frame:

- "Pinned" posts at the top, with short round-ups on the story. Can be hidden by readers.
- Blog feed. Includes text, maps, tweets, photos, videos, readers' contributions.

### 3.2.1 Working with live blogs at *Aftonbladet*

According to Andreas Aspegren, head of online at *Aftonbladet*, the format is being used more and more often. *Aftonbladet* has an obvious reader focus when it comes to live blogging, no matter the subject. Readers' contributions have a prominent position, and they are allowed to ask a lot of questions and take part in live blogs even on more serious subjects such as the Navy yard shootings in Washington DC in 2013. There is significantly more reader content than on *the Guardian*.

At *Aftonbladet* live blogs are usually used for events where editors can tell in advance that a lot of information will be coming through. It is something that the news site will want to cover from a lot of different angles but at the same time publish new information as it appears, says Joakim Ottosson, online edition editor at *Aftonbladet*:

**"It also has to reach up to a certain level of relevance, in that it must be something that readers really want to follow directly at the time of the event, not just getting a summary afterwards."<sup>26</sup>**

Usually, in a longer live blog, two reporters are involved, but one at a time. One editor usually works with the reporter in the newsroom. Entertainment and sports live blogs are more often written on site, from matches and concerts for instance. *Aftonbladet's* staff can also write a live blog through a mobile app.

### 3.2.2 Technicalities at *Aftonbladet*

*Aftonbladet* uses the live blogging tool "Cover it Live" for live blogs and live-chats. According to Joakim Ottosson, *Aftonbladet* has recently focused on adapting the tool to fit the mobile site. Another example on how 'Cover it Live' has been adjusted to fit *Aftonbladet* is that there are different templates for desktop use, for example when it comes to live chats, and there are different background colours for different sections on the site. The newspaper's sports site sometimes uses pink, which is the colour of the sports section of the paper.

Here is how a live blog's usual elements are dealt with at *Aftonbladet*:

- *Bylines:* An avatar with the reporter's face is used by every post. It is therefore usually clear who wrote what. Sometimes a moderator takes part and sometimes the greeting part is signed *Aftonbladet*.

- *Appearance on the site:* The live blog is published in its own frame, sometimes within an article, sometimes by itself (but adjacent to an article) on the live page. It differs from the newspaper's design, for instance, it does not use the same fonts. The text is not on different pages, but to see more than a few recently published posts at a time, users have to click on a plus icon at the bottom of the feed. This does not affect the number of page views regarding traffic statistics.
- *Visual elements:* Photos are included in the feed and sometimes published in a separate feed on the live page by using the tool Shoot it Live, which lets photographers live blog straight from their cameras. Video is usually separate. *Aftonbladet* puts a great emphasis on live video.
- *Time stamps:* Can be set to on or off by the editor or reporter when they launch the live blog.

**"Readers' contributions have a prominent position, and they are allowed to ask a lot of questions and take part in live blogs even on more serious subjects"**

## 4. How to live blog

### 4.1 The reporter's new role

A journalist who finds herself in a live blog context, where information is gathered from a number of different sources, many emerging from other parts of the web, takes a role that goes beyond that of merely being a reporter. Beckett<sup>27</sup> describes this as being at the centre of a hypertextuality that is created by connectivity, in its turn described as “the simple fact that the Internet and the hypertextuality of the Web 2.0 allows any journalism to be linked to a network of further information.”

That changes the task of reporting, towards that of a curator or moderator. Some of the reporters interviewed for this study also mentioned ‘editor’, ‘broadcaster’ and ‘publisher’ as labels to describe what they do. Andrew Sparrow at *the Guardian* refers to the article, ‘Why I blog’ by Andrew Sullivan<sup>28</sup>, where Sullivan advises bloggers to treat their work as broadcasting:

**“Once you understand that, everything falls into place. I found that very helpful because it encouraged me to treat it as, not a finished product, but as a process and a conversation which is open to revision and correction.”<sup>29</sup>**

Sparrow also finds live blogging “quite liberating” stylistically and though he describes it as harder work in the sense of intensity and immediacy, he also says that it is less stressful because of not having to worry all day about what is going to come out of the day’s work. Asked about whether he thinks of himself more as an analyst rather than a reporter, Sparrow said:

**“Increasingly, not so much as an analyst but as a news editor. In that a lot of what I am doing is basically deciding what is good and what is not, which is effectively a news editor’s function. And I do some original reporting in a sense, I am transcribing quotes or summarizing documents or speeches or reports myself.”**

Linda Hjertén, crime reporter at *Aftonbladet*, has live blogged a lot of trials, among them that of Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, where she claims to have updated the blog two to three times a minute. A day’s word count of the posts came up to about 150,000 characters, including readers’ comments. Her take on the new role of the reporter has a lot to do with becoming her own editor, in the sense of that she always has to keep in mind ethical aspects, such as whether

to publish names or not, or not getting into details regarding abuse, be aware of the victims’ integrity, and the newspaper’s editorial policies.

