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### **The Story of Egypt:**

Journalistic impressions of a revolution and new media power

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MSc in Politics and Communication

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**Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications,  
London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2011, in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Politics and Communication.  
Supervised by Professor Lilie Chouliaraki.**

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"),  
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# **The Story of Egypt:**

## **Journalistic impressions of a revolution and new media power**

**Thomas Ledwell**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In January 2011 the Egyptian people rose up against their autocratic rulers during an eighteen-day standoff that ended with the resignation of the Egyptian President. As per usual, foreign correspondents from around the world were there to tell the story. Even as traditional journalists spoke of the events in Tahrir Square—the centre of the protest—citizen journalists were simultaneously uploading images, testimonies, and spreading word of what was happening. This collision of old and new media is the focus of this study. Social and historical circumstances saw the emergence of the model of objective journalism that has dominated newsrooms for a century. This work explores how the Digital Age has changed both the journalistic playing field and journalistic power. There is a growing consensus the new media environment is changing journalism, the question is in what ways?

This question is explored through in-depth interviews with foreign correspondents from a variety of institutions that covered the revolution. Critical Discourse Analysis investigates the power structures within the hegemonic journalistic discourse. The study finds professional journalists acknowledge the importance of new media, but stand firm that objectivity is needed in journalism. Journalists recognize the value of citizen content as information, but remain sceptical of its news value, discursively maintaining their role as news gatekeepers. This thesis fosters an understanding of the interactions between traditional and citizen journalists as journalism reaches a turning point in its history as new media production is challenging objectivity and restructuring journalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

On 25 January 2011, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo for a ‘Day of Rage’ (Blight and Pulham, 2011) against President Hosni Mubarak’s autocratic regime that had governed the country for three decades.<sup>1</sup> Popular protests in Tunisia had just led to the ouster of the Ben Ali government there, and Egypt threatened to become the next country engulfed in the wave of popular protests that cascaded across the Arab world over the course of the ‘Arab Spring’ (Blight and Pulham, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The Egyptian protests were neither spontaneous nor unorganised. For years, opposition voices had used blogs and other content on the Internet to express discontent (Hofheinz, 2005). The 25 January protests were organized and initially coordinated through the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said,” a rallying cry paying tribute to a young man killed by government security forces (England and Saleh, 2011).<sup>3</sup> As the eyes of the world turned to Egypt, media organizations despatched foreign correspondents to cover events for their audiences back home. Even before most of those correspondents arrived, the first chapter of Egypt’s story was being told through words and images captured by citizens, launched to Internet audiences around the world. Traditional journalists and on-air personalities were quick to comment on the role of new media in perpetuating the protests, countless websites featuring examples such as mobile images of the word Facebook graffitied, like a revolutionary slogan, on alley walls.

However, the discourse remained entrenched in the notion that the information being shared was simply that: information. The mainstream media have regarded the new media environment with curiosity, but rarely have framed citizen-generated content as journalism. Why not? Sharing first-hand experience with an audience is at the core of the journalistic profession and is foreign correspondents’ *raison d’être* (Muhlmann, 2008[2004])). This dissertation explores how foreign correspondents perceive the changing definitions of journalism and journalists in the collision of traditional and new media through the context of the Egyptian revolution. Examining correspondents’ discourse, this study investigates the social and historical circumstances that have created a hegemonic perspective entrenching objectivity at the heart of professional journalism.

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<sup>1</sup> For a timeline of events during the Egyptian revolution consult Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> The *Guardian* website features interactive timeline about uprisings across the Arab World.

<sup>3</sup> The Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said” can be found here: [www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk](http://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk).

While Egypt is not the first place new media has played an integral role in a global media event (Iran and Mumbai are highlighted in Hermida, 2010), it is a particularly interesting example for this discussion. First, during the Egyptian revolution, Cairo's Tahrir Square became the focal point and symbolic centre of the protests and, therefore, of mainstream media coverage. This concentrated, shared physical space embodied the collision of old and new media that underpins Henry Jenkins' notion of 'convergence culture' (2006). Another important factor shaping the Egyptian case was the government's shutdown of mobile phone networks and virtually all Internet access in the country (BGPMon, 2011), leaving journalists and citizens alike without access to new media platforms. This creates an opening in which to discuss the integral role of the new media environment. Finally, the revolution spanned a relatively short period between 25 January 2011 and Mubarak's resignation on 11 February 2011, allowing it to maintain uninterrupted prominence in international news headlines. Correspondents assigned to the story covered the revolution from its earliest days to its conclusion, sharing the protesters' physical and online environment, allowing a unique collision of old and new media for this dissertation to interrogate.

The influence of the Internet in Egypt's opposition movement has been the subject of several academic discussions, particularly following an earlier round of anti-government protests in 2005 (Hofheinz, 2005).<sup>4</sup> However, the 2011 Egyptian revolution is still far too fresh to have been fully analyzed by theoreticians. This presents an opportunity for new research. In addition to exploring a case study, this study examines broader trends within professional journalism, particularly the ways in which journalism is being influenced by new media in the context of internationally significant events. The broader literature focuses on how professional journalists understand and characterize changes within their profession and find, for instance, that even as journalists praise the importance of citizen-generated content, they are reluctant to accept these acts of witnessing (Chouliaraki, 2010) as acts of journalism. Other studies have looked more broadly at new media's influence over journalism and resulting changes within newsrooms (Markham, 2011; Singer and Ashman, 2009; Hermida and Thurman, 2007). Yet others have incorporated interviews and first-person accounts from journalists into works examining traditional journalism in the new media environment (Beckett, 2008; Schudson, 1995; Matheson and Allan, 2009; Hannerz, 2004). To contribute to the growing understanding of how journalism is changing in the Digital Age, this dissertation focuses particularly on foreign correspondents reporting the Egyptian revolution to Western audiences.

Almost a century ago, journalist Walter Lippmann opined: ‘all the reporters in the world working all the hours of the day could not witness all the happenings in the world’ (Lippmann, 1922: 195). The tools of new media, coupled with the various spaces of the Internet, seemingly change that. Even as foreign correspondents have become an endangered species thanks to economic realities and changing journalistic audiences (McNair , 2005), everyday citizens are filling the gap by telling stories from around the world. Sometimes vaguely called ‘amateur’ or ‘accidental’ journalists (Matheson and Allan, 2009), these *citizen journalists* witness world events and share their experience. Many professional journalists hold firm in their conviction *they*, not citizen reporters, are the gatekeepers of the news, but the reality is that the journalist’s role has changed. The pertinent question for this study is *why* journalists are reluctant to recognize new forms of journalism as part of their profession.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Hofheinz, American media coined “Arab Spring” in 2005 after governments in several Arab countries took democratizing steps. This term was reused during the wave of protests in 2011.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical literature reviewed for this dissertation is concerned mainly with the emergence of *objectivity* as a norm in American and other similar systems of journalism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). This work outlines a number of perspectives on the social and historical circumstances that allowed the dominant journalistic paradigm of our day—particularly its emphasis on institutionalised journalism—to rise to prominence during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The literature review highlights major points in the debate over new media's role in the contemporary media environment and its influence on journalism. Though later analyses focus exclusively on journalists' perspectives during the Egyptian revolution, this literature review examines the relationship between journalism and new media for both journalists and citizens. Most importantly, it explores the power structures embedded within the relationship between journalists and citizen journalists, focusing on how journalists' symbolic power has grown out of traceable historical processes (Bourdieu, 1998, 2010[1984]). Finally, it critically engages with theories regarding the nature of fundamental changes appearing within journalism itself.

### **The Roots of Journalistic Culture**

Professional journalism based on the objective reporting of facts grew slowly out of a number of processes tied to social and historical developments. The objectivity paradigm instructs its practitioners to follow facts and to present objective truth in the public interest. Though it has long been taken for granted that this is the only way to practise journalism, the paradigm has evolved over time. As Michael Schudson observes, 'Reporting is not an ancient art. It is a historically specific, historically created activity' (Schudson, 1995: 15; see also Deuze, 2006). Objectivity's roots grow out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Though newspapers had been rolling off presses for some time, most had been partisan and opinionated: vehicles for commentary rather than fact (Allan, 1999; Bourdieu, 1998). The move away from a journalism of commentary to one of 'truth' was in part due to technological advances. For example, the telegraph enabled a facts-first approach and built the model of the 'inverted pyramid,' which put a focus on facts by order of importance (Allan, 1999; Schudson, 2001). The telegraph was one among many social and technological changes that set journalism on the road to greater professionalism. It is notable that it helped change the way news was told, leading to the eventual emergence of the objectivity norm (Allan, 1999; Schudson, 2001; Pavlik, 2008). Much as the telegraph helped initiate change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so too is the influence of digital media among the challenges that promise to alter the contemporary journalistic paradigm.

