# Fishing in shark-infested waters: The rise of citizen journalists, the question of credibility and the erasure of history

Marydee Ojala



# Marydee Ojala

- Editor-in-Chief, Online Searcher (infotoday.com/onlinesearcher)
- Director, WebSearch University (websearchu.com)
- Co-chair, Internet Librarian International (internet-librarian.com)
- @marydeeo

# Marydee Ojala

- MLS, University of Pittsburgh
- Adjunct faculty, IUPUI
  - Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis
- Librarian journalist



## Social media

- Started as personal communication
  - Facebook founded 2004; Twitter 2006
- Morphed into news source
- Linking out to news and commentary
- Built on relationships
- Peer recommendations
- Uncontrolled, unregulated

## Social media sources

- Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Forums, Discussion groups
- Blogs
- YouTube
- Flickr, Imgur, Tumblr
- Periscope, Meerkat



## Pew reports that

- 8% of U.S. adults get their news from Twitter
- 30% of U.S. adults get their news on Facebook
- www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2014/09/24/how-social-media-isreshaping-news



## Content analysis

- Analyzing Twitter content puts it in historical framework of diary keeping rather than news dissemination
- For historians, social media will provide important insights into daily life
- Different story when it comes to news
- Raises issues of credibility and weaponization

## Citizen journalism

- Social media encouraged everyone to be a journalist
- Commenting on journalist's story
- Writing on social media
- Self-publishing, Self-videoing
- Experts, practitioners writing about their area of expertise
  - Librarian journalists

## Citizen journalism

- Everybody's a journalist
- Questions about ethics, reliability
- Journalism literature worries about "shield law" for bloggers
- Just because it's social media, doesn't mean it's not "real" journalism
- Or that it is

#### Mainstream news

- Digitization of backfiles readability?
- Preservation originally by microfilm
- Online content delivery raises questions about what is being preserved
- Paywalls
- Journalist bloggers
- Divide between online and print journalists declining

#### Mainstream news

- Adapting to social media
- Update own websites continuously
- Have presence on social media, particularly Twitter
- When is a blog journalism?
  - Huffington Post?
  - Buzzfeed?



## Questions about Citizen Journalism

- Who qualifies as a journalist?
- Who to trust?
- How much is/should be preserved?
- How much can/should be accessed
- How searchable/findable is news written by citizen journalists/
  - Copyright concerns

# Credibility

- As librarians and information professionals, we've trusted mainstream news
- We've also trusted our peers for news about the information industry and libraries
- We want researchers to use credible sources
- We need to teach media literacy



## **Evaluation**

- Authority who's writing this, who's publishing it
- Accuracy are the facts correct
- Bias difference between news report and editorial/opinion piece
- Currency how recent is the information, what is date of publication

## **Trustworthiness**

- How much do people trust the mainstream media?
- Not much
- http://craigconnects.org/2015/05/whatsover-the-horizon-for-trustworthy-news.html



## **Biases about Bias**

- Identifying biased sources
  - Political orientation, Funding source, Press releases, Language used, Headlines different from story
- Is it bad to cite biased source?



## Perils of instantaneous news

- In the emotion of the moment, people reporting via mobile devices at the scene often get it wrong
- Not just citizen journalists, mainstream media is equally prone to incorrect reporting, but it follows stories and issues corrections equally instantaneously

## Evaluating social media

- Hoaxes
- Misinformation, misunderstandings
  - "Shooting" in Times Square; Deaths of celebrities
- Multiplier effect
  - Say it enough times and it's true
- Disinformation
  - In political campaigns
  - Through images (Baltimore)

# Evaluating social media

- Spotting the obvious fakes
  - The Onion, The Daily Squib
  - Fake Elsevier, Queen\_UK
- Questioning what you find
  - Photos
  - "Acquired"
  - Exaggerations
  - Lack of clarity (truthiness)



## Perils of Photojournalism

- out-of-context use of our family photo...
  peacefully sleeping sequoia illustrates the story of
  an abused polish kid who was beaten nearly to death in this news article. the original
  interpretation of this image is here:
  <a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/seandreilinger/2712511485/">http://www.flickr.com/photos/seandreilinger/2712511485/</a>
- Skatowane dziecko bliskie śmierci. Ojciec: ma się bać
- www.sfora.pl

# Multimedia literacy

- Snow on the Sphinx?
- Mistagging people
  - On purpose
  - For fun
- YouTube "news" and news
  - Jimmy Fallon
  - John Stewart
  - Mainstream media

## Which is real?





# But this?



#### Iconic news moments

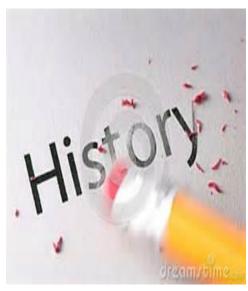
- Airplane landing in Hudson River
- Boston Marathon mobile phone photos
- Twitter reports of Osama Bin Laden's death
- Twitter does break news
- Social media can influence Congressional decisions

## Questions about Credibility

- How do we know what is true?
- Does everybody check Snopes before posting to Facebook, Twitter, and other social media?
- How about political fact checking?
- When is it important to know that facts changed?

## **Erasing History**

- Balance between individual privacy and public right to know
- Technical erasure
- Legal erasure
- Political erasure
- Natural disasters
  - Floods, fires, earthquakes



## Privacy

- What are the expectations of privacy in a social media world?
- Wearables
- Mobile phone cameras
- Mug shots
- Facial recognition software
- Larry Ellison



## Self-Censorship

- Media censors itself depending upon what country it's operating in, who its advertisers are, what its biases are, and who its subscribers are
- Information professionals need to be aware of this and read between the lines



#### Erasure laws

- Mug shots and arrest records U.S. states have instituted erasure laws
- Right to be forgotten in Europe
- What can you publish in name of public disclosure?
- How do erase something from a printed source?
- Chiquita banana

#### Future of social media & news

- Concerns about preservation and access
  - How is social media being preserved?
  - Twitter and Library of Congress
  - Newstex curating and sending to subscription databases
  - Newspapers' policies on preserving comments
- Weaponization of news
- Ability of public to recognize true facts

## Future of social media and news

- Even if it's preserved, can it be accessed?
- Can we search and find?
- Should everything be public?
- How much is social media redefining news?





#### **Contact Details**

- Marydee Ojala
- marydee@xmission.com
- Infotoday.com/onlinesearcher
- Websearchu.com
- Internet-librarian.com