Hjertén says that she started live blogging from trials because she thought it would be interesting for readers to see events before the journalist had filtered them and so get the whole picture. She still leaves out some parts, for instance details from an autopsy procedure, but says that the overall lack of selection is probably the biggest difference from writing a news article:

**“The other big difference is the work load. It takes a lot to live blog, keep an eye on comments [Aftonbladets reporters usually moderate the comments in a live blog] and everything. You know that you are also going to write an article, and have that in the back of your head.”<sup>30</sup>**

Despite the workload she says she prefers to live blog from trials, because it keeps her alert during the long speeches. Contrary to *the Guardian*’s Andrew Sparrow, Hjertén does not experience any greater stylistic freedom when writing a live blog compared to a news article. Quite the opposite. She describes it as largely ‘stenography’ work – except perhaps for descriptions of the events in the pauses between legal exchanges.

The differences in these two approaches to live blogging has probably to do, at least partly, with the difference between the overall culture and style of *the Guardian* and *Aftonbladet*. The British broadsheet press is known for its relatively formal language, whereas *Aftonbladet* certainly allows their reporters greater stylistic freedom in their articles. It could also, of course, be due to the two reporters’ respective subject matter and personal style.

### 4.2 Live blogging in ten steps

This list is compiled of advice from interviewees in this study, including Adam Tinworth, digital media consultant and visiting lecturer at City University.

1. Write quickly
2. Be human, not opinionated, in your tone of voice.
3. Be extra aware of sensitive information, conflicting information and unverified information.
4. Be social: take in readers’ comments and contributions and use social media for sourcing – but be aware that social skills are built up over a longer period of time and treat these sources as any other sources. Get to know your audience.
5. Be transparent about when you cannot verify – but also when you are sure: link to sources and interesting material. Open up the journalistic process to your readers.
6. Do not lose the overall perspective on the bigger story – summarize from time to time.
7. Do not be mentally locked into the first narrative that emerges – be able to construct an emerging narrative from the emerging facts over time.
8. Make sure you are totally familiar with the technical tools so that you can focus entirely on the writing and research
9. If possible (for scheduled events), be prepared and read up on the subject.
10. Be creative with ways to fill the gaps when no information is coming through.

## 5. Report or commentary? Blog or report?

In live blogs, news reporting is sometimes mixed with more subjective commentary. It could be in the same post or different posts. It could be through aggregated material like tweets or reader comments that express certain views or an expert analysis on the event being reported. Sometimes the reporter can express a personal view, perhaps regarding minor details, but still in a way they probably would not have done in a news article.

Like most Swedish newspapers *Aftonbladet* claims political objectivity in their articles, except for the editorial and opinion-based pages. Joakim Ottosson says that reporters are told how to deal with issues of objectivity in a live blog – there is however no written policy. The risk that a reporter would be too personal is not considered great, and usually appears in connection with answering readers' comments, something that is encouraged by the newspaper:

**"A reporter who will report the actual event should restrict himself when it comes to replying to readers' comments. The reporter should normally not express a personal opinion, but remain objective in his comments."**<sup>32</sup>

He also points out that it has to be clear who is behind an opinion and what the role of that person is. For example, the status of an expert on the subject of the event being reported on.