The transition from partisan to objective reporting did not happen quickly. It took decades for objective journalism to take shape, and the move from opinion to fact-based reportage was not ‘a pure and simple rupture’ (Muhlmann, 2008 [2004]: 17). Even as late as the early 1920s, in reaction to the propagandistic journalistic models of World War One, journalist Walter Lippmann declared ‘a crisis in journalism’ (1920: 5). Lippman was among the most vocal advocates of a move towards objectivity in order to better represent the public interest. It is in light of that debate that Schudson observes ‘a self-conscious, articulate ideology of objectivity’ (2001: 160) within journalism, notably embraced by news editors in order to control their stables of reporters, especially their foreign correspondents.

Ever since, the parameters of the objectivity paradigm have remained nevertheless vague. As an institution integral to functioning democracies, journalism has been critiqued through the years by countless scholars. Some question exactly what constitutes journalism and what it means to be a journalist. Stuart Hall suggests that the inherent ‘news values’ and ‘news sense’ that journalists claim to possess is ‘one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All “true journalists” are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it’ (1973: 181). For Hall, this indicates a ‘deep structure’ within journalism. For others, journalists’ claim to an intangible form of knowledge that distinguishes them from everyday citizens is a constructed myth. Tuchman writes journalism has become defined by this ‘ritual of objectivity’ (1972). In her view, the strategy is designed to allow journalists to fend off attacks on their credibility.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, journalists remained committed to objectivity. Only in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did serious cracks begin to appear, at the same time as the Internet began leading a revolution within the media, ‘first as a phenomenon in itself, then as the terrain into which the traditional mass media moved’ (Dahlgren, 2009: 39). The Internet and digital media have accelerated changes in the way journalism works, leading to renewed calls of a ‘crisis’ in journalism (Scott, 2005; Fenton, 2010) and in the wider relationship between institutional media outlets and their audiences (Turner, 2010; Pavlik, 2008: 6). There are very few commentators (Morozov, 2011 and Scott, 2005) who continue to challenge the growing consensus that new media are transforming journalism and its professional culture.

### **Journalism as Culture**

More recently, scholars have looked at journalism as a culture: a system of shared *beliefs*, rather than strictly professional *practices* (Zelizer, 2005; Schudson 1995; Dahlgren 1992). This cultural perspective sheds light on who counts as a journalist. Sociologically, journalism’s professional culture dictates who may be considered—or who may consider



themselves—as part of the profession (Becker, 1984). Barbie Zelizer suggests using culture alone ‘as a way to understand journalism’ (2005: 199), since it can undercut the criteria that journalists employ for inclusion or exclusion from journalistic society. She points out that it took decades for photojournalists to be included as full members of the journalistic profession, and that many tabloid journalists are still excluded from full membership (Zelizer, 2005). The rise of new media has further complicated the question of membership. Peter Dahlgren writes, ‘who is and who is not a journalist in this context becomes increasingly fuzzy as a variety of information functions arise to sort, sift, and funnel data electronically in differing organizational and societal contexts’ (Dahlgren, 2009: 173). Given the ocean of content that citizen journalists are producing across varying platforms, new media are challenging definitions within institutional journalism. For now, citizen journalists occupy an ambiguous space within the cultural system.

Just as the definition of ‘journalist’ is growing fuzzy, so is the notion of ‘news.’ Schudson extends the cultural argument, suggesting the media are better understood ‘if we recognize that what they produce—news—is a form of culture’ (Schudson, 1995: 3). It is from the ability to include and exclude events from ‘the news’ that the journalistic profession draws its real power. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu suggests that the ‘journalistic field’ occupies a central role in society due in large part to its historical role as gatekeeper of the news. According to Bourdieu, “‘the journalist’ is an abstract entity that doesn’t exist’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 23). Rather, journalism itself has power owing to its ‘de facto monopoly on the large-scale informational instruments of production and diffusion of information’ (Ibid: 46). This monopoly over the means of production explains the roots of journalism’s gatekeeper role. However, new media tools in the Digital Age challenge this monopoly by dramatically lowering the technological barrier to entry (Castells, 2009). In spite of this shift, institutional journalism maintains its claim to be the sole gatekeeper. It provides the historically developed, social framework from which journalists draw the ‘symbolic power’ (Bourdieu, 1998, 2010[1984]) to make such claims. This helps to explain the ‘deeper structure’ within society upon which the profession is built; it may also explain why professional journalists are reluctant to embrace citizen journalists’ contributions. Exclusion is another means of professional self-protection.

### **Journalistic Claims to Power**

Bourdieu recognizes the journalistic field as an autonomous system unto itself, a field of activity with its own laws that ‘cannot be understood by looking only at external factors’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 39; Bourdieu 2010 [1984]). Other fields such as politics and economics influence and overlap with it, but it is a system unto itself, having grown out of a discrete set

of political, economic, and historical processes. Critics suggest that journalism is merely a mouthpiece for the fields of politics and commerce, deepening the uniformity of views within society (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This propaganda model, outlined by Herman and Chomsky, accuses institutional media of putting profits over public interest but has been criticized as being ‘misleading and mischievous’ (Schudson, 1995: 4). Though Bourdieu agrees that journalism often leads to uniformity—especially when increased competition within journalism breeds sameness rather than diversity (Bourdieu, 1998)—his argument is based on the distribution of power *within* the field, not entirely from external forces, as Chomsky and Herman contend. Inherent within journalism are power relations among all those who colonize the field. Symbolic power structures position different institutions within the field—the *New York Times*, for example, possesses much more symbolic capital than *The Buffalo News*—as well as the individuals who work within it—foreign correspondents occupy a more elite place than local reporters. If there is a common thread running through the critical literature on journalism, it is that universal elements within journalism ‘can be defined as a shared occupational ideology among newswriters which functions to self-legitimize their position in society’ (Deuze, 2005: 446; see also Schudson, 2001). Bourdieu’s reading of journalism goes some way to explain this social positioning and outlines a framework within which the occupation’s professional ideology is manifested.

The arrival of new media and the Digital Age does not necessarily change the power structures that define the field. As a dynamic historical creation, journalism necessarily adjusts and takes new forms. Therefore, the overall influence of these tools is limited (Benson, 2006). Of greater interest is the way in which journalists draw on the social capital of journalistic society. For Bourdieu, social capital is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 51). Within the culture of professional journalism, journalists recognize their shared experience and a commitment to a single professional standard embodied in institutionalized objectivity. This defines who is in and who is excluded from the journalist ‘club’. While Bourdieu defends a certain degree of elitism within journalism (Bourdieu, 1998; Markham, 2010), the existing ‘gatekeeping mechanism’ means that only certain individuals are accepted as members. Looking at citizen journalism through the Bourdieusian lens, Tim Markham suggests that it represents a distinct, emerging professional economy, separate from professional journalism (Markham, 2010). Not content to assume the inevitability of this separation, the discussion that follows highlights several points of intersection between professional and citizen journalists.

## **A Changing Journalistic Culture**

Institutional media no longer have exclusive claim to the means of journalistic production. While the field has sought to maintain its gatekeeping role, this is changing. Many within journalism itself acknowledge that the arrival of the Digital Age has initiated a fundamental shift within journalism and are preoccupied with predicting the form this new journalistic culture will take (Harding, 2009; Sambrook, 2010; Special Report: The News Industry, 2011; see also Beckett, 2008). One key factor to understanding the new culture is to recognize that old notions of one-to-many mass media communications have given way to a many-to-many media environment. The letters to the editor page, once the only outlet for audience participation, has been replaced by interactive spaces on the Internet and related social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube. The cost of technological tools such as phones and cameras is decreasing at the same time as global Internet access is increasing. This is a global trend, particularly notable in places such as Egypt (Dutta and Mia, 2011). In this technological environment, journalists have lost their monopoly over the means of sharing events with a wide audience. First-person witnessing in real-time is no longer the journalists' exclusive domain.

