

Twitter as an Alternative Space for Sourcing and News Selection

Research shows that a growing number of journalists use Twitter to gather, monitor and share news, information and opinions. If journalists increasingly rely on social media, one can ask whether and how this affects the news they produce. Are social media altering the work of journalists and their daily news products? And the other way around: to what extent are news discussions on Twitter instigated and fuelled by news stories produced by professional journalists working for traditional media? Rather than considering the Twittersphere in opposition to traditional news media, this panel makes the case for research that focuses on the interplay between both media spheres. The central question is whether social media have the potential to break traditional patterns in the journalistic processes of news selection by creating a space for alternative stories and voices. More specifically, researchers in this panel will reflect on how social media are reshaping sourcing practices in journalism, and how this affects the flow and nature of news in the networked public sphere.

Moderator:

Prof. Michael Schudson (Columbia University, New York)

Papers:

Triggering the News, Setting the Agenda.

Marcel Broersma and Todd Graham (University of Groningen)

This paper both theoretically and empirically explores how people formerly known as sources use Twitter to strategically generate news coverage and to set the public agenda. Based on a large scale content analysis (2007-2013) of newspaper coverage in both tabloids and broadsheets in the UK and the Netherlands, we map the influence of tweets on mainstream news coverage. We focus in particular on tweets that trigger news articles and are thus in itself considered news worthy by journalists. How do various agents like politicians and celebrities use tweets to set the public agenda? What is it about their tweets that make it to the pages of newspapers? More specifically, we examine if journalists embed the use of Twitter

in traditional reporting routines of verification, develop new (online) reporting practices or simply rely on social media as sole information source. We contend that Twitter should be first and foremost studied as both a public and private arena in which elite agents negotiate over the power to determine which (political) representations are legitimate.

The conditionality of Twitter's agenda-setting power

Steve Paulussen, Raymond Harder and Peter Van Aelst (University of Antwerp)

Drawing on agenda-setting theory, this theoretical paper reflects on the capacity of Twitter to influence the news in mainstream media, on the one hand, and the impact of mainstream journalism on Twitter debates, on the other. The paper presents a theoretical and methodological framework to investigate the mutual influence between the Twittersphere and mainstream news media. The central hypothesis is that the power of Twitter as a news source in mainstream journalism depends on different factors, such as the actor using social media (e.g. celebrities, politicians, ordinary people, etc.), the medium covering the news (e.g. newspaper, news website, radio, TV), the type of issues in the news (e.g. hard versus soft news topics), and the degree of routine involved in the coverage of the news (as opposed to big news events).

Twitter as sourcing tool - connecting people, transforming journalistic practice?

Ansgard Heinrich (University of Groningen)

This paper examines the relationship between journalistic production and the use of Twitter as information source. While scholars have suggested that social media can assist to serve more perspectives on stories, the body of literature on existing journalistic sourcing practices indicates that journalists till date heavily rely on traditional, elite sources to cover news. 'Alternative' views, on the other hand, often appear to remain isolated, confined to the spaces of social media platforms and direct references seem to be missing. Through studying the online and offline coverage of the Egyptian uprisings by Dutch and UK newspapers and their online counterparts, this paper aims to compare if and how Twitter was directly mentioned as a source. As social media are assigned a crucial role in the Egyptian context, can we trace in coverage how news organizations use social media? Specifically, the paper is interested to see if and how sourcing practices might differ online and offline. When journalists can provide

direct links or larger amounts of content, does this for example equal greater influx of voices sourced via Twitter to fulfil the promise of a networked public sphere?

The tweeting viewer. The use of Twitter during a current affairs TV program.

Evelien D'heer and Pieter Verdegem (Ghent University)

This paper is part of a project titled 'Agenda Setting in a networked Public Sphere' and aims to understand the changing relations between politicians, mainstream media and citizens in an election context. The paper studies audience participation in the news production process of a popular current affairs TV program, called *Terzake*, during the 2014 election campaign. The program is aired five days a week on the specialist, 'in-depth' channel Canvas of the Flemish public service broadcaster VRT. The study combines in-depth interviews with *Terzake* journalists and audience members as well as an analysis of interaction patterns on Twitter. Based on the combination of behavioral data and perceptions of both program makers and the audience, we aim to understand how the relation between them is changing visibly and invisibly. How do program makers perceive their relation with the tweeting viewer (and vice versa)? Do they engage with the audience on Twitter or take offline action based on audience monitoring tools? Hence, how does the audience participate in the news production and consumption processes? Through a case-study approach, this paper sheds light on the influence of real-time online comments on journalistic practices.

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