At the openly political (liberal left-leaning) *the Guardian*, the line between objectivity and subjectivity is a little more blurred, at least from a Swedish perspective. However, news and comments are separated, and in straight news live blogs at *the Guardian*, commentary posts are clearly signposted, says online news editor Jonathan Haynes:

**"If you have a scale of the BBC on one end, as a broadcaster who has to be impartial, to the Mail and Sun that are basically writing what they think masquerading as news at the other end, we are much closer to the BBC. We are not always entirely impartial, we are a liberal left-leaning paper and that comes across in the news-copy as well as in the commentary – but we do not try to hide that."**<sup>33</sup>

Haynes cites live coverage of royal affairs as examples of when the viewpoint of the reporter or the newspaper might show through more in a live blog. Sometimes the reporters who are least likely to want to cover those stories get to do them because that "will make a really good read":

**"A bit of the writer's personality will seep in, but I think that is fine. I do not think we would ever be totally impartial, in the same way our news stories are not."**<sup>34</sup>

### 5.1 Tone of voice

The informal tone of voice was mentioned in Section 2 as one of the live blog's most distinguishing features. Adam Tinworth describes it as "human":

**"That is not to say opinionated, but written in a way that makes it clear there is a person (or persons) selecting and choosing elements to create the narrative. The reader should be aware of the writer not as part of the story, but as the conductor placing the elements together."**<sup>35</sup>

Andreas Aspegren also talks about a "human, social context" and "human conversation" regarding live blogs.<sup>36</sup> Steve Herrmann agrees with Tinworth in that it is important to distinguish between tone and content:

**"I think it's perfectly possible to have an informal, conversational, even lighthearted tone, while sticking clearly within the usual editorial guidelines and framework."**<sup>37</sup>

Herrmann also talks about a "gradual transition around tone of voice online" when the BBC introduced blogs on their website some years ago:

**"Before long it became clear that there was this parallel with a certain type of informal broadcasting. And as soon as our correspondents and reporters grasped that, it became easier for them to speak in their own tone of voice, without compromising how they did their journalism."**<sup>38</sup>

Andrew Sparrow at *the Guardian*, who drew that same parallel to broadcasting, says that his personal perspective comes through his live blog through editing: summarizing or recommending interesting stories and links. It is not something that would affect the accuracy of the reporting:



**"... it has to be clear who is behind an opinion and what the role of that person is."**



Sparrow also says that he keeps his tone of voice relatively formal and tries to avoid slang, but that his blog language is not as stylized as his newspaper writing. *Aftonbladet's* Linda Hjertén says sports is one of the genres where reporters at the Swedish newspaper enjoy a bit more freedom when live blogging, and have a higher personal profile than in news live blogs:

She says that she includes readers' questions to her, for example, about whether a person charged with a crime is guilty. She answers them by saying "what I think does not matter, it is up to the court to decide if he is guilty or not." In the Breivik trials she often got asked how she felt about being there, and always answered "how I feel is pretty irrelevant compared to how all those who have lost someone feel."

In Sweden and Britain, different words are used to describe the format of a live blog. British journalists call it 'live blog', Swedes call it 'live report' (liverapport or direktrapport). An alternative term in English is 'live coverage' according to *the Guardian's* Paul Owen. Steve Herrmann says that employees at the BBC tend to refer to it as a 'live page', perhaps since the blog is only one part of the templates on the actual web page, and is

"For the description of what I do live blogging is slightly better, because it is not just newspaper reporting in real time, it is a different style of reporting. Part of it is reading on screen. I do not fully know why, but readers are kind of comfortable with the level of informality that they would not be in print."<sup>41</sup>

What readers expect from a live blog certainly seems to be different from what they expect from a news article. Reporters interviewed for this study said readers take an interest in the writer and there is pressure to keep the tone more personal. Linda Hjerten mentions that she has noticed that readers are becoming more and more demanding when it comes to the reporter updating the text:

It could be argued that these changes will affect news consumers' expectations on other journalistic formats as well.





## 6. Challenges: Sources, narrative and resources

Most interviewees in this study agree that there is a greater risk of getting facts wrong in a live report because of the speed with which a live blog is written and the problems with verifying sources in real time. This is the biggest journalistic challenge when working with the format but does that make the journalism of live blogs less reliable than the journalism of news articles? And how do you get your readers to engage?

### 6.1 The reader as a source

**"The best source is probably the person who happened to be there with a smartphone."<sup>43</sup>**

A live blogger reporting on a breaking news event who wants to do their work well will need to find that person, be it a reader or someone on Twitter. Claire Wardle says that sources from the public are always going to be unrepresentative – ie, the refugees in the camp who happen to have access to Twitter:

**"Social media allows you to account from some of those narratives using people who have had first hand experiences of something. If you had a first hand experience, that does not necessarily make you objective, but it certainly means you have a story to tell."<sup>44</sup>**

Both *Aftonbladet* and *the Guardian* have ways of including user generated content (UGC) in their live blogs. At *Aftonbladet*, the chat function in the tool Cover it Live allows the reporter to directly choose between comments and questions from readers and include them in the feed. At *the Guardian*, much of that work is done by community coordinators, but if the reporter finds a readers' comment she wants to include, it is easy to embed it with its unique URL. Both newspapers have clearly signposted sections where readers can contribute: *Aftonbladet Tipsa!* and *GuardianWitness*. *Aftonbladet* keeps a similar section in their news app for mobile phones and *GuardianWitness* has an app of its own.

