

Information Verification in the Age of Digital Journalism

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Abstract

Social media and technologies such as crowdsourcing now play a pivotal role in how broadcast media connects and engages with their audiences. Conversely, in the midst of technological change, traditional values remain.

The findings of this study suggest that journalists' are using social media for news gathering, but continue to place an emphasis on trusted sources and pre-existing relationships. Verification processes can often be circular, and some verification rests in knowledge derived from reporter's earlier work. Use of authoritative sources, reliability, accuracy, and credibility appear to be prime concerns of the journalists' who were interviewed as part of this pilot research study.

Introduction

“The paper and the media landscape have evolved beyond recognition. One thing that remains true is the need to check the veracity of information to ensure it's ‘fit’ for publication, which includes Twitter.” Neil Varcoe (2013), Social Media Lead, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Since the 1990s there has been renewed interest in information seeking in relation to everyday-life information (ELIS), as a result of the publication of Savolainen's (1995) influential article. In this article, Savolainen (1995) explored the importance of mass media in providing citizens with information for their everyday lives. Since that time, the range of available news sources has grown exponentially. An extensive range of online media has been added to the traditional options of newspapers, radio, and television.

Social media and technologies such as crowdsourcing now play a pivotal role in how broadcast media connects and engages with their audiences, so has added yet another dimension. According to Jeff Howe (n.d., cited in Shiri and Rathi 2012, 32), “Crowdsourcing is the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an unidentified, generally large group of people in the form of an open call.”

The media industry has felt more than most the disruptive effects of digital change, adapting to the new media environment and the changing needs of audiences. There have been corresponding changes in journalism norms and practices, with the provision of information for everyday life also being altered by these developments.

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The effect of technologies such as Twitter on journalism practice heralds a “historically significant transformation in the way journalists work and think” (Ahmad 2010, 147). The emergence of the citizen journalist and impact of social media technologies raises significant research questions for journalists, information professionals and scholars.

There is a paucity of research literature on these developments and their implications (Ahmad, 2010). Likewise, there is a lack of qualitative studies on the rise of ‘ambient’ journalism and its effects in Australia. The lines between journalists and citizens continue to be blurred, with predictions that print media will soon be a thing of the past (Ahmad 2010).

My desire for intense study in relation to the evolving media landscape began as a result of working intimately with journalists as an embedded Research Librarian at both Fairfax Media and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

At Fairfax whilst working on the SMH masthead I attended morning editorial conferences held by the Sydney Morning Herald journalism team, thereby making myself more visible and accessible. As a result, close working relationships developed between journalists and librarians and the amount and intricacy of research enquiries increased dramatically. I believe it is essential to be a proactive information provider, and often made suggestions to journalists regarding possible avenues of research after attending the morning conference.

Above all, I have a deep and abiding interest in news and current affairs reporting. Therefore the motivation for this research is twofold; to contribute towards filling this gap, on a national and international level.

Aims and objectives

The purpose of this study is to determine how journalists ‘verify’ the news they get through social media. The emergence of social media is seeing a new community develop online, with collaboration occurring between mainstream news media and citizen journalists (Marsellos 2013). It is intriguing to watch this new community develop a framework in which group members operate and interact. Such development is amplified with the speed in which information is shared and interaction takes place via this medium.

In a similar way, technology such as crowdsourcing plays a crucial role in how the media connects with and engages with their audiences – interactive information sharing. In today’s broadcast media environment when news breaks, it is usually on Twitter. The first photos are not from mainstream media outlets or agencies; they are tweeted or posted to Instagram by eyewitnesses. In effect, anyone with a smartphone can become an extension of the newsgathering operation (Posetti 2009).

Therefore, this study will focus on the following key research question: How is social media influencing the core journalistic value of verification?

Literature review

A review of the literature reveals the changing nature of journalists' information practices, with a specific focus on the dimension of uncertainty inherent within this context. This review is organized thematically, focusing on three key topics, specifically:

1. The uncertainty factor
2. Subjective truth, contextual authenticity
3. The rise of 'ambient' journalism

1. The uncertainty factor

Attfield and Dowell (2003) undertook a two-part study in order to gain a greater understanding of the information seeking behavior of journalists. Firstly, initial research was conducted which involved unstructured interviews with 25 journalists from *The Times* in London. Interview transcripts were transcribed using a Grounded Theory approach. Attfield and Dowell (2003) concluded that uncertainty occurs in journalistic work as a result of constantly changing tasks and work requirements.

