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**The Journalistic Identities of Liveblogging
A Case Study: Reporting the 2009 Post-Election
Protests in Iran**

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MSc in Global Media and Communications

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Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2010, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Global Media and Communications. Supervised by Dr. Bart Cammaerts.

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

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The Journalistic Identities of Liveblogging

A Case Study: Reporting the 2009 Post-Election Protests in Iran

David McDougall

ABSTRACT

This study explores the self-identities of journalists who engage in liveblogging, focusing on the ways in which liveblogging practices represent a shift from traditional journalistic practice. Bloggers were categorized into ‘incumbent,’ ‘insurgent,’ and ‘virtual community actors’ in order to determine if these practices differ according to institutional affiliation. An emphasis was placed on methods of information verification and narrative construction, as well as the degree to which coverage engaged with reporting across the journalistic network or relied on primary sources. Depth interviews were conducted with seven livebloggers who covered the post-election crisis in Iran in 2009 and 2010, which were thematically analyzed to look for commonalities and differences across their practices of newsgathering and analysis.

This study reveals that liveblogging norms are broadly similar, but there do exist differences of both practice and ideology across the different types of institutions that engage in liveblogging. All actors interviewed position themselves as ‘switchers’ who control information flow between different sections of the journalism network, but they do so in different ways and with different motivations. Journalists considered this new form as a provisional form of news production, one that offers the process of newswork as the product. The immediacy of liveblogging creates new necessities of fact-checking triangulation and uncertainty that lead livebloggers to publish unconfirmed information as the beginning rather than the end of journalistic inquiry.

'In the Green Movement, every citizen is a media outlet.' – Mir Hossein Mousavi

'Cellphones, computers, the Internet -- they are the weapons of the new war.'

– Mohsen Makhmalbaf

INTRODUCTION

The informational dynamics of the protests in Iran in the aftermath of the 2009 election make this event a very special case from the perspective of a journalistic approach to verified information. In an environment where the state deliberately limited access to information through both censorship and the expulsion of foreign journalists, the official state story was frequently that there was no story to be covered. Contradictory information that made it through the censorship lines came from engaged citizen journalists, who were frequently also protest participants themselves. These individual acts of censorship subversion were often calculated attempts to support their ideological cause through use of the media. The use of the media by social movement actors to influence policy and opinion is thus an important element of any approach to journalistic standard of information verification during the Iran crisis, especially as it relates to standards of journalistic gatekeeping and story-selection. The problems of information scarcity are not limited to the agendas of those who transmit images and stories from the protests, however. Information reliability is also challenged by the practices used by some media outlets to cover the story as it develops, specifically by the decision to cover the stories as a continuously updated blog (a 'live blog' or 'liveblog'). 'Liveblogging' can cover a range of practices, and might also include formats not normally thought of as blogs such as Facebook news feeds, Twitter accounts or even Twitter hashtags or other content-filtering feeds. For the purposes of this study, 'liveblogging' will refer to two different but related forms of publication processes that take place on a blog site (either hosted through a larger media outlet or hosting platform, or entirely independent).

The 'liveblog' format in its strict definition consists of a single post, updated with time-stamped updates throughout the day as events happen. The continuously-updating nature of the post itself means that each update attempts to capture some small element of the story, and the updates interact with each other by correcting or modifying previous updates. Each update within a liveblog post is a provisional attempt to deepen a story with newly available insight. A looser definition of liveblogging can include a blog whose individual posts function as updates would in a strict 'liveblog' post. These blogs tend to have longer posts, but still with a notion of provisionality to the truths they present in these updates. Due to the similarities in these practices, these two approaches to liveblogging will

be considered as largely equivalent here. Both forms of liveblogging complicate the normal journalistic notion that a story is, at time of publication, the final word on ‘what really happened.’ Unlike traditional news stories and their emphasis on established facts, liveblogs occur in the present tense and thus are necessarily provisional. A liveblog, in this respect, is a bit like watching a news narrative come together in real time rather than reading a finished summary article of the day’s events.

While this paper will largely refer to the events of June and December 2009 in the past tense, it is important to note that the protests even as an immediate response to the election itself have not entirely ceased, and continue to bubble up when Green Movement actors see opportunities for protest. The post-election protests began in response to a widespread perception of electoral fraud, but also as a protest against the corruption of the current regime. The Green Movement itself is not itself only an electoral protest movement, but aims to channel the anger of the electoral protests into a constructive reformist social movement. As the lines between the ‘Green Movement’ as such and the electoral protests of the election’s immediate aftermath are fluid – and indeed have been made intentionally so by actors within the Green Movement including defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi himself – this paper will refer to them interchangeably. The first spontaneous protests after the election seized green, the colour of the Mousavi campaign as well as a traditional colour of Islam, as their symbolic colour; their ‘Where Is My Vote?’ slogan argued that Mousavi was the election’s rightful winner, but also followed the Mousavi presidential campaign in implicitly calling for a return to the ideals of the 1979 Revolution.

As the author of a blog that explores the political qualities of the moving image, I curated and passed along videos, images and links from the Iran protests during flare-ups such as the violence that met protestors on Ashura in December 2009. This project, like the aforementioned blog, aims to contribute some understanding of the effective dissemination of broadly revolutionary political content through counter-hegemonic modes of transmission. This study will examine a set of nodes and their roles in information transmission, in the hopes that it might offer hints at the elements that allow political images to disseminate themselves through both existent and insurgent journalistic structures. Specifically, I will examine the journalistic practices among three main types of actors (‘incumbents,’ ‘insurgents,’ and ‘virtual community actors’) to explore the way their approaches to liveblogging the post-election protests might be indicative of changes in journalistic norms, and what significance these changes might have for future coverage of breaking news in information-scarce environments.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Literature Review

Iran, social movements, and 'narrative netwar'

After the 2009 presidential election, street protests formed the beginnings of a movement with diverse aims that congealed around the notion that the election results were fraudulent and that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election was illegitimate. In the days after the disputed election, protesters took to the streets in the largest demonstrations in Iran since the 1979 Revolution, rallying behind the green colour of Mir Hossein Mousavi's presidential campaign. This 'Green Movement' has positioned itself as a reformist attempt to live up to the ideals of the Revolution and the Islamic Republic (Mousavi, 2010A). This domestic political conflict was also played out through alternative media channels, in an attempt to combat Iran's strict state censorship system. In the aftermath of the election, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance denied foreign journalists permission to cover the protests, with many domestic journalists facing arrest and imprisonment (Reporters Sans Frontières, 2010). Under these conditions of censorship, actors within the Green Movement sought to use alternative and new media to disseminate information about the protests both at home and abroad. By attempting to disseminate information through society using alternative communication tools, the reform movement echoed communication techniques used by the various strands of revolutionaries before and during the 1979 revolution – fitting for a movement whose aims, according to Mousavi himself, are closely linked to a recapturing of the spirit of the 1979 Revolution (Mousavi, 2010A).