Most important for media companies that wish to get valuable material from their readers is to maintain a good relationship with the readers, says Wardle – something she compliments

*the Guardian* for doing, by building communities. *Aftonbladet* certainly engages their readers in live blogs, which is also a way of community building says Christina Nordh, mobile editor:

**"We want to keep in touch with the readers, we want them to tell us what is happening. We have made it easier for them to give us tips about news, and there are a lot of things going on where we want readers to help us out."<sup>45</sup>**

Both at *Aftonbladet* and *the Guardian*, engagement is dependent on how readers relate towards the paper's high profile writers. Paul Owen mentions an example of covering for Andrew Sparrow in the Politics blog:

**"He was off work that day, and a reader put in a comment saying 'Is Andy ok? You know, it is just, normally when he is going to be off he tells us in advance."<sup>46</sup>**

### 6.2 Social media – a reliable source?

Social media is an invaluable source for live blogs. In the cases of the Mumbai attacks and the Boston Marathon bombings, the use of social media sparked debate after false information from Twitter accounts and Reddit users had been quoted by mainstream media. Both *Aftonbladet's* and *the Guardian's* live blogs use social media in different ways. Posting YouTube videos and quoting various accounts on Twitter as a source are two examples.

*The Guardian's* Jonathan Haynes says that the newspaper has more or less stopped using hashtag feeds in their live blogs because of unverified material. In *Aftonbladet's* live blogs, the majority of tweets published are those that the newspaper's own reporters writes. They do however include retweets, which means that other accounts are quoted.

A lot on sourcing from social media can probably be learned from looking at another media company, Storyful, and how they work with social media. According to Claire Wardle, social media is their only pre-produced sourcing material. Newspapers are banned in the Storyful newsroom, and a lot of the monitoring work is automatised. For example, they monitor Twitter lists of

verified accounts that usually move at a certain speed, so that if they suddenly start to move quicker, staff will know that something might be going on.

When an alert is verified, Storyful staff start using technology to continuously search sources like Youtube or Facebook for content on the news event. The following verification process is a mixture of "old-fashioned journalism with the human eye" and technology, says Wardle.

### 6.3 Verifying information in real time

The problem with verification for live blogging has probably less to do with who the source is and more to do with the speed under which the verification must be done. Sometimes, it is not done at all. Instead, readers are taken into the journalistic process of work and the journalist's doubts are clearly presented, says *the Guardian's* Paul Owen:

**"The Middle East live blog has given us the most headaches. I think the key is you have got to always be honest and open with the reader. If you are faced with somebody sending you pictures and video which you are unable to 100 per cent verify, but you think this is newsworthy and you think this is worth passing on to the reader and saying 'look, I can not verify, but it is the kind of thing that is coming in now.' I think it is worth doing."<sup>47</sup>**

There are techniques for verifying material, with for example Google Maps (with its Street view function), but the time and date of which the video or photo was taken is the hardest to confirm. Tools like data search engine Wolfram Alpha could possibly be of help. On Storyful's website<sup>48</sup> it is used in an example as a way of concluding what the weather situation was at a certain time and event shown in a Youtube video.

The BBC relies to a certain extent on the technical verifications of user-generated content (UGC), and on the local knowledge of their multi-national staff. At *Aftonbladet*, Christina Nordh says that UGC is checked like any other source, but mentions extreme traffic

situation live blogs as an example of when verification of UGC is more or less done by readers themselves.