The shift to many-to-many communications has immense implications for journalism. Some call this a period of 'de-professionalization' in journalism (Ornebring, 2010; McIntosh, 2005; Turner, 2010). Internet evangelists have declared that everyone has the potential to be a journalist (Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2008). The most vocal advocates of this position have been quick to declare that power has already shifted from institutional journalism to citizen journalists (Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2008), as media consumers have been transformed into 'producers' (Bruns, 2007). While this participatory journalistic culture is hailed as potentially creating better journalism, claims that citizens have usurped journalists are premature. The universalized potential may ultimately have limited influence on the journalistic field itself (Benson, 2006); however, the reorganization of the power and players within the field is threatening the power of journalists vis-à-vis 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen, 2008). The structure of the journalistic profession is changing, but there is no consensus as to what shape the new professional culture will take.

Brian McNair (2005) argues that the objectivity-based journalism that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century has given way to a 'chaos paradigm.' From that chaos, order has begun to emerge. Perhaps the best descriptor of the collision of new and old media is 'convergence culture' (Jenkins, 2006). This inclusive media culture is both a 'top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process' (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008: 6). According to Jenkins and Deuze, it has had a decentring effect on journalism; as it 'has concentrated the power of

traditional gatekeepers and agenda setters and in other ways, it has disintegrated their tight control over our culture' (2008: 6). Convergence culture has far-reaching implications, affecting both the production and the consumption of media (Deuze, 2009). It identifies changes in the day-to-day reality of journalism, yet acknowledges that journalists maintain their integral role in the process of creating and deciding what is news. Citizen journalists have not yet wrested power from institutional journalism; indeed, there is little evidence to suggest power is this changeable group's aim. Some caution that journalistic authority will never really shift, as corporations find ways to co-opt participatory online spaces (Mansell, 2004; McChesney, 2000). Still, claims that the promises of participatory forms of journalism are 'false prophecy' (Scott, 2005: 111) have been both premature and a step too far. As illustrated by the Arab Spring, it was the use of new media tools to organize protests that led to the toppling of long-standing autocratic governments (England and Saleh, 2011). There are few better examples of real power enabled by new media.

### **Power Shifts and Changing Norms**

Castells (2009) suggests that the move towards 'mass self-communication' is fundamentally changing the relationship between everyday individuals and the institutions that once dominated the communications infrastructure and means of cultural production. Within Castells' 'network society', the centres of power are in *communication nodes*: positions that are no longer exclusively the domain of institutional media. As Castells puts it, '*power is not located in one particular social sphere or institution, but it is distributed throughout the entire realm of human action*' (2009: 15, emphasis in original). The degree of this power shift within journalism has been overstated by its greatest advocates (Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2008), but citizen journalists' greater access to the means of journalistic production has granted them more power than ever before. An important distinction here is that the goals of many citizen journalists are different from those of institutional media. In Egypt, the use of online tools such as Facebook and Twitter pulled disparate individuals together under the banner of protest. As audiences fragment into 'multiple public spheres' (Dahlgren, 2009; Livingstone, 2005) in online spaces and their power grows more diffuse, the Arab Spring demonstrates the ability of new media to draw people from various corners of society together in temporary and unstructured ways (Chouliaraki, 2010). While these actions appear to be more activism than journalism, they share a common ground: the act of witnessing in the public interest. Though the Egyptian government had long been accused of injustices, it was images of the disfigured face of a young man killed by security forces, disseminated via the Internet, that inspired the Facebook page that then helped initiate

Egypt's 25 January demonstrations (England and Saleh, 2011).<sup>5</sup> As a call to action, this method shares many values with journalism.

As Michael Mann writes, 'power is the ability to pursue and attain goals through the mastery of one's environment' (cited in Castells, 2009: 13). One can argue that the success of the Egyptian revolution illustrates a masterful use of the online environment to organize citizens and have real effects in the physical world. By extension, citizen journalism is also often characterized as a 'mastery of perceived amateurism' (Markham, 2010: 3). It is notable that some citizen journalists identify themselves in opposition to professional journalism and embrace their position as outsiders. However, drawing a dichotomous distinction between professional and amateur content risks ignoring the pivotal influence that each has on the other. Still, theorists emphasize the fact that citizen journalism 'differs in some essential way from professional journalism' (Matheson and Allan, 2009: 147). Throughout the literature (Muhlmann, 2008[2004], Matheson and Allan, 2009; Markham, 2010, 2011), there is evidence that this essential difference derives from the fact that journalistic authority no longer hinges on the 'official' telling of a story, but rather on authentic experiences. The ability to easily share images and videos enables amateurs to share their experiences with others around the world (Muhlmann, 2008[2004]), giving them some of the authority previously reserved for institution-backed professionals.

Audiences search for varied and 'real' experience in new media spaces, and the growing authority of the 'ordinary voice' is changing the nature of journalistic witnessing (Chouliaraki, 2010). Institutional journalism increasingly includes real people as a form of 'demotic authenticity' (Turner, 2010: 8). Those who hold that journalism is undergoing a period of 'de-professionalization' take a negative view that implies it is de-structuring. Other writers contend that there appears to be a 're-structuring,' as Markham (2010: 2) aptly puts it. Citizen journalists who witness are endowed with significant symbolic power by virtue of the power of the journalistic field. Commensurately, the journalistic profession is striving to portray more authentic experiences. A paradigm of authenticity is vaulting over the norm of objectivity, changing the journalistic paradigm and forcing journalists to relinquish some of their power and authority as the creators and determiners of news.

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<sup>5</sup> The *Financial Times* website limits access to articles online. Subscription may be required to view this source.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research sits in the body of literature that describes the changing state of journalism and attempts to identify the discursive characteristics of its emerging forms. While the Egyptian revolution is the example by which this discussion is framed, the question applies beyond the case study, interrogating a deep-rooted challenge to institutional journalists as gatekeepers of the news.

Bourdieu's journalistic field (2010[1984], 1998) is a useful frame in which to consider how journalism operates and accounts for social and historical changes applying a constructionist approach in the Foucauldian tradition (Hall, 1997; Foucault 1980). Objectivity, Bourdieu writes, is not an unchangeable meta-structure (Schudson 2001, see also Allan 1999). As Schudson suggests, 'the practical utility of having *some* norm – does not explain why this norm, the objectivity norm, came to dominate' (2001: 165). Looking to the future, there is no reason to suggest that norm cannot change. For instance, Hall's elaborations of notions of 'news values' and 'news sense' (1973) tends to support Bourdieu's theory; these phrases are invocations of journalists' *habitus*—their shared ways of being (Bourdieu, 1977; Markham, 2010)—and begin to explain the underpinnings of their professional culture.

The Digital Age has unequivocally changed the way that media are produced, disseminated, and consumed (Deuze, 2009). This has a dramatic effect on journalistic culture in particular, and media culture more generally. The frameworks most employed here are Castells' (2009) 'network society' and Jenkins' (2006) 'convergence culture.' Each speaks to key elements of this study. Thus, the primacy of communication in Castells' work is tied to the broader implications of these new media forms within society, while Jenkins' convergence culture offers the best model for the participatory journalistic culture that is still taking shape. As the mechanisms of journalistic production become ubiquitous, challenges to journalistic culture are coming from both external social forces and internal shifts in the field's normative discourse.

Power is an integral part of the discourse on professional journalism and the challenge to its gatekeeping role in the Digital Age. Castells' theory of communication power is of great value here (2009). Once again, Bourdieu's journalistic field informs the discussion of power and journalism, particularly the symbolic power that allows journalists to claim authority over the content of the news (2010[1984], 1998). As audiences fragment, the journalistic ideal of objective reporting is giving way to different values and alternative frameworks. The most notable new paradigm is authenticity. Few dispute that the *real* experience of bearing witness is an important component of citizen journalism. Theoreticians only speculate whether

authenticity is becoming entrenched in journalism's day-to-day professional realities. Authenticity is critically explored and discussed in terms of its growing importance within professional journalism in the context of Muhlmann's (2008[2004]) theory of journalistic witnessing, and how it is changing in the Digital Age.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

Drawing from the literature outlined above, this research examines changing power structures within journalistic culture and how new media is challenging that culture's existing norms. Through the perceptions of foreign correspondents, it examines the hegemonic discourse of professional journalists and explores their symbolic power within the Bourdieusian journalistic field at a moment of historical change. The study engages with challenges to journalistic authority and attempts to identify the new structures and norms that are emerging.

