

‘Tweeting’ the News Twitter Journalism as a New Age Crowd News Disseminator in India

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Abstract:

Not restraining itself as a social networking service, Twitter conquered the realm of ‘journalism’ with its tweet- news, brushing aside erstwhile news rulers. Within a short period since its inception in 2006, it created a tremendous hype proving it to be the best platform for citizen journalists. Its incomparable service during some breaking events like the Mumbai terrorist attack and Iran election is laudable which in fact helped in its popularity. But the biggest concern of this medium of short messaging service is its authenticity and fairness of reporting, which should be at the heart of a good Fourth Estate. The surveillance took upon by these social sites, the part and parcel of our routine, is creating a network of unauthenticated information. It is integrating with our daily activities the way cellphone and the Internet already have crept into. Hyper activism that these social sites show in disseminating news- from breaking events to celebrity gossips- creates indefinite threat to the fair flow of information. This paper tries to explore the ethical concern in twitter journalism when compared to traditional and other new media platforms. This article also tries to analyze the adaptability of the combination of Instant Messaging (IM) and mobile phone text messaging and try to explain the multi- faceted dimensions of risk as far as Internet Telephony in Twitter Journalism is concerned. The article mainly relies on text analysis and content

analysis of scholarly articles.

Key words: Microblogging, Computer Mediated Communication, Instant Messaging, Web 2.0, Prosummers, Digitization, Citizen Journalists, Swarming, Spoofing, Media monitoring, Blogosphere, Gatekeeping, PCR

Introduction

Communication in the early period is considered just as passing off information from a source to the receiver, which has no demarcation as everyone is a part of the information chain making themselves both source, channel and receiver. 'Today we are beginning to realize that the new media are not just mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusion, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression' (McLuhan, 1957). The power of these words is realized only on this 21st century when the world is witnessing an explosion in communication technologies. The present period is an incarnation age of internet, i.e. Web 2.0, with more and more interactive platforms for discussion, debate and companionship suiting diverse interest of public. 'Computer-mediated communication platforms are increasing their significance in the lives of hundreds of millions of people globally' (Mischaud 2007). To add with it, ICT age is experiencing media scuffle where not only the parent media like television print or radio is struggling, but a host of new media technologies with their own added advantages. According to commentators such as Jon Katz (1997), the Internet is transforming the journalist–audience relationship- from being an unquestioned expert the journalist now becomes simply a facilitator of debate. Social networking sites are one of those new technologies that are making people a responsible monitor of the world. It has revolutionized the concept of social interaction and community building in a networked society. Twitter is the latest trend setter in the long

list of social sites, gathering members from all realms of lives, giving hope and threat to the media industry at large. The major element of discussion in this article is about the tweets and its authenticity when the reach and access of news is enhanced with the incorporation of mobile SMS. The article also looks into the activities of media firms and journalists who too are active in twitter journalism.

Tweet Chariot- Big Leap of Social Media

Events, occasions, tragedy and history have always been the preserver and mile stones for every media. As such, Social networking sites got a sudden acceptance from the public when Barack Obama used it as the sole medium for his Presidential election campaign, both to keep in touch with his followers and to generate fund for the campaign holding the concept of “engage everyone, compete everywhere”.

Social networking is the term used to describe the websites that offer ‘the people formerly known as the audience’¹ from all walks of life, the chance to ‘meet’ virtually, share information, news and views via the Internet. It has played a crucial role in bridging boundaries and crossing the seas and enabling them to communicate on a common platform growing up their social circle.

Social media are digital media based on neutral computer networks. Locally, they assume the form of instruments and practices that individuals use to share content, often something they have generated themselves. Globally, if a sufficient number of individuals and connections are involved, they show the phenomena of self organisation, emergence and unpredictability typical of complex systems. (Mattina 2009).

‘Whatissocialnetworking.com’ defines it as: “the grouping of

¹ Jay Rosen. 2006. in his blog- Press Think Ghost of Democracy in the Media Machine, http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2006/06/27/pp1_frmr.html

individuals into specific groups, like small rural communities or a neighborhood subdivision, if you will. Although social networking is possible in person, especially in the workplace, universities, and high schools, it is most popular online." It enables community formation with respect to one's own interest areas. Twitter is such a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as *tweets*. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as 'followers'. Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow open access (Wikipedia). Ever since twitter conquered the internet landscape, everyone is being 'followed and following'.