The use of 'small media' during the 1979 Islamic Revolution, as described by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, matches in many ways the circumstances of the present political contest in Iran. Under the conditions of where the mass media lacks legitimacy because of its links to the regime (1994, pp.189-190), information was transmitted from person to person through new technical means such as photocopiers, telephones, and cassette recorders (1994, pp.119-135). Using these tools, individuals passed along speeches by the exiled Khomeini or communiqués by political and religious activists. Additionally, the pre-Revolutionary period saw a rise of an alternative press and an increased prevalence of political rumours (1994, pp.119-135). This 'small media' frame correlates well with the situation of a more completely electronic set of social media tools. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi's case study on the Islamic Revolution 'suggest[s] the immense political potential of new "small media" in developing public spaces where none seemed possible, and

the authority of international broadcasting channels where domestic mass-media coverage is publicly discredited' (1994, p.189). If, as Balta and Rulleau suggest, 'the cassettes of the Ayatollah were transformed into a heavy artillery of amazing efficiency' (Balta and Rulleau, 1979, cited in Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994, p. 119), then the role of 'small media' in mediating revolutionary struggle may be as a new tactical and strategic approach to Antonio Gramsci's concept of the 'war of position,' which lays the ideological groundwork and support for revolution.

The use of the mass media as a tool to mobilize support is an element of this Gramscian struggle, as social movements have become increasingly conscious of using the influence of the media to impact political processes. Social movements that are organized as networks engage in various forms of 'narrative netwar' (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996; Sumate, Bryant and Monge, 2006), which involves using networked communication strategies to dominate the framing and narratives of events. This narrative netwar takes place through the competition for 'relative control over society's representational resources' (Couldry and Curran, 2003, p.4). In the case of a country like Iran, this struggle cannot take place directly within the domestic media structure due to the political controls and censorship that the government executes over the media. This struggle for representation is thus frequently taken abroad, with the aim of influencing domestic politics either through international pressure or by using foreign media as a conduit to citizens inside Iran. Political exiles can impact events inside a country and try to mobilize international public opinion, but this is also true of sources inside Iran that effectively use foreign media to disseminate information:

Occasionally, such international communication actually benefits or links political elements *within* a nation who cannot otherwise communicate or even know of each other's existence. Here, the international linkage becomes a necessary intermediate stage in what is really domestic political communication (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994, p.30).

This export of political content for domestic effect is a long-established practice of 20th century political movements, from the BBC's coverage of anti-Hitler German resistance to BBC reports on the Iranian Revolution of 1979, or the use of American colleagues as intermediate nodes to transmit fax messages between activists in China during the 1989 student movement (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994, p.30). Green Movement actors utilized a similar approach to information transmission during the post-election protests of 2009 and 2010, using the 'small media' of blogs, Twitter feeds, Facebook accounts, and YouTube channels – in both English and Farsi – to transmit accounts, pictures, and videos to citizens and media outside Iran.

The Green Movement's use of these tools aligns with other recent social movement advocacy under conditions of strict censorship. In the case of the protests in Burma in 2007,

activists smuggled out video to create international pressure through foreign media, and also for broadcast back into the country by outlets outside Burma aimed at a domestic audience (Buck, 2007, p.55). Similarly, both the protests of 2007 in Burma and the postelection protests in Iran were largely without spokespeople, though each had symbolic leadership (Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, Mir Hossein Mousavi in Iran). Buck argues that in Burma ‘publicity did not arise [sic] around personification but around the images that were steadily delivered’ (2007, p.58). This image delivery was largely the result of a technologically-savvy class of citizen journalists who had the means to capture and transmit images to the world outside their country. As Green Movement leader Mir Hossein Mousavi stated in February 2010, ‘In the green movement, every citizen is a media outlet’ (Mousavi, 2010B). In this information environment, a political contest is in large part a media contest as well; the prominent Green Movement supporter Mohsen Makhmalbaf argues that information and images are the main battleground in the political struggles in Iran: ‘Cellphones, computers, the Internet -- they are the weapons of the new war’ (Daragahi, 2009). The website IranNewsNow argues the same point differently in its Twitter feed: ‘In the Age of “everyone is a media broadcast station,” information is more powerful than the means to use violence’ (IranNewsNow, 2010). If these tools of citizen journalism are weapons, they are ones that only hit their target with an intermediary guidance system: the gatekeepers who transmit news to larger audiences.

New media logics

Altheide and Snow use the concept of ‘media logic’ to explore the interplay between media production as a set of formal and institutional practices and the social power embedded in these processes (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Altheide & Snow, 1991). Recent scholarship has explored forms of what we might call ‘new media logic,’ in a limited sense referring to the media logic of new media, but also, significantly, describing a more broadly applicable media logic resulting from increasing convergence in media production processes. This latter approach to ‘new media logic’ is rooted in part in the increasing significance of online production and consumption practices across media industries. The various forms of convergence in media production overall have blurred the lines between journalism and other forms of communication practice (Dahlgren, 1996; Domingo & Heinson, 2008; Deuze, 2004; Deuze, 2007, pp.141-170; Pavlik, 2004; Wall, 2005). ‘Convergence’ describes a set of related changes across media industries, in which blurred lines between modes of production and modes of consumption are driven or facilitated by technological change (Deuze, 2004; Jenkins, 2004). This paper will consider convergence as a shift toward convergent production practices across formerly-separate media forms, and as a shift of the

power relations between the former information producers and the former consumers. The convergence of journalistic product toward immediate, multimedia news forms is linked to convergence of process, in which the boundaries between sources and audiences are fluid. These two elements form the primary bases of 'new media logic.'

Liveblogging is an example of convergence on the level of the product as well as on the level of process, combining multimedia products with collaborative newsgathering that relies on integration into a network of published content rather than a firm reliance on exclusive sources. These forms of convergence have led to the decline of the 'high modernist' mode of journalism, which reflected the possibility of objective reporting as a normative goal, a possibility that was largely reliant on the trust of audiences toward journalists and the news production process (Hallin, 1992). In the era of broader convergence between producers and consumers as well as across media platforms, journalism can be said to have entered a 'postclassical' or even 'postmodern' era (Dahlgren, 1996; Wall, 2005). Dahlgren's reconfiguration of Altheide and Snow's 'media logic' recognizes five new qualities of 'cyberspace' journalism: that it is 'multimedia, hypertextual, interactional, archival, and figurational' (Dahlgren, 1996, p.64). Liveblogs specifically develop the hypertextual, interactional, and archival qualities further than traditional journalism or regular blog formats by integrating themselves into what Tiziana Terranova calls an 'internetwork,' or 'network of networks,' that surround a given issue (Terranova, 2004, p.41). The 'internetwork' in question is an informational rather than a technical one, though the two overlap significantly as the informational network utilizes technological infrastructures. As liveblogs integrate themselves into overlapping knowledge production networks, they become increasingly hypertextual by enmeshing themselves in networks of links between sites (including information channels other than blogs, such as Twitter feeds or Facebook pages). Their archival capacity, rather than offering a possible past-orientation as Dahlgren suggests, stations the liveblog in an eternal present where instantaneous updates supersede previous ones. They thus offer, by way of the archive, a constantly evolving story *told as it evolves* as new information comes to light. Relatedly, liveblogs are increasingly interactional by virtue their ability to react to audience responses; as a work-in-progress, liveblog audience members can contribute comments or corrective information on a post or via comment threads, email, Twitter, or their own blog post, thus increasing the quality of the end product. This shift toward more collaborative and immediate modes of journalism production changes the ways in which power relations are embedded in the journalistic production process. In the 'network society' (Castells, 2000), journalistic power is increasingly a function of informational gatekeeping.