As new information is encountered or stumbled upon (Erdelez 1999), events unfold, new insights are gained, word limits revised, thus new "facts and issues" become paramount. This process can be destabilized by an initial idea being discarded, in favor of another angle or viewpoint; the story is thus reinvented. Therefore the dynamic context of journalistic work can be said to have a further dimension or layer of uncertainty.

The second-stage of this study by Attfield et al. (2003) involved examining the parallels between the psychology of design and studies of information seeking in the context of complex information tasks. Writing and design are both creative pursuits; indeed, a writer is a designer of text. Decisions are often made as the writer progresses. As a consequence, a writer is reactive to opportunities presented during the process. Above all, information seeking in the context of writing is dynamic, as the writer engages in an ongoing process of making, reviewing and adjusting commitments.

The researchers drew on influential studies by Kuhlthau in relation to her information search process (ISP) model (Kuhlthau 1993, cited in Attfield et al. 2003, 443), observing that the theoretical foundations of the ISP model were influenced by the constructivist theories of Dewey, Kelly and Bruner. These theories relate to learning being an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge, rather than simply acquiring it. Yet, Attfield et al. (2003, 443) critique Kuhlthau's ISP model, as such linear models do not cater for the "twists and turns of human exploration and creativity."

However, Attfield et al. (2003) believes that information seeking is largely about a "problematic situation." This is a flaw, given that behavior of the *person in the context* is crucial. Information seeking is a dynamic process and is not always about a "problem" or "problematic situation."

Nicholas and Martin (1997) conducted semi-structured, taped information needs interviews with 50 journalists from *The Independent*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*.

Helen Martin, as Chief Librarian on *The Guardian* obviously has a vested interest in the results of this study, as the library's role in meeting information needs is also evaluated.

Uncertainty is a central theme (Nicolas and Martin 1997, Chaudhry and Al-Sagheer 2011, Hossain and Islam 2012), as journalists often do not know exactly what they are looking for; they frequently stumble upon information (Erdelez 1999) when in reality they are searching for something else.

"It is the unexpected that many journalists feed on....the searching associated with this particular need is inevitably unfocused and unstructured....sometimes it is just a reflection of not knowing what they want." Nicholas and Martin (1997, 45).

2. Subjective truth, contextual authenticity

After interviewing a range of senior journalists and editors across the United States, Hettinga (2012) made the intriguing discovery that no-one could define what "accuracy" actually meant in relation to newspaper reporting. Fair and balanced journalism acknowledges a fundamental need to be accurate, but when asked to define accuracy, all sorts of strange concepts start to emerge.

It is easy if a journalist is confined to getting the facts right, where a "fact" is something which can be independently verified, and is not a matter of opinion. In other words, if you state something as a fact in a story, then it needs to be verifiable. When journalists start introducing concepts of "subjective" truth, providing a range of perspectives and aiming for contextual authenticity, this can complicate and confuse matters.

Foreman (cited in Hettinga 2012) emphasizes that that truth can be subjective, citing the journalism term "objectivity" as a point of comparison. Foreman (cited in Hettinga 2012) believes that to be objective is to be detached and avoid adding personal perspective. All the same, reporting requires context and selecting information from a wide range of sources. As information is gathered, journalists must make choices as to what to include, which is a subjective process. Foreman (cited in Hettinga 2012) also mentioned the relationship between fairness and accuracy, arguing that accuracy exists in context.

"So we're trying to replicate truth, as, the best that we can possibly do from a human standpoint, as a human being, a flawed human being, to try to replicate what actually happened and that means you cast your web wide to get sources all over, get different perspectives on the facts."

Gene Foreman, former managing editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (cited in Hettinga 2012).

Attfield et al. (2003) explains that within newspaper journalism, the angle (or viewpoint) serves a dual role, both as a primary story generator and a constraint. Likewise, Nicholas and Martin (1997) argue that a story can be written from a certain point of view, approach or angle, with journalists often seeking information sympathetic to a certain angle that they wish to portray. Conversely, it is their quest for objectivity that can complicate matters, as there is a

perception that journalists can come across as anti-establishment because of their stance on the government, politics and political parties.

In any case, it is the role of investigative journalists to do just that - expose government corruption and malfeasance. For example, the high-profile investigation by *The Telegraph* in the UK revealed how politicians of all parties exploited the system of parliamentary allowances so they could subsidize their opulent lifestyles (Ahmad 2010).