The concept of Twitter sprout out in 2000, when a team of technicians including the programmer Jack Dorsey, the brain behind Twitter, was working on a different project called Odeo, a set of tools for podcasters. In one of the brainstorming session, 'he came up with an idea of a 'quick fire messaging system' that helped people share information with groups of friends using their mobile phone' (Johnson, 2009). The concept developed and cemented and the naming process was still continuing and the term 'Twitter' developed in a series of selection process. Jack say,

[...] We did a bunch of name-storming, and we came up with the word "twitch," because the phone kind of vibrates when it moves. But "twitch" is not a good product name because it doesn't bring up the right imagery. So we looked in the dictionary for words around it, and we came across the word "twitter," and it was just perfect. The definition was "a short burst of inconsequential information," and "chirps from birds." And that's exactly what the product was.

It was first used for Odeo employees as an internal communication service. But in October 2006, Biz Stone, Evan Williams, Dorsey and other members of Odeo formed Obvious

Corp and acquired Odeo and all of its assets – including Odeo.com and Twitter.com – from the investors and other shareholders. Twitter later spun off into its own company in April 2007. Although initially it is used as a social networking site, Twitter, the micro-blogging² service, conquered the realm of 'journalism' with its tweet- news, brushing aside erstwhile rulers. One of the most critical issues regarding Twitter, the SMS of internet, is its impact on media and journalism. When compared with other new media technologies, what makes twitter so different and favorite among public is its affiliation with internet telephony. Combining Instant Messaging (IM) and mobile phone text messaging, the phenomenon is Twitter – a web-based platform that enables subscribers to its free service to disseminate short messages by way of the web, IM applications (MSN Messenger, Yahoo!), or a mobile handset. These mini- messages along with the multiple platform of delivery prove to be more user- friendly (even if one is not online he can get the comments to his mobile, the moment a post is made online and also can post tweets) which branded them as the handiest tool of citizen journalists, mainly during breaking events.

Twitter, because it makes tweets available through an easily available Application Programming Interface (API), has enabled the creation of an enormous variety of applications that tap into its ever-growing database of 140-character snippets without requiring the user to visit Twitter.com. (Gordon 2009)

A major concern of this new medium is this leap into creating an 'SMS-journalism'. For instance, during the 2008 Mumbai attacks eyewitnesses sent an estimated 80 tweets every five seconds. The use of Twitter by victims, bystanders, and the

² **Micro blogging** is a form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates or micromedia such as photos or audio clips and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user.

public to gather news and coordinate responses to the November 2008 Mumbai siege led CNN to call it "the day that social media appeared to come of age".

Even though the popularity of SMS journalism has shattered the 'fortresses and thick walls'³ so far guided by the journalists in prestigious firms, the skepticism surrounding the reliability of this medium mounting up. News is obviously for the society, but the process of news selection in a traditional medium like print or television occurs on several levels and journalists have professional guidelines and standards that mediate their subjectivity (Uskali 2009). There is no set of rules guiding twitter, apart from its character limitation (below 140). The lack of any gatekeeping techniques make subjective, unbalanced and ambiguous news conquer the cyber space to spread throughout the world.

New Avenue for Citizen Journalists

Citizen Journalism is a movement that is providing common people power to express, power to question and power to act. With the new media and digitization, citizen is creating their own individual 'media firms', an individual endeavor and a one-man show. Individuals use their personalized instruments and equipments of daily use to make the first information report and eye-witness account of news and events happening in and around. They often use the miniaturized new media gadgets like mobile phones, handy cam, i-pod, laptops, scanners etc which can be operated and functioned in globally accessible software. Also these handy tools do all what PCR unit supposed to do. Citizens everywhere are getting together via the Internet in unprecedented ways to set the agenda for news, to inform each other about both local and global news, and to create new services in a connected, online society

³ Peter Horrocks, Director of BBC World Service in a Journalism Conference 'Future of Journalism' (2008)

(appendix 1). Web 2.0 further catalyzed the idea of 'user generated content' (UGC) which provided a more interactive participatory platform of discussion. Even though there are a plethora of technological and adaptable platforms for prosumers (a new terminology for citizen journalist Producer + Consumer), only twitter made into its own genre of journalism. When social sites like Orkut and Facebook conquered the space, no one thought of its journalistic adaptability. The popularity of twitter not only relies on its quite serious outlook but its multiple platform of instant delivery, which is explained later in this paper. With the ability to follow the stream of messages created by any number of friends, Twitter allows you the chance to have an always-on stream of information wherever you go. Perhaps, this is what a citizen journalist always needed. Unlike other mainstream media who are more commercially business oriented, citizen journalists emerged as a result of a constant urge from people to make their voice heard across the world. Media Richness is calculated by them the way that the medium is satisfying and undertaking the duties with minimum effort, time and money.