Journalistic gatekeeping, 'networked journalism,' and power relations

'Networked journalism' is a normative approach to journalistic practice that attempts to reconfigure traditional journalism for the new media era. Various models for this future journalism exist, often called by different names, all reacting to the social and technological changes currently decentring journalistic authority. Charlie Beckett's (2008) model relies on a Habermasian notion of 'the public' to situate networked journalism as a reinvigoration of the ideals of 'public journalism,' which itself sought to maintain the Trustee model of journalism as a check on institutional power (Schudson, 1998). Beckett's model is indicative of an approach to journalistic reform on the part of professional journalists, who aim to conserve the profession as a traditional seat of authority in an increasingly networked world. More radical approaches may see this Fourth Estate capacity of journalism being taken over or at least partially eclipsed by the less hierarchical information flows of the Internet. The distinction between 'producers' and 'consumers' is being eroded by the technological capabilities available to 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen, 2006; see also Gillmor, 2006). Axel Bruns has described these new practices as 'produsage,' in which 'the production of ideas takes place in a collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers, and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge' (Bruns, 2007, p.3). The resultant 'Fifth Estate' (Dutton, 2009) of journalistic production outside the confines of professional(ized) 'journalism' relies on aspects of Jodi Dean's conceptualization of the web as a 'zero-institution' (Dean, 2003, pp.105-108). Appropriating the concept from Lévi-Strauss via Žižek, Dean argues that the web is recognized as a form of community not in spite of but because the very form of its communal bonds is a site of contention: 'the Web uses the very presence of conflict and antagonism to signify institutionality. Paradoxically perhaps, contestation itself signifies collectivity' (Dean, 2003, p.108). The same is true of journalistic and informational conflict in general – an agonistic approach to factuality can invigorate the verification process. 'Networked journalism,' even in its more conservative models, aims to leverage the 'wisdom of crowds' (Surowiecki, 2004) to improve the quality of the journalistic product.

Power relations and actor typologies

New forms of power accompany these new forms of organization of the journalistic production process. In *Communication Power*, Manuel Castells examines the relationships between communication networks and power and identifies 'network-making power,' as the primary form of power in the network society (Castells, 2009, pp.45-47). Two main types of

actors can exercise this form of power: *programmers* and *switchers*. Programmers constitute networks and can reprogram them to meet or change network goals; it is easiest to think of these actors as extensions of institutional goals. Switchers, on the other hand, forge links between networks, controlling ‘the connecting points between various strategic networks’ (p.46). In any form of ‘networked journalism,’ these switchers will be responsible for mediating interactions between any individual actor or institution and the network as a whole. Livebloggers, then, are switchers above all, as their job – especially in information-scarce environments such as coverage of protests in distant countries limited by censorship – consists mainly of sifting information for validity and choosing the sites and ways in which their journalism will interact with other actors and information sources in the network. This is true in a different way for those bloggers who straddle linguistic, cultural, or information divides and introduce specific knowledges into a particular blogosphere or discourse. Information ‘switching’ requires both senders and receivers. Knowledge is equally pushed into public debate and, once it has been placed in a sub-public sphere, pulled into another sub-public; only when these two sets of switchers collaborate can the knowledge-circuit be completed.

As journalism moves increasingly toward reflecting the increasingly networked information environments that underpin late-capitalist development across all sectors (Castells, 2000), Bruns’ model of ‘produsage’ comes to impact not just the end products of mainstream journalistic production processes, but also the epistemological characteristics of journalism. The technologically aided rise of ‘mass self-communication’ (Castells, 2007) has gone some way toward creating a larger information network that might be considered ‘journalism.’ Despite the protestations of various contributors to this sphere that they are not journalists and that they do not ‘do’ journalism, these ‘non-journalists’ produce and package news stories for their audiences, breaking stories or revising others’ narratives. The resulting network of professional and non-professional journalists emerges as a rhizome of links and commentaries; nodes that aim for comprehensive truths can do so only by integrating themselves more fully into the network (see: Deleuze & Guattari, 2004).

This wider journalism network is composed of a variety of actors, not just in terms of their roles in the network (as Castells emphasizes), but also in terms of their institutional affiliations and goals. Mansell’s typology of actors in the information society (2000, pp.23-26) offers ways to think about institutional goals as a product of marketplace position.

Mansell’s typology splits actors into one of three types of institutional affiliations: ‘incumbents,’ ‘insurgents,’ or ‘virtual community actors.’ Converting this model to journalism as it exists on the web, it’s possible to think of incumbents as larger institutional actors who seek to transfer their old-media dominance into new forms of dominance across emerging media platforms. Insurgents on the other hand may be aspiring incumbents but they also aim

to create new products and services in order to better take advantage of the opportunities presented by new technologies and platforms. Virtual community actors are likely to be members of 'communities of interest' or 'blogospheres,' and while they also may have goals of transmitting their content more widely, they find themselves in need of more dominant or mass-market switchers to carry their work to a wider audience. Both insurgents and virtual community actors tend to be web-native outlets, but the strategic goals of insurgents lead them to attempt to position themselves as switchers in the mode of incumbents -- as points of connection in wider circuits of information and power. All three types of actors have participated in liveblogging of the post-election protests in Iran, but for different reasons and with different strategic practices.

This typology offers useful ways to consider the shifts in journalistic norms across different types of journalistic actors in the new media space. These shifts include a greater interactivity with audiences, an increasing emphasis on offering the public the 'process' of news work as a product, and changing norms about verification of sources and information with reference to what is considered 'publishable' in online space. Blogging practices are opening up new challenges to traditional reporting and journalism epistemologies (Matheson, 2004; Rantanen, 2009). Among these is shift toward a journalism that consciously incorporates itself into a wider network of journalism and information. As Rantanen argues,

instead of being fundamentally a monologue, communicated unidirectionally, online news appears increasingly to include unidirectional statements within a broader spectrum of ongoing conversations (2009, p.117).

This is true of liveblogging to an even larger degree, as information is cobbled together from a variety of sources while journalists struggle to make sense of the 'fog of war' of an information-scarce environment. In this situation, elements of collaborative 'networked' journalism are incorporated into newswork, 'allowing users to participate more in constructing knowledge' (Matheson, 2004, p.455)

The changing nature of temporality in liveblog reporting also represents a shift in journalistic authority but opening up the workings of news production to audiences in real time. Rantanen argues that Internet news creates a news that exists in an eternal present in which '[t]here is no precise moment' (2009, p.127). News and event blur by occurring inseparably from each other in time. But the co-temporality of liveblogging actually serves to historicize and situate news in relation to event, by offering a constantly changing picture of what has 'actually happened' through the lens of news producers struggling to keep up. Jeff Jarvis sums up this difference between print and web journalisms thusly: 'Newspaper people see their articles as finished products of their work. Bloggers see their posts as part of the process of learning' (2009). The hyperlinks and timestamps of liveblogging help shift

journalistic authority away from the certainties of print news; journalistic voices serve as filters of possible narratives and entryways into the contextual worlds of the facts presented, but in the end meaning is constructed by the user (Matheson, 2004).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this paper combines elements of journalism theory with strategies of thinking about institutional power in new media networks. Using a modified version of Mansell's (2000) typology of institutional actors in new media space, journalistic actors were placed in one of three tentative categories: incumbents, insurgents, or virtual community actors. In reality there are a spectrum of behaviours and practices that define these groups, and some actors in this study straddled the divisions between categories (*The Daily Dish*, for example, as a news aggregation and commentary blog with a strong authorial voice and partisan leanings, might fit uncomfortably in any of the three categories). How these actors function and interact in journalism networks form the basis for this modified categorization. Journalism networks are one elements of the information networks that make up the 'network society' (Castells, 2000; Castells, 2007), and much recent journalism research has focused on the ways that journalism is becoming increasingly network-enabled, and the ways in which that changes journalistic best practices (Beckett, 2008). Castells focuses on the power relationships embedded in networks, and for the journalistic focus of this study I will incorporate his notion of 'switching' as a mode of information-transmission that bridges the gaps between networks through the nodes that control the gates that connect them.