In brief, journalists do not only deal with facts. They include a range of opinions, perspectives and comments on what those facts mean. Professional ethics dictate that a journalist must step back from their subjective views and assess and verify the facts. Thus, it is possible to draw the conclusion that true objectivity is a myth, as each individual has their own subjective world views, with everything being filtered through that lens.

3. The rise of ‘ambient’ journalism

In 2012, James Spigelman, Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) gave an address at the RIPE@2012 conference. In this insightful presentation, Spigelman (2013) explored the challenges of digital technology presently facing the Australian media landscape, suggesting the profound nature of change in the technology of broadcasting and communications has had a transformative effect on audience expectations and capacities.

New technology plays a huge role in how the media reach and engage with their audiences. It is driving innovation and agility in an already fast-paced media and broadcast industry (Spigelman 2013). The consumer shift to tablets and smartphones for communication, news and entertainment, has dramatically changed the media landscape. For example, the ABC newsgathering structure allows the ABC to ensure social media is taken into account during the planning, newsgathering, and production phases. In addition, the ABC News team are using their Instagram account to showcase photos by ABC reporters and citizen journalists.

Yet, in this context the role of the public broadcaster has not been diminished. On the contrary, the editorial role of a responsible intermediary to select and organize the wealth of material has become even more imperative. In order to remain “technologically relevant”, the ABC must interact with its audiences in the manner of their preference (Spigelman 2013, 21). In other words, there is a need to accommodate “multiplatform web journalism” (Ahmad 2010, 150).

Similarly, Moe (2013) illustrates that by 2012 public service broadcasters globally – from the BBC in the UK, the ARD and ZDF in Germany, from the NRK in Norway, to the ABC in Australia - were using social media sites in their provision.

Traditional journalism “defines fact as information and quotes from official sources”, which have been identified as forming the large majority of news and information content. However, this model of news is in flux due to social media technologies (such as Twitter) that facilitate the “instant, online dissemination of short fragments of information from a variety of official and unofficial sources” (Hermida 2010, 297).

Dr. Ali Nobil Ahmad is an academic and journalist based in Pakistan. As such, Ahmad (2010) offers a practice-based anthropology, documenting his experience as a journalist working on *The Guardian* in 2009, thereby providing valuable insights on the use of Twitter in this context. Each section of *The Guardian* has a Twitter account, with followers kept updated on publications for marketing purposes, and journalists are encouraged to disseminate content – interactive information sharing. In addition, Twitter is used as a collaborative research tool by journalists and staff, in order to share ideas and knowledge.

In today's evolving media landscape, when news breaks, it is usually on Twitter. For example, on the day of the G20 protests, journalists from *The Guardian* and commentators supplied a constant stream of live Twitter updates, including photos. Eyewitness accounts were published, unmediated by editors, via a feed on *The Guardian* website, along with maps and a live blog. The numerous layers of coverage meant the user received an extraordinarily rich sense of what occurred as events unfolded, thus producing "a profoundly immersive experience" (Ahmad 2010, 151).

By way of contrast, Ahmad (2010) posits such developments could potentially undermine the role of journalists as fact-finders, as increasing numbers of citizens become 'ambient journalists'. In any case, the lines between journalists and citizens continue to be blurred. Evidence suggests that print journalism could soon be a thing of the past.

Nonetheless, the power to profit from information online (whether filed by journalists or uploaded by citizens) remains in corporate hands, thereby perpetuating the notion of 'information capitalism'. With reference to Ahmad's (2010) writings it is clear that there are critical questions relating to Twitter, in terms of whether (or not) it is a useful tool for journalists, or a marketing tool for corporate entities.

Finally, recent studies relating to Twitter may provide a word of warning for broadcast media organizations. Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch's (2012) analysis of credibility and issue perceptions draws on data from two experiments, revealing that Twitter is considered to be less credible than other news distribution channels. As a result, Schmierbach and Oeldorf-Hirsch (2012, 333-334) highlight the "need for caution" in the use of Twitter to facilitate the distribution of news stories, suggesting that stakeholders need to stay abreast of continued research in this field.

The literature highlights the evolving nature of journalists' information practices, revealing the dimensions of uncertainty inherent within this context. Journalists frequently stumble upon information when actually they are searching for something else. Our behavior is social, situational and contextual; therefore information seeking is a dynamic process.

Professional ethics dictate that a journalist must step back from their subjective views and assess and verify the facts. True objectivity is a myth, as each person has their own subjective world views, with everything being filtered through that lens.