Comfort with that notion grew as online comments and live chats assumed a role that Letters to the Editor once held on their own, albeit with greater anonymity and often less civility. Then, from the "audience" spilled forth blogs and photos, videos and tweets. Soon, the words 'citizen' and 'journalist' were joined in a marriage brokered by technology and nurtured by convenience as news organizations shed staff yet still needed to produce 'content'. (Ludtke 2009)

In all these criteria Twitter occupies a step ahead from other services. Rather than a replacement for blogs as a publishing medium, Twitter offers an addition to the options available to you. While blog posts tend to be longer in form, Twitter posts are ideal for making single points or sharing a single piece of information, and gives way for spot reporting and news disseminating with the only requirement of a camera mobile

phone.

Even though social responsibility needs to be the fundamental duty of a mass medium, mainstream media is not always free from constraints- political, social or religious. In spite of its self censorship pushes many of the news into ditch in the name of ethics, sensitiveness and fairness. But social responsibility does not only rely in disseminating information, but a truthful, fair and balanced representation of events in the most polished and elegant language. As far as twitter is concerned, issues have been compressed to make into 140 character bits, possibly like a mobile message. Even though the contents may be for social good, many a times it turns to be ambiguous and incorrect due to its space constraints.

'The internet is particularly affecting journalism in terms of its credibility in an anonymous global communications environment, where everyone is both producer and consumer of content' (Deuze & Yeshua 2001, 274). Criticism against Citizen Journalism of its less professional mannerisms and the lack of ethical and theoretical expertise is further enhanced by the advent of twitter journalism when the diffusion of news has no limit with the application of Mobile Instant Messaging, which is a major welcoming feature of twitter when compared to other platforms for citizen journalists. With social networking, the traditional media is less of a gatekeeper because the general public can shape the conversation surrounding high profile people or events where they couldn't before (Bob Stewart 2009). The majority of bloggers are unqualified to provide news and the blogosphere has produced a climate of "ignorant skepticism" of the traditional media (Bowles 2009).

Instant Messaging and SMS- an Ambitious Amalgamation

'Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has been around since the first electronic digital computer was invented (during

the World War II) or at least since the first recorded exchange of prototype emails in the early 1960's' (Thurlow et al. 2004). By the advent of Twitter a new dimension of CMC is inculcated where a convergence is in effect between the Internet and Mobile phone technology which has a tremendous impact on the lifestyle of people, the effect of which is the 'rise of mobile phone in to mobile media of user generated content (Hjorth 2009). A new generation of mobile phones is appearing aimed at generating their own circulation or subscription revenues. iPhone can be exploited as a PCR unit with all sorts of technical editing and gimmicks possibility. Layman is covering the stories with simple equipment anyone can use anywhere, rather than a reporter and trained videographer going to the scene (Peters 2009).

[...] It is the fact that iPhone users are personalising their phones with applications – 2bn so far and amid all the downloadable games, maps, pint-glass emulators and fart generators, some of the "apps" that are proving particularly popular are news...(Wray 2009).

Twitter encompasses all those characters in its soaring quality normally vested upon new media technologies- miniature, handy, adaptable, accessible, durable, portable, malleable and after all convergence. Messages can be accessed through the Twitter website - via personal or public pages - or through Instant Messaging tool like Google talk, ichtat etc or via mobile SMS. No matter where each one of these people is or how they are choosing to receive their communications, reaching across geographical boundaries, roaming competencies and contract limits and seamlessly across email, mobile SMS, and instant messaging networks is just the next step in our communication revolution. Some used to designate it as swarming⁴. The time and space constraints are further quashed by this online extensional service with short messaging and multiple platform

of delivery. Audience, the passive acceptor of news commodity has shed their role to become a participant in the social news production, development and dissemination, where the news come to the people, wherever they are in their chosen format and delivery platforms. But the biggest matter of skepticism lies on the size of the comments one can post on twitter- when a mobile SMS limit is 160 characters, tweets are only below 140 characters or less response limit (Glaser 2007).

Twitter makes users always connected making them a part of the networked society providing interactivity and hyper textuality. Here the technology and society are being conceptualized for an advanced interactive participation. Moreover, the role of 'society in shaping and constructing the technologies' that surround us is laudable (Mischaud 2007), as the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) theory, a variant of social constructivism argues. For instance, SMS was not initially slotted for commercial purposes but viewed as part of the wider GSM mobile telephony network, as an "add-on" service. It was conceived as "a machine-to-person service" that would alert a mobile network in the event of an emergency (Trosby 2004). Fast-forward nearly two decades and text messaging has become an integral part of personal communication for hundreds of millions of people worldwide, in developed and developing countries alike (Wikipedia 2007b). As such technological design always collides with the social need and the user- satisfaction. Twitter was introduced as a microblogging social networking site. But soon it conquered the realm of journalism when the users felt it to be the most technological advanced medium of journalism.

