

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

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# 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/fact-tank/2014/09/24/how-social-media-is-reshaping-news](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/24/how-social-media-is-reshaping-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/whats-over-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:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/seandreilinger/2712511485/>
- [\*\*Skatowane dziecko bliskie śmierci. Ojciec: ma się bać\*\*](#)
- [www.sfora.pl](http://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?



## TODAY'S WEATHER



# 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?



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