Social media plays a pivotal role in how broadcast media connects and engages with their audiences. There have been corresponding changes in journalism norms and practices, with the rise of the citizen journalist. It would appear that print media will soon be consigned to the

past. Due to the lack of research on these developments within scholarly literature, further study into the changing nature of journalists' information practices is worth exploring, focusing on the following question - How do journalists verify and report on information originating in or reaching them via social media?

Research design

This study uses a qualitative framework to answer the research question. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings. Moreover, social research produces “multiple constructed realities that can be studied holistically, inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers)” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 37).

The research instruments I chose were qualitative semi-structured interviews as set out by Bryman (2012, 470). Consequently, qualitative instruments in the form of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with journalists (participants) in this pilot research project. Taking this ‘social’ approach unquestionably aided the study of the nuances and human-centered issues around this phenomenon.

Scholars such as Talja et al. (2005) highlight the importance of linguistic processes and conversation, concluding that people create and structure their social reality via language. Interviews may be viewed as linguistic constructs, given the social nature of such interaction. Accordingly, qualitative semi-structured interviews using Dervin and Dewdney's (1986) Neutral Questioning technique were conducted with participants to ascertain their viewpoints on the use of Twitter in terms of whether (or not) it is a useful tool for journalists. These interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of each participant (Bryman 2012, 482-483).

In qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As such, for purpose of this study I was the sole investigator (‘human instrument’). Broad research questions were posed relating to strategies employed by journalists to verify news originating via social media, with a focus on the issue of ‘trust’ (in information); as opposed to ‘trust’ in people. This strategy facilitated this case study by virtue of a ‘compare and contrast’ approach, whereby differing viewpoints held by each journalist (participant) were explored.

Analysis was conducted on the data using Grounded Theory (open coding) as illustrated by Bryman (2012, 567). Memoing in Grounded Theory was used to further guide the research process, facilitating the identification of concepts and themes (Bryman 2012, 573-574). To ensure ethical practice, participants were identified by an alpha-numeric code, namely ‘A1’ and ‘Z2’ to guarantee anonymity.

Participation in this study was delimited to journalists who (a) were employed in the broadcast media sector and (b) reside in the state of New South Wales. Furthermore, upon investigation it was established that formal approval (ethics clearance) was not required in order to conduct this pilot research study.

The research followed the approach taken by Shapiro et al. (2013) when studying how journalists' retrospectively describe processes for ensuring accuracy by conducting qualitative interviews with 28 semi-randomly selected Canadian journalists working for French and English-language newspapers. For the purposes of this pilot study, the researcher was limited (due to various logistical constraints) to undertaking qualitative semi-structured interviews with two Australian journalists employed in the broadcast media sector.

Interview design

Each interview was 25-30 minutes long. In theory, the researcher envisaged each interview following an almost identical pattern. In practice, due to the flexible nature of qualitative semi-structured interviewing this was not the case. As the interviews were informal in tone, each interview was more like a conversation. This necessitated adopting a flexible approach, adjusting the emphasis in the research to cater for how the conversation flowed during the course of each interview. In this way, the researcher was able to elicit rich, detailed answers from each participant (Bryman 2012, 470).

The researcher began each interview by asking the journalist in a general way for his/her views on how journalists' discover, use and share information. The discussion focused on the importance of accuracy, verification and use of authoritative information and sources. This led to a discussion on how broadcast media professionals assess the credibility of new information and whether the use of social media technologies (such as Twitter) are influencing and revolutionizing the way journalists' access and share information. Finally, the researcher asked a few concluding questions, focusing on the specific verification methods or strategies journalists' employ when working on a news story.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews were transcribed in full and the transcripts were then reviewed by the researcher to determine broad themes that suggested themselves as common trends. The benefits of transcribing your own interviews include bringing the researcher closer to the data, facilitating the identification of key themes and an awareness of the similarities and differences between participants' accounts (Bryman 2012, 486). Unexpected findings were also revealed.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher identified each participant by an alpha-numeric code (A; Z) and then the order in which they were transcribed (1; 2). Thus, in presenting my findings, A1 designates the first coded interview and Z2 designates the second coded interview. In what follows, I discuss common trends emerging from the interview transcripts, as well as the most apparent areas of convergence and divergence on key issues relevant to journalistic verification.