But technology always has pitfalls on their other side that people tend to ignore without a glitch. Since Twitter used the phone number of the sender of an SMS message as authentication malicious users could update someone else's

⁴ Swarming refers to systems in which autonomy, emergence and distribution replace control, preprogramming and centralization.

status page by using SMS spoofing⁵. Technology allows greater manipulation of images –colour changes, cropping, airbrushing, deleting. Even the context of an image is changed to fit into a personalized event. Attribution to source is neglected completely and one can remain virtually anonymous. TOR is one such open-source Internet anonymity system--one of several systems that encrypt data or hide the accompanying Internet address, and route the data to its final destination through intermediate computers called proxies. This combination of routing and encryption can mask a computer's actual location and circumvent government filters to prying eyes, the Internet traffic seems to be coming from the proxies (Talbot 2009).

Another great concern is the lack of any rein, in order to control the over- spread of messages, which move forward like a fission from source to source reaching a diverse audience who are not part of the twitter chain. This happens since twitter makes use of SMS, which will be forwarded to the content lists of a user's mobile phone, not necessarily to a twitterer. Within a split of a second, a comment can become a controversy. For instance, Shashi Tharoor, former UN Under Secretary and a keen follower of Twitter, came in to news top story through his comment on his flight journey in the commercial class, which he mentioned as 'cattle class'. The furious public supported by big media giants in India, lashed against him for his malicious comments of common people, within a short time after his postings in Twitter. Hence, even though right to expression is getting more chance in the digital world, often it can be a threat to oneself owing to the wider reach of messages.

Tweet updates – news plurality or news replication?

The tendency towards concentrated media ownership raised

⁵ **SMS spoofing** is a relatively new technology which uses the short message service (SMS), available on most mobile phones and personal digital assistants, to set who the message appears to come from by replacing the originating mobile number (Sender ID) with alphanumeric text.

economical and cultural concerns when it became a threat to media plurality (Doyle 2002). The proliferation of citizen news platforms brought more diverse news, but often said to be replication or reproduction of mainstream media contents but in a subjective way. But twitter cannot be shoved upon with this criticism, since replication of newspaper contents is not practical in a platform like microblogging where there is limitation in conveyance of idea. This practical restriction makes twitter comparatively less successful in narrative news. But Twitter has been stamped already as a medium of breaking news and live coverage. Whatever the service of this medium, the biggest concern is the lack of any gate keeping techniques. Previously journalism models emphasized the power of the editors as the primary gatekeeper. The news agenda however is no longer dictated by editorial staff and is increasingly defined by public.

Information and entertainment content are no longer just the fruit of the industrial production system that characterizes mass media. At the same time, social media users are not merely passive recipients, but can interact and, even more importantly, be the source of new information. (Mattina 2009)

Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that it was during the American Presidential election campaign that the role of social media was explored by the candidates. Both Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama used social networking sites as their way to reach followers. People and media at large chose to monitor the routine of these candidates through their favorite social sites, which gave the lesson of the potential of social networking or people's network. Hence news has slipped away from the hands of professional journalists to the amateur public causing a dramatic shift in the objective reporting.

Even though the surveillance undertaken by the common man is noteworthy, the authenticity of reports raises the question of reliability. It can be argued that the key critical questions regarding news are whether there is a consensus on

how news is defined and who creates and controls news production and news content. To date, the most salient, powerful example of Twitter's influence has been Iranian protesters using the service to assemble marches against what they feel has been an unjust election. It emerged as a leading source for real time information in the day after the election (see appendix 4). Twitter is difficult for governments to block because tweets - 140 characters or less - can be uploaded from mobile phones like a text message. 'Twitter was used primarily in two ways- to disseminate information of what is happening on the ground and to communicate between the protesters about events, meetings and election related news' (Analysis of Social Media Response Iranian Election, June 2009). In the same way, when the US Airways jetliner crashed into New York's Hudson River, Twitter was among the first sites where photos of the landing were linked. It was one of the passengers who sent the breaking report of the miracle crash landing by taking photographs and uploading it.

Comparing news on twitter and other media platforms, especially television and online newspapers, provide more insight into the nature and uniqueness of tweet news. Even though television gives breaking news and news flash, it is a medium to which we need to tune in, in order to have the access of news. Lack of interactivity and audience choice make this medium many a times useless in the busy schedule of life. The threat predicted to the traditional newspaper is from online newspapers, the proliferating medium with a refreshing aura of news dissemination. But even though these online newspapers carry all the qualities like hyper textuality, feedback, user-friendly etc, like television, it also expects the audience interest to log on to the particular website in order to get the news. But twitter is always online and alive even though one is not connected with internet, proving to be more user-friendly and interactive.