Using the Egyptian revolution as the empirical setting for this examination, the overarching questions are:

- Why must journalists commit to objectivity?
- How is citizen journalism influencing traditional journalistic storytelling?
- How is the role of traditional journalism changing?
- Who may be considered a journalist in this new media environment?

The answers to these questions help inform the ultimate research question:

**In their experience covering Egypt's revolution, how do foreign correspondents perceive the influence of new media over professional journalism?**

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Rationale**

Traditional and citizen journalists used words and images to tell the story of the Egyptian revolution across a wide variety of media platforms. The revolution was a particularly apt expression of convergence culture, in that the story was told from multiple perspectives. The primary goal of this study is to investigate how new media influenced the practical and cultural realities of traditional journalism during these events by looking at how journalists conceive of themselves as journalists, and how they perceive acts of journalism performed by everyday citizens using new media.

To explore this, I interviewed several foreign correspondents that had descended on Cairo to tell the story of the revolution to their Western audiences.<sup>6</sup> Interviews focus on the journalists' experiences to 'obtain descriptions of the interviewees' [in this case, the journalists'] lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of a described phenomena (*sic*)' (Kvale, 2007: 11) and gain an authentic understanding of their experience (Silverman, 2001). This study also investigates the journalistic *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977; see Markham 2011): the deep-rooted, shared sensibilities embedded in the professional culture of traditional journalists. The goal is to reveal beliefs and to explore the socio-cultural power structures that shape the relationship between traditional and citizen journalists. Throughout, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals the discursive constitution of social identities and social relations (Fairclough, 1992; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999).

### **Interviewing**

Though protests took place in cities across Egypt, the focal point of the story was Cairo's Tahrir Square. I at first considered interviewing both foreign correspondents and citizen journalists—such as Egyptian-based bloggers—for their impressions of one another. However, this approach was too broad. Instead, I performed semi-structured interviews with foreign correspondents from Western media organizations in order to delve more deeply into their impressions and experiences with new media in the context of the Egyptian revolution.

This methodological approach applies the tenets of Holstein and Gubrium's 'active interview' (1995). The qualitative interviews explore the uncharted territory of the particular and unique context surrounding events in Tahrir Square, paying special attention to ways in which responses from traditional journalists are 'narratively constructed' (Holstein and

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<sup>6</sup> Some of these interviews were discussed in a pilot study submitted to the LSE Media Department in May 2011.



Gubrium, 1995: 56). This accords with the notion that, in the interview setting, the interviewer and the respondent are engaged in the ‘production of knowledge’ (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000:45). From a Foucauldian perspective, all knowledge is discursively produced and entangled in relations of power (Foucault, 1980). This is of note for a project that probes the power structures within the Bourdieusian journalistic field. Journalists’ symbolic power is key to protecting their gatekeeping role. The interviews and subsequent CDA together reveal the depth of the journalistic *habitus*, beyond the lived experience of the individual journalists.

Each interviewee signed (in person or virtually) an agreement to be interviewed, including permission for the interview to be recorded and for the use their names, though the decision was later taken to provide anonymity. Each interview is transcribed in its entirety. Though this ‘necessarily imposes an interpretation on speech’ (Fairclough, 1992: 229), it was necessary in order to properly review the texts during later stages of analysis.

### **Alternative Methods**

In the early planning stages, I considered other methods of data collection. Surveys were impractical for time-pressed foreign correspondents and the format would not have allowed for probing questions. A focus group was logistically impossible: organizing a group of correspondents to come together at any one time was prohibited by the nature of their work, and choosing a representative sample required selecting journalists based in different countries. Also, focus groups would not have provided the desired depth as ‘the information obtained in focus groups reflects group opinions and attitudes rather than hidden beliefs’ (Berger, 1998: 56). While allowing depth of analysis, an ethnographic study would have meant abandoning plans to focus on events in Egypt. What’s more, recent ethnographic studies of journalists have already looked at the interactions between new and old media in a newsroom environment (for example, Singer and Ashman, 2009).

### **Research Design**

The flexible nature of the semi-structured interview is a benefit to mutual narrative construction. However, the interview poses ‘a persistent set of problems to be controlled’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 113). Flexibility requires constant reflection on one’s own influence over the process; simultaneously, it allows for more control over the data. The data presented here are based on an inductively grounded theoretical approach. While this means that research and analysis are an ongoing part of the process, ‘the combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fits grounded theory strategies for increasing the analytic incisiveness of the resultant analysis’ (Charmaz, 2003: 312). Planning

the interviews requires great attention to the process, especially the two building blocks of good interviewing: the recruitment of respondents and the interview topic guide (Gaskell, 2000).

In recruiting respondents, this study focuses exclusively on foreign correspondents from Western media organizations that covered the events in Cairo's Tahrir Square. Knowing that journalists from around the world were covering the Egyptian revolution, I deliberately recruited those who work for media companies in Canada, Britain, and the United States, taking into account the different journalistic traditions and styles in newsrooms around the world. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the media systems in these three countries are similar as they are driven by many of the same political, historical, and economic realities.

### *Selection of Respondents*

Though there is 'no one method for selecting respondents' (Gaskell, 2000: 42), my primary goal was a diverse sample, and I prioritized diversity over ease of access and in some cases waited weeks for the chance to perform interviews. Having worked as a journalist for almost a decade, including time as a foreign correspondent, my personal and professional networks include many journalists involved in covering the Egyptian uprising. While this made it easier to recruit respondents, it was constantly necessary to be conscious of my potential biases.

Recruiting respondents through my existing journalistic networks had the potential to influence interviews and resulting data in negative and positive ways. On the negative side, more than one interview respondent treated me as a fellow journalist rather than as a researcher from outside the industry. For example, they used industry jargon—'phoners' (telephone interviews) (Respondent 5) or 'sat links' (satellite links) (Respondent 3)—and conversational gambits such as 'you know what it's been like' (Respondent 1) or 'I'm really glad that we're journalists at this time' (Respondent 3). On the positive side, being considered as part of the group meant interviewees mulled over challenging questions on the nature of journalism rather than dismissing the questions as naive.

I interviewed five foreign correspondents. Though a relatively small sample, discourse analysis is less affected by sample size than other methods (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Each of the five correspondents is based in a different country—Britain, Canada, the Czech Republic, Egypt, or Israel—though all were educated in Canada, Britain, or the United States. They work for four different media outlets—Associated Press, Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation, Global Television Network, and Voice of America—and all report primarily for print, radio, and television (though online components are also part of their coverage). Their journalistic experience ranges from seven to more than 20 years. The sample includes three women and two men, three of Caucasian and two of Arab origin. They range in age from their late twenties to their late forties. Importantly, they are all foreign correspondents for their respective organizations. In order to investigate symbolic power within journalism, it was important that each of the respondents have the same job and a similar degree of symbolic capital. Though factors such as age, experience, and medium are also important (Bourdieu, 1998), foreign correspondents are generally considered to be near the top of their profession, therefore possessing more social capital within the field.

### *Topic Guide*

The topic guide follows the chronology of events during the Egyptian revolution. It is broken into three primary categories: new media's role in the lead-up and early stages of the revolution; use of new media on the ground during the height of the revolution; and correspondents' impressions of new media's implications for journalism as a whole. Because the flexibility afforded by one-on-one interviews was the chief reason to use this method, the topic guide was not '[followed] slavishly as if the success of the research depended on it' (Gaskell, 2000: 40).