FINDINGS

In exploring the research question, three main themes were identified, specifically:

1. Quest for truth
2. Verification as a “circular process”
3. Brand and identity

In the midst of technological change, traditional values remain. The findings suggest that journalists’ are using social media for news gathering, but continue to place an emphasis on trusted sources and pre-existing relationships. Verification processes can often be circular, and some verification rests in knowledge derived from reporter’s earlier work. Use of authoritative sources, reliability, accuracy, and credibility appear to be prime concerns of the journalists’ who were interviewed as part of this pilot study.

DISCUSSION

Three main themes relating to the research question emerged. These themes have implications for determining how journalists’ verify and report on information originating in or reaching them via social media. In many ways, certain themes are interwoven, for instance the ‘quest for truth’ is inextricably linked to information verification. Whilst the significance of brand (news brand, personal brand) is an unexpected finding, it is considered to be of some utility, thus is included as part of the discussion.

1. Quest for truth

The quest for truth is paramount in journalistic endeavors. Accuracy itself continues to provide a strong common ideal for journalists. Both participants stressed the importance of being accurate and made numerous statements attesting to this professional norm. When discussing how to assess the credibility of new information, as one put it:

“... I mean look it’s a trap for all of us too you know, the very famous truism about assume makes an ass of you and me and it’s something as journalists’ who are striving to be accurate and known for that, we fall into that trap every single day potentially if we don’t check, and it’s not assuming” (A1).

Another perspective is provided by Participant Z2, who emphasized the importance of familiarizing oneself with a subject, prior to commencing more in-depth research:

“The first basis is that you need to read and become informed on what you’re trying to investigate, because that body of knowledge and knowing who the players are in that story is important to know ... when then you go to social media, that body of knowledge gives you a base to be able to go “that doesn’t sound right, that does sound right, that fits in here”, and it helps you put the pieces together” (Z2).

Equally, participants insisted that other motivations for conforming to this ideal ranged from the impact of an error on their credibility (A1, Z2) or on the reputation of their news brand (A1) or that of the journalistic profession as a whole (A1, Z2). As one participant maintains:

“It’s my reputation and also you owe it to the story I think, because if you get something wrong, of course you can get sued and stuff like that if there’s defamation and all those legalities” (Z2).

This theme is exemplified by Participant Z2’s comment that whilst some journalists are focused on breaking news and breaking stories, she is more concerned about accuracy and verification:

“... I’m not interested in being a journalist that breaks news that may not be accurate. So, I’m all for breaking news, but if it’s accurate and if I’m not confident that it’s accurate and I can verify it and vouch for it, I won’t run with it” (Z2).

Apart from accuracy, another factor that may be taken into consideration by journalists’ using social media is that ideally they should present a balanced view:

“... if you look at the Israel and Palestinian issue for example, because I tweet about the Middle East a lot, I’m even very, very careful about making sure I don’t tweet more about the Israelis or the Palestinians, maybe I probably take it to a different degree, but I’m even very cautious about that because I don’t want anyone to think that I’m favoring one over the other” (Z2).

When asked whether social media (such as Twitter) is influencing the way journalists’ access and share information, here is one particular viewpoint:

“I’m a believer that it’s a tool and it doesn’t replace anything that’s already there. It’s another tool in your tool kit, it’s like you bought a new spanner, you know, that’s a different size. It is changing things, I’m not saying it’s not... it’s just another way of accessing things” (Z2).

2. Verification as a “circular process”

Rather than being a discrete activity, both participants described verification as part and parcel of their information gathering activities. One participant when discussing the use of Twitter during the course of her work day, summarized it this way:

“So even though I might log onto Twitter regularly I won’t pay much attention to individuals who are not attached to organizations’ which I respect. Individuals are just that, unless I can verify where they come from, where they are attached to and therefore how much weight I should give their opinions and thoughts” (A1).

The same participant points out that due to the demands of working in a pressured deadline driven situation means it is imperative not to waste time on sources that could possibly be doubtful, stating:

“It’s very important that I don’t waste time ... reading information that could be from a questionable source, and that doesn’t attribute its facts and statistics to any organization or entity that I can then research further ... it’s all about verifying the original source” (A1).

Both participants were in agreement about the necessity of verifying information and sources. Indeed, it appears that this is a very rigorous and precise practice.

One participant gave a detailed explanation of how she ‘maps out’ who to contact when researching a news story, obtaining information from various sources, then starts verifying, and cross-checking pieces of information:

“... you verify what they tell you by cross checking and triple checking pieces of information, different sources that are unrelated preferably and that way you can cross check and verify and triangulate pieces of information, determine whether that piece of information is accurate or not ...” (Z2).