Theoretical approaches to the impact of new media on journalism also underpin this study. Castells' concept of 'switchers,' which describes actors rather than actions, might be considered in terms of a practice that Axel Bruns calls *gatewatching* (Bruns, 2005; Bruns, 2007). Gatewatching is part of the new toolbox of 'networked journalism' (Beckett, 2008), but it is important to remember that participation in a network can occur in a variety of ways including both switching and content providing, and some outlets act as both switchers and content providers. Additionally, liveblogging must be considered from the perspective of journalistic epistemologies and norms in three areas of direct important to newsgathering in information-scarce environments. From a variety of perspectives, this paper will explore the temporality and provisionality of breaking news; the role of journalistic authority in the presentations of whole truths, and the authentication procedures that news producers use both prior to an after publishing information. Finally, an examination of 'narrative netwar' (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1996; Sumate, Bryant and Monge, 2006) will explore the interplay between social movements and the news media, in an attempt to address questions of

journalistic objectivity and the epistemological complications of news work under conditions of information scarcity.

Objectives

While academic research has at least partially addressed the impact of blogging and other forms of new media on journalistic practice, there has been very little work that addressed the specific practice of liveblogging. Using English-language liveblog coverage of the post-election protests in Iran in 2009 and beyond as a case study, this paper will explore the impact of liveblogging on possible shifts in journalistic epistemology, examining the self-perceptions of journalists in three institutional categories with regard to their journalistic practice as livebloggers. The main question this paper will attempt to answer is

In what ways do liveblogging journalists perceive their practice as a shift in journalistic practice?

I hope to answer this question by dividing livebloggers into three categories by institutional affiliation, where answers may differ with respect to the roles of new and old journalistic methods and attitudes. Additionally, I will answer this question by focusing on three main categories of news production norms: provisional truths and journalistic temporality; partial truths and the creation of narratives; and the authentication of sources and its relation to traditional objectivity norms. By examining the self-perceptions of a diverse set of journalists engaged in liveblogging, I hope to sketch the emergent norms of the practice and offer ways to think about the still-evolving lines between liveblogging and traditional modes of news production.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In investigating notions of journalistic practice and how journalists themselves situate themselves within the confines of traditional journalistic ethics, qualitative semi-structured interviews were used. This section of the paper will justify this choice of method and explore the practical and theoretical limitations of this choice.

Research Strategies and Justification

This paper is an attempt to excavate current practices in web journalism, but also the attitudes of the authors of a new form of web journalism toward 'traditional' journalistic practice. As such, qualitative interviews were chosen. As Kvale argues, 'the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view' (1996, p.1). This attempt to get inside the attitudes of the practitioners of web journalism is thus best served by interviews, which allow the subjects to discuss their methods and how they understand the processes and values that underpin their work. The qualitative aspect of these interviews is also rooted in a desire not for comprehensive statistical approaches to truth, but rather to sample a range of practices and attitudes across the spectrum of types of liveblog-hosting sites. Qualitative research methods were appropriate in this way also; as Gaskell argues, 'the objective of qualitative research is to sample the range of views' (2000, p.42) rather than 'counting opinions or people' (p.41). This sampling of various views was an important element in the research agenda of approaching a possible typology of liveblogging practices. An important element of this was to interview various types of sites to explore the ways in which they adhere to standards of 'journalism' in liveblog coverage. Some of these interviews were with bloggers who do not consider themselves 'journalists' as such. In these interviews especially, I was able to witness respondents offer a 'narrative under construction' (Gaskell, 2000, p.46) when attempting to answer questions about their journalistic practice.

A semi-structured approach to the interview was taken in order to allow respondents to pursue further detail on their impressions of their professional values and practices. The semi-structured approach allows for flexibility in pursuing lines of questioning, in order to modify the topics and follow a respondent's line of thought to its conclusion. If 'qualitative interviews are always open to the unexpected and emergent' (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.172), then the semi-structured interview offers an opportunity to take the emergent and unexpected knowledge on offer and use it to shape the rest of the interview and the project as a whole. Open-ended questions allow for answers to be broadly directed without being prescriptive, and allow the interviewer to tailor questions to individual respondents both before and during the interview process. The semi-structured approach may also be more

conducive to generating hypotheses from the results, rather than testing an existing hypothesis (Mouton & Marais, 1988, p.135). As this research began with a set of concerns rather than a strict hypothesis about the practices of the different categories of journalists using liveblogs as a tool for coverage of breaking events, the limitations of a more structured interview would have inhibited the deeper exploration of the journalists' own views of their work.

As the selection of blogs was meant primarily to be indicative of forms of journalistic practice rather than representative, quantitative methods were ruled out early on in the process, for two main reasons. First, the study's primary goal is to understand changes in journalistic practice by identifying kinds of approaches to journalism in information-scarce environments. The typological aims of the study make a range of respondents across the three identified categories of institutional actors (incumbent, insurgent, and virtual community actors) more significant than a larger, more representative sample size. Secondly, the number of English-language sites covering the 2009/2010 post-election protests as liveblogs was relatively small. Only a few mainstream outlets chose to augment their coverage of the protests through liveblogging, and a similarly small number of web-based sites (either 'virtual community' blogs or 'insurgent' news sites) took on the task of constantly updating their news and links. Even if the study had intended to provide a quantitative assessment of shifting journalistic norms across different categories of news sites, this would be impossible in a study of responses to the Iran protests that began in 2009.

Some limitations were unavoidable due to the constraints of working with journalists and bloggers who cover breaking news, including those who work in a region with the political and infrastructural instabilities of the Middle East. As respondents were scattered throughout the globe, geographic constraints made it impossible, with one exception, to conduct face-to-face interviews. The majority of interviews were thus conducted on Skype as audio phone calls. While video was considered as an added layer of personal connection, in most cases respondents preferred speaking on Skype without video. As many respondents were working journalists, no doubt some preferred this virtual telephony in order to be free to read emails or news updates on breaking stories. In some cases, the ability to speak with respondents was limited by technological or security concerns. Alexandra Sandels, a journalist based in Lebanon, found Skype to be an unreliable platform because of the limited Internet infrastructure in her immediate vicinity, and therefore preferred to conduct the interview by instant message. Another respondent, the pseudonymous blogger Homy Lafayette, is based primarily in Iran and felt it important to preserve his or her anonymity as much as possible, due to concerns about security. He/she felt uncomfortable having his or her voice recorded in association with the blog, and I agreed that the blogger's anonymity could be most surely protected by not transmitting our interview across largely unsecured

Internet connections. Under different circumstances this could perhaps have been avoided through a series of technological security layers, however there is no guarantee that the respondent would be comfortable with these measures as being adequate to ensure that his/her identity could remain anonymous. In this ‘politically sensitive or dangerous situation’ (Mann & Stewart, 2003, p.84), instant messaging enabled our conversation to take place despite these security concerns. The time constraints of journalism limited access to blogger Chris Bodenner of The Daily Dish, who was able to answer questions via email in lieu of scheduling a conversation.