Many users have become accustomed to clicking on

Twitter when news breaks. 'Recently if a big story breaks, the news is out first on social networking platforms such as Twitter' (Brewer 2009). But Social Presence Theory (Short et al. 1976) argues that the social impact of a communication medium depend on the social presence it allows communicators to have. The theory assumes that more contact will increase the key components of "presence", greater intimacy, immediacy, warmth and inter-personal rapport. In the case of communication technology, the assumption is that more text-based forms of interaction (e-mail, instant messaging) are less social, and therefore less conducive to social influence which in turn thrash down the success story of twitter. As against Social Presence Theory, Structural Functional Social theory argues that news content is information that seeks to meet social needs. When twitter gave breaking stories and updates during Mumbai terrorist attack, this need of society is fulfilled in the best way providing them with the most recent updated 'clues' (can give only certain cues because of character limitation).

The pressure created by the 24-hour, up-to-the-second news cycle prompted by the internet could create an alternative reality where people race to be first without stopping to check the facts (Bowles 2009). Verification of contents before publishing is indispensable for any medium. Even hours before the official announcement of the death of Pop singer Michael Jackson, even before he breathe his last, tweets and scraps conquered the mediascape announcing the sad demise.

Twitter, a Handy Tool for Mainstream Journalists

Traditional news media has taken a bit of a hit in recent months, partly due to Twitter and Facebook, where people feel more comfortable sharing and receiving information. The proliferation of online contents were always made scapegoat for the diminishing popularity of traditional medium like newspaper. But never was it alien towards the growing

technology and widening horizons of communication.

In the decade and a half since the Internet emerged as a viable medium, and the decade since mobile communications became practicable, questions of how content providers can effectively earn money from either have remained prominent. The lack of truly effective revenue models to support the gathering and distribution of news has led many to argue that providing this serves other purposes, especially in creating interactions that strengthen the brand and form and maintain relationships that bond users of various platforms to news organizations. If these are the primary benefits of contemporary technologies, news organizations must become much more sophisticated in their thinking about them and how to achieve those benefits. (Picard 2009)

Accordingly, many journalists in traditional media are now evading the social networking space and using tools such as Twitter to both find stories and spread stories (Brewer 2009). Social media is making the newsroom obsolete by allowing journalist's to post their information from anywhere (Peters 2009). It's much more personal to tweet directly with the news source than to yell at the TV. Its fluidity became the first, most obvious, threat to existing media (Cagle 2009). New media provides opportunities to tell stories better, faster and for traditional media to become more embedded in the Internet rather than a "series of articles floating above it" (Bell 2009).

Traditional journalists are using it both to enhance and augment traditional reporting.

[...] some (reporters) contribute to or manage organizational Twitter accounts on behalf of their employees. A few use it as a Live reporting platform and some employ applications to share images, audio and links to other online content they find interesting. Many are using it to crowdsource contacts, story angles, background and case studies. (Posetti 2009)

For them it is a freak out from the thick walls of journalistic norms and convections. In the cyberspace they shed their

objectivity and update their tweets affiliating their personal whims. In this activism, the organization's credibility is sometimes put down. Despite these threats to ethical concerns of news dissemination, most of the media firms now have twitter account. For instance, CNN has 157000 followers, but they follow only 17 people and they are all other CNN twitter accounts. Obviously CNN is not interested in a conversation on Twitter. To them it is another way to distribute their headlines, like flash news running across the TV screen. Some firms like BBC are active in Twittering that they even molded their website to suit social networking with more audience forums and comments. Hence for many it is the best marketing tool of a crisis ridden industry (Posetti 2009). Many organisations use Twitterfeed- a free service that automatically converts items from the organization's RSS feed into Tweets. As the RSS feed is updated continuously, the tweets too get updated. There are no gatekeeping techniques to filter sensitive news or political feeds to get into cyberspace for proliferation. In their long run to grab 'followers', the organisations too are keeping aside their journalistic norms. If for media forms it is just a marketing platform, for the journalists it is a sort of collaborative reporting or an outlet for augmentation of daily news.

Journalists face a new host of ethical considerations related to the online medium, ranging from a reporter concealing her identity in a chat room to quoting from bulletin board postings to recording and streaming digital footage without the subject's permission (Lasica 2001). This led some media organisations to come out with guidelines for journalists going twitter. Wall Street Journal twittering rules caused a journalistic and social media storm by suggesting that journalists keep private and professional lives completely separate when using new media platforms (Bell 2009). Corporations and media organizations across the country are struggling with the issue as social media chips away at their power structures and threatens to compromise their public

image. ESPN has clamped down on its employees, allowing only "official" ESPN-sanctioned use of social media tools. The Washington Post has also cracked down on its reporters after Raju Narisetti, one of the Post's managing editors, posted two (rather innocuous) political opinions on his Twitter account (Duff 2009).