Interviews began with a focus on the *hows* and *whats* (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) of the media environment during the Egyptian revolution and shifted towards questions of *why* respondents' felt and interpreted new media trends in light of events. Later questions were designed to probe at the hidden consciousness, 'to penetrate the defences people put up to prevent their hidden beliefs from coming to light' (Berger, 1998: 55). In this case, probing questions provided text to later explore and analyze the symbolic power embedded within the correspondents' responses.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

While the interview opens doors to unconscious beliefs, the goal of the study is to understand the deeper meaning embedded in the discourse. Using CDA permits analysis of journalists' self-conceptions and their perceptions of citizen journalism within the greater scheme of journalistic production. A number of social theorists, including Norman Fairclough (2005) and Bourdieu (with Wacquant, 1992), link social structures and social events. Ultimately, the culmination of social practices creates institutions or fields (Fairclough, 2005), including the journalistic field. Understanding the discourses in these interviews goes some way to explain

institutional journalism's claims to objective truth and continued role as gatekeepers of news in spite of shifts in journalistic power. Further, CDA uniquely provides tools required to reveal power relations within discourse and crucially allows deeper investigation into journalists' symbolic power. A coding frame was developed to categorize these relations. It is informed by strategies outlined by Fairclough (1995) and Lofland (2006). Codes were used as a guide throughout the analysis.

Unlike other forms of textual analysis, CDA provides 'an opportunity for the researcher to probe into issues which go beyond the sample as such' (Fairclough, 1992: 227). I elected to use the three-dimensional model of CDA advocated by Fairclough (1995; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) and described as being developed for 'investigating social changes' (1992: 8). This offers the intertextual and interdisciplinary approaches (Fairclough, 1992; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001) required in order to reveal meanings embedded within texts.

Given the focus on the position of journalism within the broader social world, the expectation was that interviews with journalists would reflect a 'particular ideological position' (Fowler, 1991: 10; see also Van Dijk, 1995), as discussed above in the context of a journalistic ideology (Deuze, 2005). The goal of this critical interpretation is to unearth 'the social meanings expressed in discourse by analysing the linguistic structures in the light of their interactional and wider social contexts' (Fowler et al., 1979: 196). The three-dimensional model was particularly useful as people 'generate representations of what they do as part of what they do' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999: 25-26), and the ability to identify the ways in which people reflexively construct theories of their own practices was crucial.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The following CDA of texts from interviews focused on events during the Egyptian revolution reveals the hidden structures embedded in journalists' verbal constructions, with the aim to uncover power relations between mainstream media and the nascent category of citizen journalism. The analysis is divided into four sections that flow from the specific case study. Though some ideas overlap, its primary categories are: new media and the Egyptian revolution; group identity and objectivity; citizen journalism and changing journalistic culture; and, power shifts and authenticity in contemporary journalism.

In general, the five correspondents interviewed for this study appear conflicted about the role of new media in the present journalistic context. While all acknowledge the importance of digital tools in their own day-to-day work, they also recognize a wider influence over journalism itself. The conflict arises when it comes to accepting citizen journalism. At times, the respondents seemed to recognize acts of journalism by citizens as within the journalistic frame. More often, the journalists expressed scepticism over whether or not these acts constitute journalism at all. The journalists' ambivalence arose from their belief in the journalistic tenets of truth and objectivity.

### **New Media and the Egyptian revolution**

During the Egyptian revolution, institutional media in the West regularly trumpeted the role of new media in helping to organize and coordinate mass protests. In particular, respondents singled out the Facebook page 'We are all Khaled Said' as the main organizational tool for the initial protest on 25 January 2011. Respondents generally agreed this page was 'particularly significant' (Respondent 4) and that other new media tools were 'massively' (Respondent 2) important, 'integral' (Respondent 5), and 'a flame, a catalyst' (Respondent 3) early in the uprising. However, the respondents often followed these acclamations of the significance of 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009) with qualifying language to make it clear that new media was one among several factors that precipitated subsequent events.

Foreign correspondents acknowledged the value of new media, notably Twitter, in the early stages of the protests, describing it as follows:

Personal newswire (Respondent 5)

Twitter is the first thing we look at (Respondent 1)

It was clear that that was leading the flow of information (Respondent 2)

Importantly, Twitter is discussed as a source of 'information' and not 'news.' In this case, even 'newswire' is used in a figurative sense. Twitter is credited as being a valuable source of

‘information’ from citizens on the ground. This reflects Schudson’s (1995) argument that news is a cultural product. The Twitter discourse, though positive, is rooted in the journalistic opinion that information only transforms into news after passing through a journalist’s lens, maintaining journalists’ gatekeeping role in news production (Castells, 2009).

The use of online forums, such as the Arabic blogosphere, to voice discontent within Egypt dates at least to 2005 (Hofheinz, 2005), but the 25 January ‘Day of Rage’ is generally seen as the launch of the revolution that ended Hosni Mubarak’s rule. All but one of the respondents lived outside the country and were sent to cover the revolution in the days surrounding the initial protest. Still, the correspondents were clear that they were paying attention before they were officially assigned to the story. Two of them invoked the same expression, that they were ‘keeping an eye on it’ (Respondent 1, Respondent 5). One respondent, who is based in the region, suggested that some predicted that Egyptians would protest after the events in Tunisia:

[Y]ou just knew that it was going to ... I didn’t actually think it would end in the ouster of Hosni Mubarak, but you knew there was going to be a period of uncertainty, for sure (Respondent 4) *Coded as Journalistic intuition/Experience, Exclusive/Elite Knowledge*

Embedded in this text are two interconnected discursive elements. First, the pause in the middle of the sentence ends a phrase suggesting this was going to happen. The pronoun ‘you’ is here used in the indefinite sense, such that: ‘ “one who knows about Egypt” knew that it was going to ....’ This points to a form of elite understanding that protests in Egypt were inevitable, and that this conclusion was common sense. It is also tied to more embedded notions of journalists’ inherent ‘news sense’ (Hall, 1973; Matheson & Allan, 2009). The pronoun switch from ‘you’ to ‘I’ is another notable point: the discourse moves from general claims to the correspondent’s particular personal sense. When personalized, the discourse is more humble, as the passive ‘I didn’t actually think’ is far less authoritative and blunt than the ‘you just knew.’ This form of pronoun switch happened in a number of interviews, more often than not conflating the ‘we’ and ‘I’ of the journalist. (This is particularly noticeable in Respondent 1).

An important element in the coverage of the Egyptian revolution is the government’s shutdown of the Internet and mobile phone services in an attempt to thwart protestors (Arthur, 2011). While this action acknowledged the role of new media tools in the journalistic telling of events, it had a profound impact for both traditional *and* citizen journalists. Respondents universally acknowledged the shutdown made their work more difficult:

It was an absolute *nightmare* (Respondent 5)  
We were in a bit of a *black hole* (Respondent 1)  
All of these journalists going *cold turkey* (Respondent 4)

Considering the importance of technological processes involved in modern journalism, shutting down phone and Internet services ensures journalists cannot do their jobs easily. The respondents' strong, metaphorical language equates the loss of the Internet to the darkest of places and withdrawal from addiction. All three evoke literal disconnection and figurative isolation. This speaks to the larger issue of the Internet as an integral tool across different forms of traditional media, as they have moved into the 'terrain' of the Internet (Dahlgren, 2009). In several interviews, respondents used rhetorical questions to sum up this shift:

How did I exist as a journalist before Google ... ? (Respondent 1)  
What did we do before Facebook and Twitter? (Respondent 3)  
'How did we do it before?' (Respondent 4)

The great importance of the Internet in the day-to-day lives of journalists elevates the status of the participatory platform for all users. The respondents often recognized its importance for citizens as well, undermining assertions that institutional media have co-opted online spaces, as some theorists suggest (Scott, 2005; see also Mansell, 2004).<sup>7</sup> The question still remains why mainstream journalists are willing to recognize the importance of these tools and citizen journalists' contributions, without accepting the citizen journalists as part of journalistic discourse.

### **Group Identity and Objectivity**

Tied into the discourse on citizen journalists' contributions is the question of the innate news value of the observances, announcements, and uploaded content they broadcast (or narrowcast) via the Internet. Foreign correspondents' perspectives cannot be disentangled from their journalistic profession and the professional norms to which they unconsciously subscribe (Bourdieu, 1998). The most obvious linguistic device that identifies this intangible group identity was the regular use of the word 'we,' particularly when respondents used it in speaking about personal observances or actions. Here, there is evidence of the journalistic field being expressed through respondents' discourse. The use of this inclusive term may mean the respondent was accompanied by a colleague. However, the prevalence of the term suggests a deeper-rooted association among people whose common bond is their profession.