Summary of Procedures

Sampling Strategies

Relevant blogs were identified through a variety of methods. First, mainstream newspaper websites in the US and UK, and specialist English-language media focusing on Iranian were consulted to find which outlets hosted liveblogs. The liveblog posts were then examined to find sites linked to by these blogs, and see which were other liveblogs covering the protests. Additionally, a variation of snowball sampling was introduced via interviews to find which liveblogs these authors considered as peers or sources in covering the protests. Discussions with academics and journalists who focus on Iran broadened the list of candidates. In selecting blogs run by individuals, I relied on the reputation of these blogs in the minds of more institutionally-affiliated bloggers (both ‘incumbent’ and ‘insurgent’). Bloggers from this wider list were contacted, with varying success. Some agreed to interviews while others were difficult to reach or could not schedule a time during the research phase of the project. Schedule constraints were especially difficult for working journalists whose job it is to cover breaking news, and some scheduled interviews were postponed or rescheduled multiple times in an attempt to find time to conduct them. In the end, interviews of various types were conducted with journalists representing seven liveblogs: Robert Mackey from *The Lede*, the breaking-news blog of *The New York Times*; Matthew Weaver, who liveblogged the protests for the website of *The Guardian*; Alexandra Sandels, who contributed liveblog coverage to *The Los Angeles Times*; Scott Lucas, founder of the US-foreign policy blog *Enduring America* (<http://enduringamerica.com/>); Chris Bodenner, one of the main bloggers at The Daily Dish (http://andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com/the_daily_dish/); ‘Homy Lafayette,’ blogger at *Iran News in English* (<http://homylafayette.blogspot.com/>); and ‘Pedestrian’ from the blog *Sidewalk Lyrics* (<http://www.sidewalklyrics.com/>).

Topic Guide Design and Analysis

Development of the topic guide was conducted through an examination of literature surrounding blogging practice and journalism standards in general, alongside discussions with various academics and journalists to hone the concerns specific to liveblogging of crisis events. While the study was not piloted as such, due to the small group of bloggers covering these protests through liveblogs, some questions were modified from a series of interviews conducted as part of a previous research project on which I collaborated, studying the practices of 'networked journalism' in UK newspapers. The topic guide itself begins with a few basic informational pieces about the format and history of liveblogging at a given site. There were then two main categories of questions. The first dealt with questions of journalistic practice as regards authentication of information, including the advantages and disadvantages of liveblogging as well as the differences between liveblogging and traditional journalism. The second main category of question dealt with motivations for covering the protests. These questions also approached issues of ideological bias in the coverage, through either an explicit stance or through skepticism about either official or unofficial sources. Topic guides varied slightly depending on the particular institutional affiliations of the blogger and the nature of their site; however, the same issues were addressed in all interviews.

Interviews were transcribed prior to analysis, in order to facilitate the selection of direct quotes and to keep the thread of conversation visible while reviewing answers. During the interviews themselves, written notes were taken to facilitate the process of quote selection and to keep the interviewer's first impressions available during later analysis. This step aimed to avoid, at least partially, some of the pitfalls of analyzing time-delayed and transcribed interviews, one of the main pitfalls of interview analysis (Kvale, 1996, p.205). The analysis itself was a largely thematic analysis of the answers, done through a form of meaning condensation, in which longer statements are 'compressed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words' (Kvale, 1996, p.192). As the open-ended nature of interview questions led the respondents to address similar issues across various answers, this meaning condensation involved a more flexible interpretive approach in which related topics across various answers were grouped together in order to be summarized more succinctly from a thematic perspective.

FINDINGS

Introduction

Expert interviews with liveblog practitioners addressed the practices and self-reported journalistic norms of liveblogging. These interviewees were broadly categorized as follows: Incumbents were bloggers who write for the websites of large, institutional newspapers, in this case Robert Mackey from the blog *The Lede* at *The New York Times*, Matthew Weaver from *The Guardian*, and freelancer Alexandra Sandels who writes for the Middle East-focused blog *Babylon and Beyond* at *The Los Angeles Times*. Insurgents interviewed were Scott Lucas from *Enduring America* and Chris Bodenner from *The Daily Dish*. *Enduring America* is in many ways a classic journalistic insurgent, responding to an opening in the information marketplace; *The Daily Dish* was provisionally labelled 'insurgent' because, while hosted by a mainstream news source (US-based politics and culture magazine *The Atlantic*), it is a 'personal' blog in many respects under the leadership of commentator Andrew Sullivan, and is overtly partisan on many issues including Iranian politics. Virtual community actors were individual, unaffiliated bloggers who had a vested personal interest in the Iranian political struggle, and who offered (and continue to offer) significant liveblog coverage of the crisis as it unfolds. Pedestrian from *Sidewalk Lyrics* and Homy Lafayette fall into this category.

In examining the qualities of breaking-news liveblogging as an emergent form of journalism, respondents largely agreed about the differences between their work and 'traditional' forms of reporting stories in print media. Previous liveblogging experience was varied, but most incumbent and insurgent outlets began experimenting with the form in 2008, covering the American presidential election, the Mumbai terror attacks, or the war in Gaza. It is thus an emerging practice and as such, there was not always certainty about the established 'rules' of liveblogging. Most participants viewed their standards as having been set in a somewhat manner to begin with, but now having settled into a set of practices based on navigating the norms of web-communication in breaking news environments with traditional norms of journalism. All respondents viewed liveblogging as offering new ways of augmenting traditional journalism.

Authority and link-culture: Provisional and Partial Truths

In establishing the differences between the news product offered by liveblogs and that offered by articles published in print, the journalists who participated in this study emphasized the less solid authoritative basis for constructing unitary 'truths' in their reports.

The changing nature of authoritative voice in liveblogging relies on two main aspects of the informational dynamics of the crisis liveblog. First, truths presented in real time are *provisional truths*; secondly, the individual updates or additional facts are always only *partial truths*, making the live blog as a whole a ‘mosaic’ of the information that is circulating at any given time.

Provisional truths and journalistic temporality

As information comes to light or is revised, stories change and thus any live reports need to be amended to reflect this new information. In some cases, facts previously reported are invalidated by new information. While print papers can run a correction or publish a revised version of the story in later editions, and television broadcasts can simply correct their previous story by presenting a new, temporally instant version of the story, liveblogging roots itself in a series of provisional and timestamped versions of a story, constantly updated and expanded upon but without the ‘eternal present’ atemporality of other live media. Previous versions of a story remain and are replaced by newly provisional truths, but the ability to see this process of correction and amendment makes even the newest version of a story more obviously ‘provisional.’ Robert Mackey discussed one news liveblog at the New York Times, covering the shootings at Fort Hood in Texas in November 2009. A US Army spokesman had originally announced that there was one gunman and he was dead, but a long-delayed follow-up press conference confirmed that the gunman was still alive. By this point the first edition of the printed paper had gone to press and the story could only be changed in later editions. The liveblog decided to keep all previous references to the gunman’s death, choosing the transparency of timestamps to reflect updated information as ‘what we know now.’ Mackey argues that this process transparency requires a new relationship to a news audience as well, in which the audience ‘understand[s] that they are inside the newsgathering process to some extent.’ The Guardian’s Matthew Weaver also suggested that liveblogging is ‘letting readers in on [...] our thought process’ and ‘learning about what’s happening with the readers and showing the workings’ of the journalistic process, in real time.