The future of journalism and the ethical dilemmas that run through it are at a vital juncture in our industry. It is imperative that educators inform you and debate with you about ethics -because in reality you –the future journalists, the future watchdogs on power -are our only bridge to a more ethical and humanistic industry. One where issues about harm and privacy and sensationalism and bias and all the others -are considerations above the economic and commercial imperative. (North 2009)

Since bloggers too started to compete with mainstream media for breaking news, the pressure has ramped up on being the first to post. Whoever gets in first with news usually gets the bulk of attention and traffic. In this run, often news get tampered, misinterpreted and personalized with self- edited texts. First hand reports may need confirmation, after which it can be corroborated or complemented by other sources. This is the role of professional journalists and established media, which have the resources, training, and expertise to check information and pull together a balanced view of the story.

Amidst these criticism, by evaluating the latest contents and issues, we can see a symbiotic relationship is emerging between mainstream media (such as newspapers and broadcast), and social media (Dawson 2006). Twitter works complementing and supplementing other media, and media relying on twitter for stories. Twitter absolutely does not obviate the need for professional media – it complements it by providing first-hand reporting from a vast army of people on the ground, which is then filtered and integrated into mainstream reporting (see appendix 3). The success story of Social

networking sites which led the news flow during the events like Tsunami in Asia and London bombings, already have made many of the Mainstream media to give ample approval to user generated content and aiding its production within news rooms itself (Bivens 2008). Hence BBC created a UGC Hub. User generated picture or video scoops regularly lead television bulletins and the front pages of newspapers, whilst a new category of opinionated blogging is redefining the frontiers of journalism itself (Newman 2009).

Hirsch (2009) have a different view. He says it takes time build credibility among the public about the non- traditional media like twitter. When a reporter calls a source, they can say they are from a well-known television station as opposed to some website nobody has heard of. Sources may be more willing to talk, which makes a difference for news consumers out there, according to Hirsch. It can have another adverse effect too. The tweet posted by a media firm (or journalist) get disseminated passing over from one source to another without much obstacle. In this networked journey, the actual source of the message remains anonymous or it is attributed up on wrong member, there by producing a pseudo- publicity.

Ethics in quandary!

As forms of communication evolve, avenues of news reporting increase, and the scope of media influence expands, media ethics becomes an increasingly important issue in modern society (Coleman 2009). Journalists face a new host of ethical considerations related to twitter journalism, ranging from a reporter concealing her identity in a chat room to quoting from bulletin board postings to recording and streaming digital footage without the subject's permission. More recently, the blogosphere and twittersphere tracked Obama at the G20 Summit in real-time. Aides on the floor of the event provided constant coverage to people all over the world (Cagle, 2009).

This gave public a highly exclusive level of access to a very significant event (Cagle 2009). But the peril behind this broadcasting piece is never questioned. The events like parliamentary proceedings have limited access to media and are provided with much edited pieces. Content generation requires both creation and filtering. Traditionally content has been created by journalists, and filtered by editors. Today “user generated content” has become a major buzzword, generated through personal gadgets like computer, iPhone etc

Editorial ethics of balance, impartiality, fairness, objectivity and accuracy are at the heart of all good journalism (Brewer, 2009).

[...] Net Journalists are taking even less time to check their stories than they did in the old media. The rush to put these online is undermining journalism everywhere. (Hume 1999)

The promotion of ethics is fundamental to a profession like journalism regardless of the kind of platform they choose. Journalism in itself is a service to the society which can be guided through the straight path in the light of ethics and codes of conduct.

[...] It (ethics) centres around one basic tenet- editorial writing in the free press should be 'independent'. That is, what you are reporting should be truthful and accurate... All sorts of guidelines and rules are established by different publications in order to secure this independence, to a greater or lesser extent, since editorial independence is traditionally regarded as a necessary condition for commercial and critical success. Let's get one thing clear, however - there are (almost) no blanket rules. There is no great code of conduct written in stone that journalists and publishers should adhere to. Publications choose their own rules in the hopes of best serving their readers. (Harris 2008).

With so many journalists in traditional media now invading the social networking space and using tools such as Twitter to both find and spread stories, the stand of ethics is often questioned.

Much of the concern about the Twitter's impact on journalism centers on its emphasis on speed and immediacy, which properly remain central tenets of online publishing. The photographs that these persons take using their mobile cameras are uploaded and transmitted across the world without cross checking or considering the ethicalities of the content. Technologies allow manipulation of photographs by cropping, adding and deleting portions from the original work. The accuracy and fairness concerns can be multiplied by the increasing use of so-called citizen journalists to provide reports that are then disseminated—often without verification—by traditional news organizations.

As we explained earlier, there is a definite relation between media and twitter in the process of news collection. Even the traditional journalists are considering 'journalism on web' as more active as it aids to hyperlinks and virtuality. Many mainstream media firms being a part of twitter, get many of the news sparks from this new communication site. But the accuracy and justification of the source is out of stock.