These findings correlate with the research undertaken by Shapiro et al. (2013) in their study of Canadian journalists. Their study reveals that there is substantial diversity in verification strategies employed by journalists, often mirroring social scientific methods such as ‘source triangulation’- setting out to prove or disprove a hypothesis through triangulation of information from various sources and analysis of primary data sources or official documents.

Another participant provided an example of a situation where she thought a recent news story was published in a certain newspaper, and it turned out that it was published on another date in a different publication. This matter was resolved after contacting a research librarian for assistance:

“... you have to check and triple-check everything, I assumed it was in a certain publication ... there’s a lot swilling in your head, you have to be accurate in this game, you have to be one-hundred percent accurate” (A1).

Moreover, verification is often an ongoing and systematic process, as this participant notes:

“... you build that body of knowledge, you talk to experts and speak to experts in the field and you get that information, you have a system in place where you can cross-check and you can see if that makes sense or not and whether you can verify whether it’s true or not, there’s a method to it...” (Z2).

3. Brand and Identity

An unexpected finding, pronounced emphasis was placed on both ‘news brand’ and ‘personal brand’ by one of the participants. Consequently, Twitter as a new form of Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) marketing directly impacts eWOM communication, by allowing people to share brand-affecting thoughts almost anywhere and at any time (Jansen et al. 2009).

When debating the use of Twitter, one participant revealed that one of her problems with Twitter and social media generally is that there is no regulation, declaring:

“We have the ABC brand behind us, so it’s really important that we are accurate and that we maintain the integrity of the brand, the ABC brand, so we can’t go off half-cocked and say we think twenty people have been killed or whatever until we know it” (A1).

In relation to Twitter, this participant also underscored the fact that given the volume of information that is being presented on Twitter, it is incredibly important to take a sober view of it. Once a reputable news source is associated with a story, only then is it seen as having authority and credibility. When talking about a recent shooting in Nairobi, this was her response:

“... something recently flashed up about Nairobi; that X number of people had been shot at, at that shopping center in Nairobi, and the first flash came from someone whose name you don’t recognize. But the minute you see a reputable news source, that news brand attaching their name to the story, that’s when it becomes an important story to follow” (A1).

Similarly, the Oriella Digital Journalism Study (2013) found that 51 per cent of journalists said they sourced news stories from microblogs such as Twitter, but only when the source behind them is already known to them.

Whilst some research has been conducted in relation to the changing nature of journalism in light of the social media explosion, more research will need to be conducted into the implications of this shift to new technology on journalists’ information practices. Continued research into issues of credibility and issue perception relating to the use of Twitter as a news distribution tool are also worthy of further exploration.

CONCLUSION

Social media plays a pivotal role in how broadcast media connects and engages with their audiences. Interactive information sharing is de rigueur. In today’s evolving media landscape, when news breaks, it is usually on Twitter. Despite this technological change, the fundamental role of journalism remains the same; to gather evidence from authoritative sources, create news stories and convey them.

The findings suggest that journalists’ are using social media technologies for news gathering, but continue to place an emphasis on trusted sources and pre-existing relationships. Verification processes can often be circular, and some verification rests in knowledge derived from reporter’s earlier work. Use of authoritative sources, reliability, accuracy, and credibility are prime concerns of the journalists’ who participated in this pilot study.

One limitation of this study is that it adopted a case study approach, whereby qualitative semi-structured interviews with two Australian journalists employed in the broadcast media sector were undertaken.

As there is a lack of scholarly research on verification standards relating to investigative reporting in the Australian context, it is recommended that future research be undertaken following the approach taken by Shapiro et al. (2013). It is envisaged that this would entail

studying how journalists' retrospectively describe processes for ensuring accuracy by conducting qualitative interviews with 25 semi-randomly selected Australian journalists.

To conclude, it is suggested that further research into the changing nature of journalists' information practices is worthy of consideration, including research into issues of credibility and issue perception relating to the use of Twitter as a news distribution tool.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. In your experience, how do journalists discover, use and share information?
2. Are there telling differences between new and veteran reporters?
3. How do you as a broadcast media professional assess the credibility of new information?
4. In your opinion, how is social media (such as Twitter) influencing and/or revolutionizing the way journalists' access and share information?
5. In terms of Twitter, when is it proper to release/retweet/share information? How do you ensure that this is done in a responsible manner?
6. When working on a news story, what verification methods or strategies do you employ?