Liveblogging makes apparent the working of journalism by changing the relationship of reporting to temporal constraints of publication times. By making reporting a more immediate process, it reports the latest news as it’s currently understood in a way that mimics television journalism. By temporally situating these provisional truths, liveblogging opens up the inner workings of traditional journalism practice. Journalists, including some of those interviewed for this study, frequently use sausage-making as a metaphor for journalistic process. Liveblogging, then, offers a peek inside the sausage-machinery to

examine the gears and inputs. This attitude was mainly expressed by the two journalists who work for large, institutional newspapers and thus consider their work as a different form of processing news than that of their colleagues. Liveblogging is an extreme form of what Bob Garfield called ‘incremental information gathering’ in his NPR interview with TechCrunch founder Michael Arrington (‘Process Journalism,’ 2009). Chris Bodenner described *The Daily Dish* as ‘constantly self-correcting, and very transparent about doing so;’ Matthew Weaver quoted his Guardian colleague and fellow-liveblogger Andrew Sparrow, the *Guardian* website’s senior political correspondent, as saying that ‘journalism is the first draft of history, liveblogging is the first draft of journalism.’ This ‘first draft,’ even when it becomes a second or third draft of a story, is necessarily incomplete as it is being published before all the facts are in.

Partial truths, narratology, and ‘seeing what’s out there’

The provisionality of truths included in liveblog posts leads inextricably to the second important element of liveblogging epistemology: that individual updates in a liveblog are necessarily only *partial* truths. The attitudes expressed toward the incompleteness of stories in the liveblog format differed across the various categories of actors. Interviewees from more institutional journalism outlets tended to see liveblogs as supplements to the traditional news stories published by the paper, and viewed their blogs as offering the partial truths inherent to the unfinished stories of the ‘first drafts’ of printed stories. All three of the bloggers interviewed from large newspapers mentioned their coordination with the writers of articles for the print edition as an important part of their blogging process. These incumbent actors tended to be very conscious their position as insurgents in the context of their institutions, where their practice is a shift away from the traditional norms of authoritative voice in published articles. Robert Mackey of the New York Times argued that liveblogging, as a form, emphasizes the creation of a ‘mosaic’ of links rather than an attempt to distil the full story:

In a way I’m always putting in sources partly because it seems like part of the ethos of the whole thing. [...] But also because that is sort of like this accretion of knowledge about the event, it’s like a mosaic, its based on all the different sources.

Both Mackey and *The Guardian*’s Weaver each emphasized that their reporting samples the range of narratives available about a given event or situation rather than simply trying to create a single consolidated narrative. Weaver described the ways in which the audience is responsible for creating narratives from what liveblogs publish, using the example of the protests from February, 2010:

That was an example of saying, look, we don't know what's gone on, there's no journalist there, you decide, this is one version of events on State TV this is another version of events from [demonstrators]... they're not dissimilar but there are clearly big discrepancies - you decide.

For these institutional journalists, the task of liveblogging is to present a variety of perspectives as information unfolds about an event. In the 'fog of war' that news producers navigate while events unfold, liveblog coverage 'reflects [...] the information that's accumulating in the news room [...] as we start to gather information' (Mackey). The task of liveblogging, in their eyes, is one of creating a mosaic of often-conflicting perspectives on events for the audience to decipher. If liveblogging reveals the inner workings of journalism production, then refraining from presenting an overarching narrative before the facts are clear allows these bloggers to maintain journalistic objectivity, which all expressed as an important value in news coverage that they sought to uphold.

If liveblogs constitute a 'mosaic' that creates the story, then the individual updates are the tiles that combine to make the larger picture. Virtual community actors tended to consider their roles as adding pieces to this larger mosaic rather than aggregating content and zooming out to the wider picture. In this respect, they considered themselves sources more than switchers in the context of the English-language Iran-protest blogosphere, or perhaps as switchers that operate across the linguistic and cultural divides that separate the English and Farsi sections of the Iran-protest blogosphere. Both of the bloggers interviewed were very critical of American and English-language media. According to their point of view, English-language media outlets offered stories that would turn out to be false because of a lack of understanding or knowledge of Iran or a lack of primary sources. Homy Lafayette suggested that the lack of expertise amongst journalists led to many of these problems: 'the problem is that 30 years after the revolution, there still aren't that many real "Iran experts" in newsrooms.' Pedestrian from Sidewalk Lyrics argued that CNN in particular was prone to running stories based on rumours that she could easily refute with phone calls to friends. Both of these bloggers argued for the primacy of firsthand sources and Farsi-language media over the aggregational element of other liveblogs, which they argued has a tendency to create an echo chamber for unverified rumours. Lafayette 'almost exclusively tr[ies] to go to Farsi sources for new ideas' while Pedestrian tries to include material from the 'lots of really wonderful sources in Persian that English speaking people might not have access to.'

Additionally, both Pedestrian and Lafayette aimed to bring their individual knowledge to the story, offering perspectives from their unique positions as 'experts' in the country rather than (or in addition to) any journalism expertise they may have. While Lafayette does have a background in journalism, Pedestrian does not have any prior training as a journalist

nor does she consider her blog 'as a news site specifically.' Pedestrian tries to give 'the reader a glimpse of the dynamic of Iranian politics,' and did so during the post-election protest by 'trying to cover as much news as possible that was being left behind.' This attempt to present the news that's being ignored in English suggests that she considers her direct knowledge of the situation – through connections to friends, or even her ability to read accounts in Farsi – as offering missing pieces of the puzzle to the larger account of what's happening in Iran. Similarly, Lafayette argues that offering expertise is part of the project of his/her blog:

Even if I'm simply writing about the statements made by such and such a figure, I feel the need to give background -- who is this person, what is his/her history, why is the statement important etc. I rarely just throw facts out. As far as the translations go, same thing. I will provide notes within the translation to help people understand. [...] I always assume that my target audience does not have a deep knowledge of Iran and its history.

These two bloggers position themselves as both sources as well as switchers across linguistic divides. In both capacities they hope to transmit their content to a wider audience; implicit in this is a need for switchers with larger audiences to link to their content. For virtual community actors such as these, their ability to add to the larger 'mosaic' of a developing story relies on their material being incorporated by switchers with access to larger audiences.

Insurgent actors interviewed saw their relationship to narrative in a similar way to virtual community actors. *Enduring America's* Scott Lucas argued that mainstream media coverage, especially in English, leaves open spaces for a blog like *EA* to offer expertise and a widening of perspective. The 'different perspective' that *Enduring America* offers comes from their expertise in the areas covered and a desire to look through local lenses rather than those of American or European foreign policy. *EA's* first major liveblogging experience was during the Gaza War of 2008-2009, and in that case as well as during the post-election crisis in Iran Lucas found that 'the U.S. was not necessarily at the centre of this story.' This attempt to emphasize a different perspective than the mainstream English-language media leads to a 'de-centring of the United States' in the positioning of stories, as in the case of the Iranian post-election protests:

the United States is not at the centre of this case and so my perspective is going to be, first and foremost, not how the U.S. Government sees Iran, or not how a U.S. analyst sees Iran, it's going to be how the Iranians see what is happening and that's hugely different.

This editorial stance leads *Enduring America* to consider different sources and contacts as important to telling the story of an event. This includes readers who might have expertise in a given area, as well as other contacts on the ground. One prominent *EA* contributor, 'Mr. Verde,' began as a reader sending in information before becoming a contributor on Iran. *EA*

also uses social media forms like Twitter as tools for receiving information about the stories as they break, but largely as a 'portal' toward 'what may be out there in the press or what we should know is out there in the press.' In this portal usage of Twitter, sources and contacts become social media contacts who can offer links to breaking stories when they are first reported anywhere in the world.