Journalists—from reporters to multimedia producers to editors—are under great pressure to do more with less. The intense financial forces, the thinner staffs, and the risk-taking culture create a mixture where heightened quality control measures are all the more essential. Now is the time to reaffirm essential core values that underpin journalism ethics and journalistic excellence. Accuracy, fairness and honesty are as important now as they have ever been. (Steele 2008)

The ethics that the traditional media tends to comply with, may not be applicable as far as a medium like twitter is concerned since it is not a controllable medium. The lack of balance in reporting leads to misinterpretation of issues and creates a bogus overlook on major sensitive issues. The twitter activism after the Iran Election is a best example of it. Many countries have boasted of exerting their power up on internet to curb their freedom, calling it internet censorship. This is not only the

case with Iran or China, but it is said that 'many companies in US and UK have developed softwares to enable such censorship' (Tuinstra 2009). However twitter maintained its status quo since mobile communication was still much alive then.

The character limit too adds to this authenticity of news reporting. A newspaper article takes a paragraph to convey the '5Ws and 1 H', which is the basic content of a story. Tweets squeeze this to 140 characters leading to ambiguous contents. As Dickerson says

[...]Twitter is not the next great thing in journalism. No one should try to make Twitter do more than it can and no reader should expect too much from a 140-character entry. As for the critics, their worries about Twitter and journalism seem to be a kind of obtuse behavior that would make a perfect observational Twitter entry: "A man at the front of the restaurant is screaming at a waiter and gesticulating wildly. The snacks on the bar aren't a four-course meal!" (Dickerson 2008)

Twitter has turned out to be tabloidized celebrity journalism with sensationalized and half baked news reports. Since celebrities of almost every realms of life turn on to twitter, it is easy to track their routine and cook news. In fact, celebrities in Hollywood and Bollywood have been banned from revealing information on their upcoming and ongoing projects. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, actors have new clauses in their contracts that prevent them from using social media sites (Hindustan Times 2009). It often pose threat to their life too since the messages can't be controlled from spreading out. 'Let's kill Berlusconi' and 'Death to Berlusconi' are some of the account names that have more than 16,000 members that has recently appeared on one of the social networking site, Facebook the probe in to it is still continuing, but it is uncertain whether similar accounts are there in other social sites like twitter.

Media entrepreneurship has given way to a single- man entity, a long way from corporate setup where the 'massiveness of mass media is disappearing' (Meyer 2009). This new entrepreneurial spirit along with the 24 hour news round up expects the need of objectivity, which is supposed to be assumed by the professional journalists. The citizen journalists are least considered about it since the reason behind their birth itself is as a voice to the public. Social networking site further added to this subjective reporting making the way for different perspectives of a single issue. Sometimes it will prove to be good, but sometimes it veils the real issue. Being accurate and objective is how journalistic credibility is brought to the social media journalism. But this combination is often brushed aside as personal opinions are disguised as news and disseminated reaching the nook and corner of the world. Such a decentralized work atmosphere, with no gate keepers, editors or management decision, will change news to 'views'.

Just as accuracy and objectivity are vitals of journalistic value, a reporter must also pay respect to others privacy too. This is the lapse of many citizen journalism sites like twitter. Intrusion into privacy is not only unethical, but a criminal offence. But as far as the social sites are considered, the issue of privacy has no relevance since the social sites itself is a publicity medium of one's routine otherwise why should one be in twitter or Facebook? But in all these sites there is a privacy option which people carelessly switch off or forget to do so.

'The news is so important to our democracy that only a special, trusted source, the elite journalist, could frame it and present it to the public --a passive mass audience of listeners or viewers' (Lippman 2000). But as a counter argument, according to John Dewey, a responsible journalist revealed and reported on issues in order to strengthen and inform the civic conversation (Whipple 2005). These grass reporting bring a participatory democratic society. But not everything is fit to report many events may be of bad taste or offensive. So a

specific guideline to filter the news content is needed in a proliferating platform like twitter, in order to have the real democratic reporting.

If traditional, mainstream media is to contribute to this fast-evolving communication network it needs to carry with it the values that have underpinned journalism through its many previous evolutionary stages. The platforms and conduits change, but journalist must remain true to editorial values adjusted only to reflect societal developments. Still the laws like Printing and Publishers Act and Official Secrets act is strictly implemented upon professional journalists. It is unfair that newspapers have to be subjected to such laws when no permit is required to set up a website or blog.