**"If someone says that this-and-this road is blocked up, the reporter can say: 'I am getting information here that this road is blocked – how does it look to you?' Then it is reader participation and source verification at the same time."**<sup>49</sup>

## 6.4 Losing the (narrative) thread

When reading a live blog, no matter how many summaries the reporter has taken time to do, there is always a risk of being thrown into something that does not make any sense. It is built-in in the format. Thurman and Newman show that 28 per cent of UK readers thought live blogs could be difficult to understand because of their formatting. Considering that the office is one place where news consumers prefer to read live blogs, and that they will be popping in and out of the text over the work day, this probably presents a bigger issue for live blogs than for other formats.<sup>50</sup> Martin Schori, online editor at *Aftonbladet*, recognises that and says that readers have complained from time to time:

**"Sometimes you barely know what the bottom line of the story is."**<sup>51</sup>

**"It is clear that at the margins, live blogs are likely to be slightly less accurate than a conventional article."**

## 6.5 Resources

Having one or two reporters working on a live blog for an eight hour-shift takes away resources from other work. These reporters could perhaps, had they not been tied-up live blogging, have written a number of articles instead. This is probably a sign that news articles might decrease slightly in numbers because of live blogs.

BBC's Steve Herrmann thinks it is the biggest issue facing live blogging and says the broadcaster sometimes prioritizes resources away from secondary stories in favour of a live blog:

**"It has not presented a major problem so far. We have normally been able to make on the day-decisions which allow us to cover the ratio of stories we need to."**<sup>52</sup>

## 6.6 Dependency On Other Media: Aggregation as Reportage

The reason why the live blog can be seen as a new journalistic format is not its 'live-ness' per se. That has been done by broadcasting media since early last century. The novelty lies in the blog part of the term. Live blogs are networked journalism: the use of aggregated material plus editorial narrative. Some of this – UGC and social media aggregation – was covered in the last chapter. Another, quite big, part, some of which is channeled through social media, is other mainstream media content.

Andrew Sparrow at *the Guardian* says that he does very little proactive journalism, as in ringing people up and interviewing them. Instead, he focuses on providing an overview of his subject by monitoring what politicians are saying on broadcast media, parliamentary settings, committees or press conferences:

**"I am not generating a great deal of individual content. But my sense is that the value is actually pulling together all the stuff that is out there for someone who does not have time to do it themselves."**<sup>53</sup>

Paul Owen says that he tends to be very dependent on the wires, TV news and rival media sources. Writing a live blog, he says, is not a question of going out there and getting the story in a traditional way:

**"I think that's just more honest in a live blog. There are plenty of news stories in the paper every day that are built on wire copy, with one or two original interviews interspersed at the top."**<sup>54</sup>

However, there are exceptions on the dependency of other media. Live blogging from sports events, concerts and, even some news events, like trials, is akin to conventional reportage.

Live blogs are definitely more dependent on other media, but also on the newspaper's own correspondents.

## 6.7 Better Quality?

Good journalism will always be mainly about presenting facts. Doing this requires verification of sources and facts. It is clear that at the margins, live blogs are likely to be slightly less accurate than a conventional article. Yet readers do not seem too worried. In the study by Thurman and Newman, slightly more respondents (35 per cent) were unconcerned about a lack of accuracy in live blogs than concerned (27 per cent).

Live blogs are more well-sourced than normal news articles. In a live blog covering the Navy yard shootings<sup>55</sup>, *the Guardian* refers to 29 different sources (including 11 Twitter accounts), among them national TV, local newspapers, individual reporters, US authorities and one Twitter user at the scene. In the newspaper's conventional news article on the same subject from the same date<sup>56</sup>, the number of sources quoted are 16.

According to Thurman and Walters, readers at *the Guardian's* website appreciated "the balance that they believed the mix of sources provided." Live blogs were, according to the study, seen as "more factual" than conventional news articles that were seen as more "polemical" or "opinion based". Perhaps this has to do with the fact that British newspapers are politically slanted. Thurman and Newman<sup>57</sup> showed that

40 per cent of readers agreed that live blogs are more balanced than articles because of the range of opinions they report and their links to sources.

So it seems that mainstream journalists writing live blogs are verifying facts and sources as they always have done with traditional journalistic skills, now complemented by new technology. Claire Wardle says it might even be harder to fool journalists nowadays:

**"Journalists have always had to double check sources. In many ways I think verification standards have improved now that people are so aware of how easy it can be to be duped."**<sup>58</sup>

In a live blog journalists may end up relying more on already known and trusted sources – which could perhaps contribute to a limited source spectrum. Each event is a learning process, says Haynes:

**"During the Boston bombings there were Reuters journalists that tweeted things that just were not true, so we have become a little bit more cautious. I think everyone is doing it, trusting people they know they can trust."**<sup>59</sup>

By being more transparent in their linking to sources, it could be argued that live blogs tend to put some of that journalistic responsibility onto the readers. *Aftonbladet* has recently made it possible for readers to live stream TV directly onto their site, for example. The newspaper also gives a series of instructions<sup>60</sup> to readers, regarding ethics and how to respect privacy when taking photographs, in its tipping-off page in its app and online, as does *the Guardian*<sup>61</sup>.