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<sup>7</sup> Much of the literature discussing the co-option of the Internet by the mainstream media dates from the period of 2004-2006, before the boom in social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

This shared bond corresponds to Bourdieu's 'durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (1986: 51).

One example that speaks to 'mutual acquaintance' in the journalistic understanding describes a scenario during the Internet blackout when one of the newswire services still had a working connection:

You sort of used whatever you had access to. So at APTN<sup>8</sup> we had access to Internet, and you had about, I don't know, maybe 20 or 30 international journalists, anybody in the world, it was sort of a secret ... they were very, very gracious – you know, there's incredible camaraderie between journalists and international media when they're in an event like this (Respondent 1) *Coded as Journalistic values/Culture, Exclusivity/Elite Status, Recognition/Inclusion*

The 'camaraderie' among journalists in difficult circumstances points to their 'institutionalized relationships.' Though these journalists didn't know one another, the respondent strongly emphasizes how 'very, very gracious' her or his hosts were, using terms that sound closer to the appreciation of a house guest than that of a colleague. While s/he is speaking about a relatively large group of people who were able to share the valuable resource of Internet access, s/he also describes this illegal Internet connection as 'a secret.' The respondent is saying, 'it was our secret'—a secret for any and all journalists from anywhere in the world. The context is described as an 'event like this,' suggesting an unwritten rule that journalists will offer hospitality to other journalists during major events. As Zelizer writes, the question is not only who are journalists, but 'who is included within the community of journalists?' (2005: 204). Within this discourse, journalism goes beyond being simply a profession, and takes the form of a culture and a community.

What makes a journalist is equally difficult to define. Since the objectivity norm took firm hold, first within American journalism and later elsewhere, codes of journalistic ethics and professional rituals have grown around the objectivity paradigm (Tuchman, 1972). Further, respondents discuss fact-based, objective reporting as the core tenet of journalism, frequently speaking of the need to be 'accurate' or 'objective,' and insisting that reporting reflect the 'truth.' These descriptions fit with those described elsewhere (Deuze, 2005; Muhlmann, 2008).

Interviewees' reactions show they see objectivity as a set of rules for journalists to live by. During interviews, respondents would stop mid-sentence trying to remember specific facts—numbers and names—rather than skip over them. Pauses were brief but disrupted their

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<sup>8</sup> Associated Press Television News.



thoughts and flow of the responses. This illustrates the inherent belief that facts can bestow truth upon the story:

What's his name? I wrote it down (Pause. Shuffling papers) (Respondent 1)  
I don't know what percentage (Pause) but a huge number (Respondent 2)  
(Pause) I'm trying to remember the guy's name, I'll tell you about him later  
(Respondent 5)

Journalists have been accused of being unable or unwilling to define their role (Hall, 1973). Within these discourse, it appears that the former is true. Beyond repeating widely professed professional codes, the definition of a journalist has been ritualized, internalized, and even mythologized. As in similar studies (Markham, 2011), the results demonstrate journalists' reliance on mythic or intuition-based notions to describe the intangible:

You have your own *sense* of trust about them (Respondent 4)  
You *sensed* there was something happening (Respondent 1)  
You sort of have to *trust your gut* (Respondent 3)

These journalistic *senses* and *feelings* constitute a 'verbal invocation of the Bourdieusian habitus' (Markham, 2011). Foreign correspondents have a particularly elevated position within the journalistic field and a greater degree of symbolic capital. Further, they tend to have more experience in the field. These feelings and senses are tied to both symbolic capital and experience, and journalists within the group understand these intangibles as associated with experience and status. These are the journalists who 'just get it'.

### **Citizen Journalism and Changing Journalistic Culture**

While respondents were quick to praise the role of new media in the context of the Egyptian revolution, they proved slower to accept citizen journalists' contributions as journalism in the traditional sense. Notable among the reasons they gave is the low bar for entry:

Even housewives, who bake cookies all day and take care of their kids and are part of the PTA, or whatever, have Twitter accounts! Do you know what I mean? You don't have to be an academic or a professional or a businessman or a journalist to have a Twitter account ... they want to receive their information quicker, perhaps in a more modern way because they're modern people (Respondent 3) *Coded as Participation, Recognition/Inclusion, Skepticism/Exclusion*

Within the context of the interview, this recognition of social media users is intended as a compliment. However, there is more than one reading embedded within the discourse. The excited recognition of the expanding conversation within journalism demonstrates an openness to include more voices in the journalistic discourse. On the other hand, the

respondent still represents the everyday citizen as being a non-professional and someone outside the sphere of journalism. Theorists proclaim this new category of ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ is inheriting media power (Rosen, 2008). The view from within journalism disputes that. The respondent’s choices here ‘mark off socially and ideologically distinct areas of experience’ (Fowler, 1991: 84). The audience may be encouraged to take part in the conversation, but the text above projects journalists’ elite status over everyday citizens and illustrates a ‘discourse of difference’ (Hall, 1997) that paints citizens’ lives as mundane compared to the implicitly exceptional lives of journalists covering events such as the Egyptian revolution.

This is not to say that foreign correspondents construct a discourse that denies citizen journalists any place in the new journalistic culture. Respondents acknowledge the two-way participatory culture outlined in theory (Deuze, 2006) that brings convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) into being. Notably, respondents often speak in terms of a ‘conversation’ with audiences. One respondent reported an epiphany about the nature of this relationship while covering the Arab Spring:

Those people started to say, 'Have you seen this? Have you seen this? Have you seen that?' Because I was intensely curious and addicted to my Blackberry, so I was looking at every one of these people saying, 'Who are these people? What the hell do they want with me?' ... The members, people following me [on Twitter], they would have no other way of reaching me. They don't have my email, phone number, all that stuff. It was actually people reading my stuff that ended up teaching me about how this could be an incredible journalistic tool. (Respondent 5) *Coded as Recognition/Inclusion, Participatory culture*

This discourse evinces a general recognition of the value of two-way discussion and the participatory nature of the Internet, but the realization is framed as a surprise. There is also an embedded discourse of identity that derives from traditional journalistic culture. The questions ‘who are these people?’ and ‘what the hell do they want with me?’ illustrate how journalists are not used to being approached by non-journalists, much less with an expectation that the journalist will *do something for* them. This perspective represents an old model of the relationship between mass media and its passive audience in one-way communication. Media has been a two-way communication for years, yet the respondent is still taken aback. Much as journalists seem entrenched in an increasingly dated model of journalism, they are also slow to realize the change in their audience. Discursively, this new dynamic is made possible by online social spaces, and would be impossible with ‘old’ media—‘email’ and ‘phone.’ Already ‘addicted’ to a Blackberry, the respondent demonstrates knowledge of new media tools. However, acknowledging that people were ‘teaching’ her or him how this new platform works is significant. Here there is an understanding that expertise

about this new ‘journalistic tool’ lies outside mainstream media and beyond traditional journalists.

Though journalists have full access to citizen journalists’ content, and speak of watching and following it regularly, most interactions between mainstream and citizen journalism are highly mediated. Often the only elements of user-generated content that appear in news reports are acknowledged and verified through a variety of regular journalistic filters.

... via a very circuitous route of someone taking it on a mobile phone, finally onto YouTube, it being picked up by Reuters and then being rebroadcast on satellite, then we used a lot of that in our reporting. (Respondent 2) *Coded as Journalistic values/Objectivity, Gatekeeping, Recognition/Inclusion*

Here, there is both a physical and systematic distance between the citizen journalist and the institutional journalist that protects the gatekeeping role of mainstream journalism on the grounds of integrity. While multiple forms of content are watched and shared online, they are said to enter the journalistic field only once they are determined to be accurate and are incorporated into reports; journalistic processes alone elevate ‘information’ to the status of ‘news’, though the original content has not changed. The journalists interviewed still seem to believe that the production of news as a cultural form is their domain (Schudson, 1995).