In passing these stories on to their readership when the stories are single media reports, *Enduring America* is able to do a form of meta-reporting that other outlets with more institutional pressure toward certainty might need to avoid. Lucas describes this process as being one of moving past the confines of the facts of an event and into the facts of why and how an event is reported:

I can go out with the item and say, look, this is coming in, we can't completely confirm but here's our judgement on it. Now if the story changes [...] I can pull back a bit and say no it didn't happen. But my question is, why was it reported that it happened? [...] That's a different media process because quite often what BBC or CNN are doing or the New York Times is, they're trying to say "yes, no, did it occur or didn't it occur," and I'm trying to say not only "did it occur, did it not occur," but what's the political manoeuvring that's going on around this?

While liveblogs routinely link to reports prior to full verification of their claims, Lucas is instead offering another level of meta-analysis in which EA can report on the journalistic and political factors that underlie *others'* journalistic process. *Enduring America's* goal is to capture elements of the narrative that are being ignored elsewhere, through 'local' expertise and a view that focuses more on non-'Western' sources and viewpoints than other media outlets. Like the virtual community actors interviewed, EA aims to add information to the attention of audiences and mainstream media outlets, but does so primarily through 'switching' information from Iran-centric spheres into a wider English-language conversation. This meta-reporting and aggregational 'switching' also contributes elements to the broader mosaic of a story by exploring the motives and processes of actors who participate in the media events connected to the 'event' itself. In this respect, news and event do blur (as Rantanen would have it) but because journalists, like social movement, participate in information networks that have political consequences (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 2003). The story, as EA sees it, is not just the event in question, but also the narrative netwar manoeuvring that surrounds the event itself. This widening of the frame of the story exemplifies the way insurgent practices, in this case with regard to content worthy of 'switching' into wider networks, reimagine the tasks currently taken on by incumbent actors.

The Daily Dish, according to writer Chris Bodenner, was most interested in bringing information into a broader stream of awareness, at which point *Dish* writers hoped that

mainstream outlets would pick up the story as one to receive further verification and follow-up: 'We largely saw our role as getting information out there as soon as possible, in order to alert traditional outlets and allow them to follow up on the leads, sorting out the reliable from the unreliable.' *The Dish* positioned itself as an aggregator of a variety of content, from amateur photos and videos to Twitter posts, reader emails and foreign policy analysis. The use of reader emails as a significant source is an important source of interactivity that gives *The Dish* the majority of their 'original' reporting. While always seeking to offer new information to the conversation about the protests, this narrative selection was frequently informed by the blog's position as 'unabashed supporters of the Green Movement and opposition leaders.' The writers of *The Dish* were thus conscious of creating *a certain kind of* mosaic from a political stance, but openly included various ideological opponents in their coverage to capture the range of opinion. In creating this mosaic, *Daily Dish* writers aimed to be 'switchers,' in Castells' model, who consciously wielded their switching power in the service of the Green Movement's 'information warfare.' Their use of the liveblog as a form of informational advocacy – 'a bullhorn to grab people's attention,' as Bodenner put it – establishes their 'dramatic narrative' as an effort to contribute to the Green Movement's global 'narrative netwar.'

Journalistic standards, fact checking, and new news production processes

Authentication Processes

Actors across the three institutional categories had broadly similar approaches to information verification, though less established outlets tended to place a slightly greater emphasis on 'getting it right' as a key element of their reporting and placed a higher priority on the use of firsthand sources. Whether this was a reported bias or an actual one, it is clearly an attempt by these virtual community and insurgent actors to solidify their credibility; where a more established outlet has already built up trust in their reporting this may be less necessary. In addition, the emphases placed by incumbents on reporting the competing narratives make their reporting perhaps slightly more able to incorporate uncorroborated information when it has been reported elsewhere and is as yet unverified.

Across the spectrum of actors, there was general agreement that trust in sources was earned through consistent reliability. Robert Mackey of *The New York Times* described his fact checking process as 'improvisational' with respect to the sources in play in his reporting. Mackey was previously a fact-checker for *The New York Times Magazine*, and considers his liveblog verification process to be a condensed version of *Magazine* fact-checking practice, which he described as being a crash course in subject-area expertise. He also described

confirming details with experts, both via personal contact and through their online commentaries. Overall this approach is a combined learning process of understanding the situation enough to verify information and constantly crosschecking information with others who can offer expertise. Mackey also mentioned his growing knowledge of Tehran's geography over the course of his protest coverage, and how this facilitated a personal understanding of whether a certain video or report seemed plausible given the other events on a given day. This overall approach was emblematic of fact checking in liveblogs in general during the protests, as many sources of information were largely untested (by these outlets, at least) prior to the election. Scott Lucas from *EA* also found new sources that earned their credibility through a track record of information that turned out to be correct, and this was the only determining factor for establishing the credibility of a source of even contributor to the site:

some of the people who write for *EA*, the correspondents, let alone the sources, I've never met them face to face because of security considerations. I don't necessarily know the real name of one or two of our correspondents. Why did I use them? Because I crosschecked the information they provided and I've done this for months and they've been on the mark all along, absolutely on the mark. The information has stood up.

Enduring America, in contrast to standard practice at many mainstream news outlets, might publish a story with only one source to support it, provided that the source is consistently reliable. Similarly, Pedestrian from *Sidewalk Lyrics* verified information through the track record of sources, placing a larger emphasis on firsthand trust and personal contacts in Iran. Perhaps, like *Enduring America*, Pedestrian's reliance on contacts and trust relates to her only partial membership in the profession of 'journalism.' More than any blogger interviewed she displayed an active lack of journalistic identity, commenting 'I don't see my blog as a news site specifically, so if I'm not sure about something I just don't write about it.' On the other end of the virtual community journalist-identity spectrum was Homy Lafayette, who has a background in journalism and is very conscious of a possible credibility gap between larger media and an anonymous blogger. In spite of the partisan political slant of *Iran News in English*, Lafayette aims above all for credibility and considers that the blog's reputation would suffer from even one wrong story. In checking the validity of a story, Lafayette attempts to triangulate facts from as many different sources as possible, taking into account the biases in each source and the context surrounding that source. The major exception to these practices among liveblogs studied was *The Daily Dish*, which (as mentioned above) primarily covers the conversation about Iran, and does very little firsthand reporting.