There are small signs that the live blogs' disclaimers regarding unsure facts have made it into other formats. In at least one news article<sup>62</sup> published online during the Boston Marathon bombings, *Aftonbladet* put in a disclaimer at the end of the text saying "The text is updated continuously. This is ongoing news and some information is still unverified."

Readers are now not just expected to be citizen journalists, or accidental journalists, when contributing content – but also when consuming the content. The reader now has to act like an editor.

"By being more transparent in their linking to sources, it could be argued that live blogs tend to put some of that journalistic responsibility on to the readers."



## 7. Readers and the live blog

Readers certainly appreciate live blogs when it comes to balance. 62 per cent agree that live blogs are a convenient way to follow news at work.<sup>63</sup> In one study reader contributions made up 21 to 50 per cent. In live blogs on the Boston Marathon bombings, 21 per cent, Wimbledon 2013, 50 per cent, 2012-13 Egypt Protests, 27 per cent and the birth of Prince George, 27 per cent.

Historically, Paul Owen at *the Guardian* says that he found readers “quite sceptical” towards the format of live blogs, but that he thinks they like the format now. Then again, maybe *the Guardian*’s readers have a sort of hate-love relationship with live blogs. It has certainly come to the point of it being a public joke that *the Guardian* live blogs everything, says Jonathan Haynes:

**“Often on Twitter, there will be a person going ‘oh my God, is *the Guardian* live blogging this?’ and then ‘Oh God, they are.’ And of course we are.”<sup>64</sup>**

At *Aftonbladet*, mostly positive reactions towards the format of live blogging have been noticed by staff – unlike e-mails about articles, where attitude is more negative, says Martin Schori:

**“Especially when you have done it for several hours and writes ‘ok, thanks for this, time for me to go now’ – then a lot of people thank you back.”<sup>65</sup>**

### 7.1 Dealing with readers’ contributions at the *Guardian* and *Aftonbladet*

*Aftonbladet* recommend that their reporters reply to readers’ comments included in the live blog. The same applies at *the Guardian*, according to Andrew Sparrow. Sparrow does not often include readers’ comments above the line in his live blog because he feels that it is hard to choose which ones to include, but says that he does reply below the line:

**“there is a question of how much time you have got to reply to them. My normal working rule is if anyone asks a direct question that is polite and sensible, I will almost always reply. If people are being flippant or frivolous or rude, I tend not to.”<sup>66</sup>**

Andreas Aspegren was head of reader participation at *Aftonbladet* before he became head of online. He says that the tone in the readers’ comments will usually be more pleasant if they are replied to. He also thinks newspapers sometimes overestimate readers’ willingness to participate, and mentions live chats that have not generated as many questions as expected:

**“There are all sorts, of course. But you must not forget that there are probably occasions when we might think it more fun to live blog than the readers do.”<sup>67</sup>**

Live blogs at *Aftonbladet* and *the Guardian* do provide more participatory and interactive journalism than other text formats at the newspapers. The interaction between reporters and readers in the live blog is similar to when newspaper staff interact with their readers on social media sites. So is live blogging perhaps the newspaper’s way of bringing that interaction home, to their own sites? To get that same social engagement on their own sites could certainly improve the relationship between the newspaper and its readers and probably form lucrative loyalty bonds, in terms of readers staying for a longer period of time on the newspaper’s site, something that could in turn increase ad revenues.

**“So is live blogging perhaps the newspaper’s way of bringing that interaction home, to their own sites?”**





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## 8. The future of live blogging

Live blogging may be an interesting format today – but will it be so in the future?

### 8.1 News agency live blogs

Several news agencies have recently launched live blogging services, Tidningarnas telegrambyrå (TT) and Agence France Presse (AFP) are two examples. News agency live blogs do not seem to affect the diversity in the overall flora of live blogs. Being more business-to-business, they do not interact with readers in their live blogs and they also proof-read posts.

AFP seems to aim their service towards sites like Yahoo, rather than replacing live blogs at newspaper sites, and TT allows newspapers to include their own content for adding local flavour and to interact with readers.

Another concern could be the potential risk of news agencies locking up content in their live blogs. However, Katherine Haddon, head of online at AFP's London office, says they are "in no way a replacement for the wire."