All respondents expressed scepticism about the news value in much of what is produced and shared on the Internet. Two respondents choose the same metaphor to describe the content online:

... a lot of it is anonymously posted ranting and it’s very difficult to sort the *wheat from the chaff* (Respondent 2)  
there’s a lot of *chaff* that you have to sort through (Respondent 1)

Invoking this metaphor suggests the underlying belief that most of what is produced online is of little value. Though there is acknowledgement some of this material has value—metaphorically, the wheat—it is still valuable as *information*, not *news*. The process of identifying the wheat—the ‘sorting’—is identified as a journalistic process. For other respondents, the first step to transforming this information into news is to ‘verify’ the information and ensure that it is ‘accurate.’ This is highlighted as the most important journalistic filter:

it’s up to the journalist to *verify* it and to make sure the message that gets out...is the *truth* (Respondent 4)  
they were very, very *accurate* and you could see from what you saw on the wires and what they were saying later to *verify* that they were telling the *truth* (Respondent 5)

... you didn't know if it was *true* or not. You had to go with it, and *check it* when you got there (Respondent 3)

Here the discourse shows the premium journalists place on accuracy, verifiability, and double-checking information from online postings. In these lexical structures, the most telling pairing is between accuracy or verifiability and 'truth'. This correlation draws directly from the codes of journalistic objectivity: the prime requirement of news is that it be based on fact-based truths. Embedded in this discourse is a suggestion that this is 'up to journalists', that the ability and responsibility to verify truth is their domain. The Bourdieusian journalistic field is in play here. It is from here that journalists draw their symbolic power as the gatekeepers not only of what the *news* is, but also their power to decide what is *truth*. Journalism perceives itself as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980).

### **Power Shifts and Authenticity in Contemporary Journalism**

In spite of foreign correspondents' claims to objectivity, there is recognition within the texts that their profession is changing and that citizen journalists have a role to play in the new journalistic environment. The theoretical literature almost unanimously suggests that new media are influencing a fundamental shift within journalism (Castells, 2009; Jenkins, 2008; Deuze, 2006). Part of this research investigates what form the new journalistic model may be taking. As with the theorists, respondents have difficulty expressing how the transition 'from an analogue past to a digital future' (Sambrook, 2010) will occur. To be sure, technology itself is not solely responsible for changes in social structure, as 'technology cannot be thought without society' (Castells, 2003: 587). Nevertheless, respondents recognize new media tools and citizen journalism for their influence.

While respondents generally agreed that there has been a change in how journalism works, their responses about the nature of this change varied. For generations, journalists at the highest level have been recognized as authority figures, particularly in the reporting of international news stories. Foreign correspondents still maintain gatekeeping is a lynchpin of their profession, even as the definition of gatekeeping changes.

So a lot of our time as journalists is now spent doing that, *debunking* things that people put on the Internet (Respondent 3)

... *distilling* that down is sort of the new gatekeeper role (Respondent 1)

Journalism has always been about finding the most important and pertinent threads of information to weave together into a story. New media has caused an information explosion, meaning that journalism is no longer about gathering and presenting the information, but navigating the flood of tweets, comments, and uploads. In this regard, gatekeeping is now

about ‘debunking’ rumours, half-truths, and lies in this ocean of information and ‘distilling’ it down to something that presents reality more accurately. Here, journalists begin to take on the role of facilitators rather than gatekeepers (Beckett, 2008; see also Deuze, 2006). One respondent said pointedly, ‘we are not the gatekeepers anymore’ (Respondent 5). Elsewhere, a different picture of the disparate roles of traditional and citizen journalists’ emerged:

I still like to think that the difference between us and a non-traditional news source ... that's a bad way to put it. A not mainstream source ... I mean, the theory is that we are equipped and we've got the ability to provide more than just the headlines. (Respondent 5) *Coded as Journalistic intuition/experience, Mystification, Gatekeeping, Recognition/Inclusion*

It is interesting that the respondent takes a few attempts to define what citizen journalists are and to name their role in the journalistic puzzle. This suggests journalists haven’t yet figured this out, but don’t want to appear closed to the idea of sharing journalistic space. Still, the text suggests a view that institutional journalism is more authoritative and better ‘equipped’ to handle news reporting beyond ‘the headlines.’ There is an assumption that citizen journalism comes in the form of grainy mobile images or single-sentence tweets. Acknowledging these as a ‘news source’ suggests that there is journalistic merit in this production, though of lesser value than ‘news’ itself. The discourse implies the traditional media’s chain of editorial command, shared contact databases, and close contacts with leaders and experts still position it apart from and above citizen journalism. The notion that journalists are gatekeepers is still embedded in this discourse, as journalists’ have an ‘ability’—that intangible ‘news sense’—that is presented as a self-evident authority (Markham, 2011).

Significantly, respondents raised several examples where citizen journalists may wield journalistic authority. In recent international cases, journalists were unable to enter a country and relied on citizen content to tell the story. They often mentioned post-election protests in Iran as an example, but also coverage of several countries where protests erupted during the Arab Spring, including Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen.

We were just, essentially, *harvesting* our news online (Respondent 1)  
Twitter and bloggers were far more useful to me as a *research tool* in Iran, particularly due to the restrictions placed on the foreign media there (Respondent 4)  
‘Citizen journalists’ is an appropriate moniker I think, because they were *reporting what they saw*. That’s really the basic definition of a journalist isn’t it? (Respondent 5)

These three samples speak to different points, but all imply that in the eyes of traditional journalists, citizen journalists are essential in reporting on repressive regimes that ban foreign media. Core journalistic tenets still apply, and respondents speak of calling their own

trusted contacts to verify citizen journalists' reports, but the recognition of citizens' contributions is notable and demonstrates that views within mainstream journalism are adjusting to reflect the new convergence culture. This discourse also touches on what is required to be a journalist. Citizens' uploads and blogs become acts of journalism, even in the minds of foreign correspondents, provided they are 'reporting what they saw'. For Western audiences, the role of witness has long been the sole domain of foreign correspondents. However, new media tools have democratized the space (Muhlmann, 2008[2004]), enabling everyday people to share their experience across multiple platforms, circumventing mainstream media. In particular, the ability to share images invites others to 'see for themselves.'

Respondents recognize citizens' 'ordinary witnessing' (Chouliaraki, 2010) as part of journalism, though it is not given the same status. Journalists may no longer have a monopoly on witnessing and sharing the world's events with publics around the globe, but they still draw a distinction between professional and amateur forms of witnessing.

I think of them as witnesses, I do. That's what journalists do, they bear witness. But does that make it journalistic? Not necessarily so. The fact that they're trying to tell the world 'this is what's going on and we have documentation and proof'. That's great. But you do need context. You do need analysis. (Respondent 4) *Coded as Journalistic intuition/experience, Scepticism/Exclusion*

The implication that journalists offer context and analysis above and beyond citizen journalists is fair, as they travel to places as 'professional, specialized tourists' (Sontag, cited in Matheson and Allan, 2009: 130). They see events with fresh eyes and report to audiences back home, with a certain understanding of those audiences' expectations and frames of reference. Still, in recent years foreign correspondents for Western media outlets are becoming a rare species, as foreign bureaux close and international news coverage shrinks (Sambrook, 2010). Increasingly, correspondents are covering foreign events from a distance. This influences witnessing—as one correspondent said, in such instances, 'I call myself a typist' (Respondent 5)—and while journalists can still provide context and analysis, distance undermines their claim to authoritative understandings of events beyond those of the ordinary citizens who are living through them. It also undermines the claims to authenticity of lived experience, even that of 'specialized tourists.' Today, events in many parts of the world are being reported by citizen journalists who have intimate knowledge of these places, and this intimate connection is informing this style of journalism.

Among the greatest criticisms levied at citizen journalism is that it is too often 'emotional' and loaded with 'opinion.' Within the discourse presented here, these indicators of deep

connection controvert objectivity. During my interviews, respondents questioned whether objectivity is possible and whether anyone is without bias; however, whether achievable or not, the objectivity paradigm still insists that journalists remain disconnected from the stories they cover. Citizens are simply too close to their lived experience to withdraw from that experience and take an objective perspective.

At the same time, citizens' acts of journalism—with all of their 'emotion' and 'opinion'—continue to proliferate in online spaces. As audiences continue fragmenting (Livingstone, 2005), institutional media are under increasing pressure to adapt to the new media environment in order to attract viewers, readers, and listeners. Among the changes is the widespread adoption of more connected and personalized approaches. Respondents' discourse revealed that authenticity is emerging as a quality the mainstream media want to embrace: the power of the 'I' as witness for 'us' brings the honesty of experience to a story (Muhlmann, 2008[2004]). Still, for the respondents, becoming part of the story is 'crossing a line' (Respondent 3) and contradicts the 'journalist's responsibility' (Respondent 4).