Objectivity and authority

Self-conceptions of journalistic objectivity differed significantly across the three categories. While all three categories strive for truthful reporting, virtual community actors were open about the degree to which their political biases inform their work. Journalists working for incumbent outlets were very strongly committed to the value of objectivity as expressed in traditional journalistic norms, identifying ‘journalism’ as something that can only exist under conditions of objective reporting. *Babylon and Beyond* contributor Alexandra Sandels argued that ‘you have to give voice to both sides [...] otherwise you’re not doing your job as a journalist.’ However, it is worth noting that the ‘subjectivity’ of virtual community actors overlaps significantly with the expressed objectivity of incumbents. Homy Lafayette argues that ‘there is always some level of subjectivity in the best journalism.’ Lafayette was clear about wanting to keep Iran in the news to foster partisan goals: ‘Very selfishly, I try to keep Iran in the news because as long as it’s there, there’s a bigger chance of having public opinion on the side of the demonstrators.’ However, Lafayette’s focus on credibility in a wider circle than amongst partisans and aim of being ‘a legitimate source of information’ mitigate the sort of partisanship that traditionalists view as tainting journalism. Robert Mackey argued that overtly partisan US political blog *Talking Points Memo* covers stories with journalistic integrity and according to traditional standards of journalism. In this example – or that of Lafayette or of *Sidewalk Lyrics* – we might find a synthesis of partisan motivations and traditional objectivities. As Pedestrian described *Sidewalk Lyrics*, ‘It’s not a neutral source, my blog, at all. [...] But I think there’s a difference between being neutral and being fair. I try my best to be fair, but I’m certainly not neutral and I don’t claim to be at all.’ This notion of ‘fairness’ may be another way to describe the juggling of partisan impulse with journalistic integrity that Mackey referred to in his example. Similarly, Pedestrian discussed the difference between personal reporting and personal voice, suggesting that she can still offer English audiences ‘the perspective of a young Iranian’ while staying what I would term broadly ‘journalistic’ (though she avoided the suggestion that she is a journalist or produces journalism): ‘I don’t talk about my personal connections to [stories], not just because I don’t want to give away any hints to my identity, but because this is not a personal space in terms of me telling my story.’ This narrative depersonalization is part of the objectivity norm in journalistic practice. It may be that Pedestrian’s notion of ‘fair,’ or Homy Lafayette’s goals of ‘credibility’ are indeed the hallmarks of journalistic objectivity by another name.

New news production processes

The Guardian's Weaver discussed a deinstitutionalization of the reporting process that liberates the journalist from certain processes that might separate the journalist from the actual work of 'reporting.' The Guardian's normal process involves multiple layers between the journalist and publication (copy editing, etc), enabled by a technology that 'locks out' further changes from the journalist after a certain point in the process. The software used to enable liveblogging, however, allows the writer to 'go straight into the production system.' This lack of filtering creates immediacy for both readers and journalists, and the process itself becomes more journalist-centred as they retain full authorship over what is published. Similarly, Homy Lafayette appreciates the relative freedom from the constraints of institutional 'media logics' that proprietorship of one's own blog can offer: 'It's quite a liberating experience to not have to work within the financial constraints or editorial line of a news outlet.'

Part of this deinstitutionalization is a further adoption of the principles of 'networked journalism' as regards interactivity between authors and audience. Incumbent and insurgent actors alike considered this an important element of their liveblog coverage. Weaver noted that his work strives to be 'of the web rather than just on the web,' by linking through to other sites and including audio and video in posts. Additionally, Weaver's readers were actively offering content to his attention through comments. Videos of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan – which became perhaps *the* iconic image of the unrest - were posted by readers in the comments to *The Guardian's* liveblog after Weaver had gone home for the evening. Mackey's experience at *The Lede* was similar; reader feedback in comment threads offered confirmation of details on videos or corrections to the timeline of when videos were published. Insurgents were even more willing to incorporate information from readers as content rather than just verification. Enduring America's Scott Lucas argued that interactivity with readers is a key component of good journalism on the web, and one that strengthens their reporting as *EA* readers offer information and expertise that can then become content on the blog – either when contributors follow up on this information, or when readers become contributors themselves. The Daily Dish's prime use of interactivity is by publishing reader emails, when they offer significant contributions to the topic on offer. In the case of the Iran protest liveblog, various posts were updated (or followed up on) with translations or contextual information added by readers.

Two respondents compared liveblogging with earlier forms of journalism. Mackey argued that the liveblog format – like that of the early weblogs – resembles the 'one line summaries of the latest events' that used to run on a news ticker in Times Square. Lafayette discussed the history of live reporting as a component of traditional journalism: 'live

reporting on a situation which is evolving has been a form of traditional reporting for some time, if not decades.' Lafayette then mentioned the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, the Normandy landing and the sinking of the Titanic as previous examples, though Lafayette could easily have gone back as far as the Crimean War reporting of William Howard Russell if not before. These examples all point to the incorporation of various forms of provisional, partial truths into 'traditional' news coverage. Live-blogging, for these practitioners, is an augmentation of traditional journalism rather than a replacement.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, livebloggers across the three designated categories expressed broadly similar viewpoints toward their liveblogging practice. All of these interviewees were self-consciously engaged in creating a 'journalism of connections' (Matheson, 2004, p.458) that aimed to interact with the network of Internet reporting on Iran in different ways. Liveblogging outlets, at least in coverage of the post-election crisis in Iran, tended to be primarily 'news' oriented in the sense of playing by journalistic rules and attempting to present information as fairly as possible. However, they differed somewhat in their narrative approach, with virtual community actors emphasizing the 'story' aspect rather than the mosaic approach to creating narratives. This may be because these actors need to strive more actively for credibility than incumbent or even insurgent outlets. While virtual community actors expressed different motivations and purposes for their work than other actors, and in one case categorized their work as something other than 'journalism,' their descriptions of their practices were in some ways more traditionally 'journalistic' than those of insurgent and incumbent actors. Overall, incumbent actors categorized their work in terms of holding to traditional journalistic norms but were less connected to sources on the ground in Iran than either incumbent or insurgent actors. All three categories were concerned with 'switching' information from one network or sub-network to their audiences. This may be due to the limited number of liveblogs of the Iran crisis, or perhaps that liveblogging is almost definitionally an active commitment to this form of journalistic 'switching.' Incumbent and insurgent practices in particular are converging to a more 'distributed' form of journalistic authority, where the blog acts as a portal to elements of the broader story. Virtual community actors, on the other hand, see themselves as largely responsible for offering pieces to the mosaic rather than assembling the tiles.

Some interviewees emphasized the continuity of liveblogging with previous forms of immediate or short-form journalism. Meanwhile, blogs such as *Enduring America* are exploring new ways of integrating these forms with increasingly self-conscious analyses of the interaction of media reporting and political manoeuvring. Perhaps the technology-aided shift toward liveblogging and related forms like Twitter feeds represents, rather than a new form of journalism, an opportunity for reinvigoration of the goals of news production. Even inside incumbent institutions, liveblogging is an element of insurgent practice. Incumbents are insurgents inside their institutions and see themselves this way. Matthew Weaver commented that more 'traditional' journalists at *The Guardian* and elsewhere had offered praise for his liveblogging work, even those who had been resistant to the form originally. Liveblogging, through its triangulation of sources and its still-developing tradition of meta-reportage, may represent 'a new form of journalism that places stories in a much more

historical, political, and cultural context' (Pavlik, 2001, p.16, in Matheson, 2004, p.458). This triangulation of context will perhaps, alongside immediacy, become the most significant influence of liveblogging practice on other parts of the newsroom.

Future research into liveblogging practice should continue to address the still-developing norms and how they shift traditional journalistic epistemologies. In addition, the typological framework of this study was perhaps overly simple in its reliance on institutional affiliation for categorization purposes; future work should address practices rather than affiliation as the basis for typological categorization. It should be clear that these categorizations are necessarily blurred. As Robert Mackey said, speaking of web news content coming out of Iran:

There are some people that either are already journalists or essentially are acting like journalists and being careful about things, even if they are at that moment amateurs or using social networking to put things out instead of more traditional media.

The same principles apply to the aggregation and analysis of this content. This paper has been an attempt to explore the varieties of liveblogging practice through the lens of these distinctions, but it appears that these distinctions themselves may be disappearing as liveblogging creates its own set of journalistic norms. Future research should reconsider whether these categorizations will be relevant factors in examining liveblogging norms and practice in the context of contemporary journalism.

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