### 8.2 Twitter takes over?

Earlier this year, *Guardian* CEO Andrew Miller said that social media now stands for 10 per cent of incoming traffic, most of which comes from Twitter.<sup>68</sup> A Pew Research Center study, conducted in August-September 2013,<sup>69</sup> showed that 8 per cent of US adults get news through Twitter. Compared to the 30 per cent of US adults who get their news from Facebook, Twitter news consumers are younger, better educated and more mobile – ie, a more attractive audience for advertisers.

Twitter has recently recruited some top name journalists directly from mainstream media<sup>70</sup>: NBC's chief digital officer Vivian Schiller as Head of News partnerships, former *Guardian* data editor Simon Rogers as data editor for Twitter and the *Guardian*'s communities and social editor Joanna Geary as news partnerships manager. It remains to see where this will take Twitter, but

overall, it seems safe to say that Twitter is acting more like a news organisation.

But will Twitter retain its primary role as a means of distributing news? Digital strategist Nic Newman thinks not, and says the main challenge for Twitter is increasing its content and not just being used as a route into mainstream media. This is something that has recently been done, with photos and videos appearing in the stream since late October 2013.

So is Twitter posing a threat to live blogs as a format? In terms of the amount of content and the speed at which it is added, yes. Mainstream media has rights issues for the inclusion of video and pictures – whereas on Twitter, photographic content is put up in real time, leaving the live blogs of news organisations a step behind.

Live blogs have some features that Twitter in its current form cannot compete with. For example, the authored live blog; the 'voice' of a newspaper and the credibility that comes with the brand. Paul Owen also points out that unless Twitter were to give up its format – the 140 character limit – he does not see how it could cover things in depth. Also, he thinks news consumers still want a filter or editor:

**"People still want somebody to say these ten things are the important things you need to know about this story. Whereas Twitter says, here are a million things, judge for yourself."<sup>71</sup>**

### 8.3 The format of the future – blog or stream?

All the journalists interviewed for this report think that the live blog will survive and develop. Its popularity and usability among news consumers suggests it is a format we will see more of in the future.

As part of the constant changes and improvements in digital media, the format of live blogs will continue to evolve. One possibility mentioned by Beckett<sup>72</sup> is that of the news site front page becoming a live blog. ITV News<sup>73</sup> have put that into practice since March 2012, although they recently started to add more traditionally formatted articles. Andrew Sparrow at *the Guardian* talks about the front page as a live blog:

**"All the journalists interviewed for this paper think that the live blog will survive and develop."**

Another variation of this way of presenting news is an “incremental” form of reporting news. A stream could include more elements, such as Instagram photos, readers’ avatars, and more aggregated content from Facebook and Google plus. Steve Herrmann at the BBC compares it to the way Twitter deals with news, in incremental additions of information in a linear stream. This would differ from today’s live blog – which is typically authored and focuses on one story or subject.

More visual content also poses new challenges for the live blog format when it comes to design. Claire Wardle says she thinks the live blog in general is still relatively ugly:

Well, media companies keep trying. At the BBC, a new, enhanced live page is under way. Staff are working on a new format to “make live coverage of big events and stories more than the sum of its parts,” says Steve Herrmann. Features include an intelligent video player that rewinds and allow users to go back for key moments (used earlier during the Olympic)

Claire Wardle says news organisations are still experimenting with live blogs but they are here to stay:

Vicktor Olsson at TT has similar high hopes for the live blog as a traffic generator. Perhaps it is part of a solution to mainstream media's biggest challenge – how to finance journalism:

**"Everyone is still looking for the Holy Grail. The general hunch is that it has something to do with digital services. I see [live blogging] as part of the solution, but the jury has still not delivered its verdict."<sup>77</sup>**

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## 9. Conclusion: Key questions, answers and challenges

The two main questions of this study were:

- Does live blogging give us more diverse, well-sourced, deeper, more participatory, interactive, accurate, accessible journalism?
- Does the format offer any promising prospects for the future or is it merely a passing trend – and what are the challenges for journalists and media companies who work with them?

The short answer to the first question is that there are of course good examples of live blogs as well as bad examples, as in all journalism. So the answer is yes – but not without reservations.

### **Diversity:**

It could be argued that live blogs are more diverse in presenting a wider range of sources but less diverse by being more dependent on other media and focusing less on original reporting.