In a way, they want you to be that citizen journalist without actually being part of it. Already, I think, even before this whole trend of citizen journalism, already the emphasis was there. Maybe that's where the citizen journalism thing was born, because more and more people were demanding from our—our bosses were demanding from us—our take, our feelings and, you know, 'what's it like to be there?' Those questions always shocked me, to be honest. (Respondent 5) *Coded as Journalistic values/Objectivity, Industry Criticism, Scepticism/Exclusion, Recognition/Inclusion*

The terms employed here are strong and the tone is of surprise and frustration. In this context, 'they' and 'our bosses' both refer to the decision-makers within institutional journalism, who are 'demanding' that journalists put themselves into their stories. This demand to become part of the story challenges the correspondents' definition of journalism as objective truth-telling. Journalists' personalized perspectives, based on their 'feelings,' may be more authentic, but authenticity in this form means being connected to the story and therefore sacrificing the disconnection inherent in the notion of objective witnessing. The 'shock' comes from journalists not expecting such a 'demand' from those within the field. Those in the news business are supposed to understand the codes of journalistic culture, especially objectivity. These demands are therefore a betrayal. Deeper still, journalists appear to believe that neither budget constraints nor being barred by totalitarian states is a good excuse for covering a story from a distance.

The respondents' discourse on citizen journalism illustrates a complex chicken-and-egg dilemma, suggesting that institutional journalism and citizen journalism are inextricably entangled and co-influential. This complex relationship is restructuring journalism

(Markham, 2010) and the journalistic field, both of which are adapting to new social circumstances (Benson, 2006). Interestingly, it is the professionals within the field who most refuse to embrace the changes. Their symbolic power is shifting, as more voices are included in the journalistic conversation, but the correspondents' main concern is to maintain the objectivity that defines the journalism they know.

## CONCLUSION

Most people who snap an image on their mobile phone and upload it to their Facebook page are not concerned how their actions fit into mainstream journalism, or whether it is considered an act of journalism. From a theoretical perspective, however, the distinction between *what* constitutes journalism and *who* is a journalist is of great interest, as it marks the boundaries of a profession that is integral to the network society (Castells, 2009). In Egypt and elsewhere, where freedom of expression and the media have been limited by repressive regimes, this question is all the more significant as new media make it more difficult to silence opposition voices. As the findings of this study illustrate, professional journalists recognize that new media are important for their profession—most notably when they are absent. They are more reluctant to acknowledge that institutional journalism is embracing authentic experience as part of the news, sometimes as a value overriding objectivity. Although they recognize ordinary citizens as witnesses and value their perspectives, many do not recognize them as legitimate journalists because of perceived lack of objectivity, the key mechanism by which the profession protects itself against forces that impinge on the journalistic field and threaten its culture.

While traditional journalists may not recognize emerging journalistic forms as journalism *per se*, citizen journalism and the importance of the Internet are recognized at the highest levels elsewhere in society. This in part follows from events during the Arab Spring. Though there has been discussion of the Internet as a human right for some time (Best, 2004), a recent United Nations report highlighting the influence of social media during the Egyptian protests advises that Internet access be declared a universal human right. It states: 'facilitating access to the Internet for all individuals, with as little restriction to online content as possible, should be a priority for all States' (La Rue, 2011: 4). Importantly, the report includes a section entitled 'Protection of Citizen Journalists' (La Rue, 2011). This extends protections once exclusively granted to professional journalists to a much wider swath of society, to thwart efforts to 'silence legitimate expression' (La Rue, 2011: 10).



This research has set out to identify ways in which convergence culture is effecting change within professional journalism. There is clear evidence that journalism is changing, but that the change has not yet taken shape. Journalists, ambivalent, greet this with both excitement and trepidation. This analysis has found that foreign correspondents conceive of themselves as firmly entrenched within a professional culture of objective journalism. Future research comparing analyses of what correspondents *say* and what they *write* could illustrate whether this commitment to objectivity is an expression of journalists' habitus or whether they do—and are able to—present fact-based stories that present unbiased, objective views of the 'truth.' Clearly, these are difficult standards to meet. As the authenticity of experience increasingly defines the journalistic paradigm, the onus is on both ordinary and professional witnesses. "Observers' must in future offer guarantees; it was no longer enough to see, you had to see clearly' (Muhlmann, 2008[2004]: 18). The tools of the Digital Age are allowing more voices into the conversation, but a commitment to authenticity also carries the responsibility of being honest about experience—another aspect of telling the 'truth.' Whatever form journalism takes in this new media environment, achieving some form of truth will remain at its heart.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many thanks to the LSE Media Department, especially Dr. Chouliaraki, for opening my mind to new perspectives on media and for the many ideas and sage advice that have informed this research.

Thanks to the many great journalists who help us all make sense of the world, some of whom I had the pleasure of speaking with for this dissertation.

Dedicated to my wife Isabelle, without whose love, support, and patience these academic exploits would not have been possible.

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## **APPENDIX I - TIMELINE OF THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION**

### **January 2011:**

- During uprisings in Tunisia, Egyptian activists call for protests against the rule of president Mubarak
- A man sets himself on fire near parliament and there are warnings of a “Tunisia-style explosion” in Egypt

### **January 25:**

- Thousands of Egyptians take to the streets of Cairo declaring a "Day of Rage"
- Similar protests break out towns and cities across the country, including Alexandria

### **January 26:**

- Tahrir Square in central Cairo became the focal point of the protests
- Police use tear gas and beatings to disperse protesters, hundreds arrested including foreign journalists

### **January 27:**

- Protests continue across several cities
- Mohamed ElBaradei returns to Egypt to join protests
- Facebook, Twitter and Blackberry Messenger services are disrupted

### **January 28:**

- Military takes to the streets of major cities but refuses to interfere
- Mubarak dismisses his government
- Internet and mobile users report major disruption to services before an expected wave of Friday protests

### **January 29:**

- Mubarak fires his cabinet, but refuses to step down
- Egyptian soldiers secure Cairo's museum protecting thousands of artifacts

### **January 31:**

- Calls grow for Mubarak's resignation and he still refuses to step down
- Upwards of 250,000 people gather in Tahrir Square, defying the military-imposed curfew
- Internet access across Egypt is still limited

### **February 1:**

- Mubarak declares he will not run for re-election but still does not step down, a key demand
- Leader of Egypt's Kifaya (Enough) movement, says Mubarak's offer not good enough
- Tens of thousands continue to protest in Tahrir Square with thousands more across Egypt

### **February 2:**

- Violent clashes in Tahrir Square between protestors and armed pro-Mubarak supporters
- Internet services at least partially restored in Cairo after a five-day blackout aimed at disrupting protests

### **February 4:**

- The largest protest yet as hundreds of thousands gather in Tahrir Square for the "Day of Departure"

### **February 5:**

- Thousands who are occupying Tahrir Square fear the military will force an evacuation of the square
- Egyptian government claims 11 dead during the protests, United Nations says 300 dead across country

### **February 6:**

- Protests continue in Tahrir Square, violence continues to be part of the stand-off
- Banks re-open and traffic police take to the streets to try to get the capital back to normal

### **February 7:**

- Thousands of protestors occupying Tahrir Square refuse to move
- A symbolic funeral is held for a journalist shot filming the clashes between protesters and riot police
- The man who created the Facebook page that helped organize the initial protests – Wael Ghonim – is released from prison

### **February 8:**

- Protesters continue to gather at Tahrir Square, now a tent city
- Renewed protests including Egyptians who have mobilized after the release of activist Wael Ghonim

**February 9:**

- Mass strikes start rolling across the country
- Human Rights Watch says that 302 people have been killed since the beginning of the uprising

**February 10:**

- Rumours of Mubarak's departure shattered after he repeats promise to not run in the September elections but to "shoulder" his responsibilities in the "peaceful transition"
- Protesters in Tahrir Square react with fury over Mubarak's refusal to leave

**February 11:**

- Another day of angry protests in Tahrir Square and across Cairo targeting state television and the presidential palace, tens of thousands take to the streets across Egypt
- Mubarak resigns as president and hands over power to the army, announced by vice-president

**Sources:**

Al-Jazeera English Website:

<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/01/201112515334871490.html>

*The Guardian* Website:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>

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