### **Sources:**

Live blogs are better at sourcing by presenting a wider range of sources and letting readers access the original source with the use of hyperlinks. They are less 'well-sourced' in that these are not always thoroughly verified.

### **Depth:**

Live blogs create a long-form by their own narrative legacy. By focusing on the immediate they strengthen the complementary impact of a properly constructed self-standing long-form article. A live blog certainly provides more information than the standard 600 word article.

### **Participation:**

Live blogs are certainly more participatory and interactive than other standard news formats. They are more accessible than other formats in the sense that it is easy to dip in for a quick news update now and then, for example at the office, and they are also suitable for providing news updates via the push function on smart phones. They could be considered less accessible in the sense of sometimes lacking in a clear narrative structure.

### **Transparency:**

The most important thing about live blogs is their transparency. They can take readers into the journalistic process and leave them with the responsibility to judge for themselves. They still take greater responsibility than a social media platform like Twitter because they try to provide a journalistic filter of information. The best

will be clearest and most honest with their readers about their process as it happens.

### **Future?:**

Which leads us on to question number two – the future? All answers from interviewees in this study points to the conclusion that live blogs are a format that is here to stay. The format is well adjusted to the preferences of both news consumers and news producers, probably more so than other new formats. *The New York Times* outstanding multi-media 'Snowfall' narrative takes time and a lot of technical resources to produce, whereas a live blog is relatively quick to launch.

The format of the live blog is not without challenges – there are three that stand out as more important:

### **Narrative:**

Firstly, there is the problem of the narrative structure, the problem of keeping up with it during a fast changing news story and making it possible for readers to grasp immediately what is going on.

### **Resources:**

Secondly, a live blog that goes on for a longer period of time can take up a lot of human resources. In times where media companies all over the world are downsizing, it takes good planning to calculate when to launch a live blog and when to choose another format, for providing the best and most efficient journalism to readers.

### **Verification:**

The third challenge is that of verifying sources and making the right decisions on what information to release when a news story is moving at a fast pace. Some mistakes can be corrected afterwards without any harm being done, some cannot. Guidelines for reporters, who to a great extent publish their own blog posts, are used at both newspapers studied in this report. The news agency staff interviewed say that all content passes through an editor, or at the very least, another reporter takes a second look at it. Still, the fast pace at which a live blog is produced and the adrenaline rush a lot of journalists experience when dealing with breaking news could overthrow these guidelines. That is the part of the journalistic responsibility that cannot be transferred onto the news consumer – and perhaps, therefore, the biggest challenge to deal with when it comes to live blogging.

“... there are of course good examples of live blogs as well as bad examples, as in all journalism.”

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://publish.tt-gruppen.com/2013/02/08/tts-nyhetschef-vicktor-olsson-vi-kan-ha-ett-livflode-igang-inom-nagon-minut/>
- <sup>2</sup> Mainstream media and the distribution of news in the age of social discovery, Nic Newman, September 2011
- <sup>3</sup> Personal communication, October 23, 2013
- <sup>4</sup> E-mail interview, October 2013.
- <sup>5</sup> Thurman, Neil and Walters, Anna (2013) Live blogging – Digital Journalism’s Pivotal Platform? A Case Study of the Production, Consumption and Form of Live Blogs at Guardian.co.uk. Digital Journalism 1(1), 82-101.
- <sup>6</sup> Thurman and Walters found four distinct types of live blogs. They are divided into: News, Sport, Series/ Subject and Other Scheduled Event. News has subcategories: Scheduled news, Semi-scheduled news, Completely unscheduled news and Major breaking news.
- <sup>7</sup> <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/jultrafik/article14114556.ab>
- <sup>8</sup> Paul Owen, personal communication, October 21, 2013
- <sup>9</sup> Thurman and Walters, 2013
- <sup>10</sup> E-mail interview, October 2013
- <sup>11</sup> Thurman and Walters, 2013
- <sup>12</sup> The figures from the study uses the definition “Minimum aggregated minutes on page over 24 hours”. For exact number, see Figure 1 and Figure 2 in the conference paper The future of breaking news online?, presented at Future of journalism conference, University of Cardiff, 12-13 September 2013, Neil Thurman and Nic Newman
- <sup>13</sup> Neil Thurman, personal communication, October 2013
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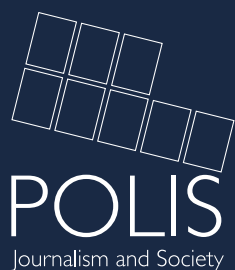
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