Conclusions

It is many things to many people but most of all it is lightweight, easy to use and transparent. Its swirl of activity is like huge party full of hundreds of conversations you can tap into – not, like Facebook, an exclusive club where one need to know the right people to join in. The challenge facing any twitter journalists is to balance the legitimate desires of the online audience for up-to-the minute reports with the profession's traditions of fairness, completeness, balance and accuracy. With more and more citizen platforms we are witnessing a world of information overload as against the news scarcity. To sieve the grains from the chaff is the main responsibility and success factor of any news organization whether online or traditional. Despite the fact that the codes of ethics are the silver line that guides the journalists through the right path, the code is at risk of becoming irrelevant or outdated because it does not specifically address one of the most significant changes in how journalists do journalism in 500 years. New form of journalism requires new approaches to ethics. Many of the accepted codes by institute like MEAA

never address the role of Internet or new media in news dissemination. This has led some institutes like UNESCO and Poynter Institute to introduce fresh norms and codes to 'Reaffirm the ethical dimensions of the information society'⁶.

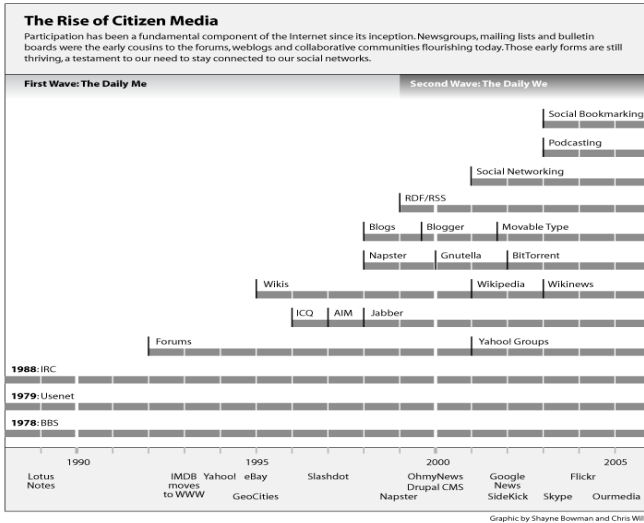
Of course Twitter doesn't actually is making revenue in any ways right now. But once advertisers realize the potential of social networking site as a good platform for marketing, it will aid to further commercialisation as it happened with other traditional media too. Ever since advertisements conquered the pages of newspapers and the slots of television, there was a gradual shift in the programming- from education to edutainment and information to infotainment. This trend can be witnessed in twitter, not too later

Twitter isn't only about people chatting to their friends, or sharing news of a revolution. The adaptability makes it catnip to users- and to the media, which dutifully reports every twist and turn on the site. It is just one part of a larger movement in which Google, Facebook, the mobile phone industry and the internet all play a part. As twitter grows its user base, it is becoming not just a source of breaking news, but also a deep and broad indicator of sentiment and social change.

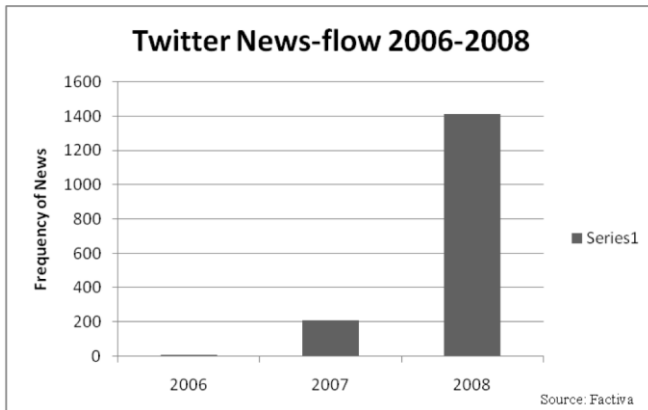
⁶ In 2008, UNESCO held its first regional conference for the Asia and Pacific Region on the Ethical Dimensions of the Information Society.

Notes

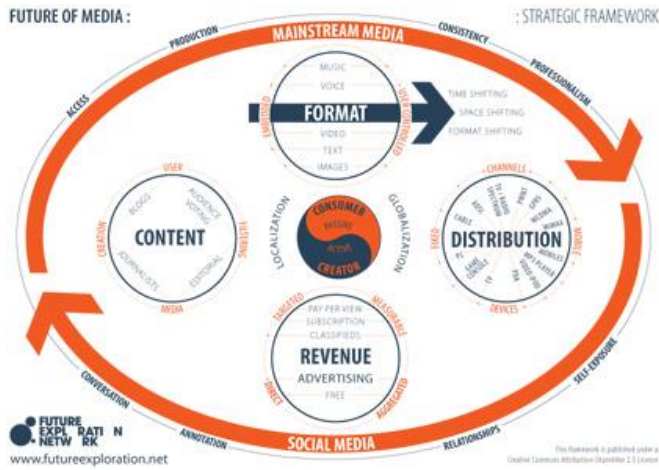
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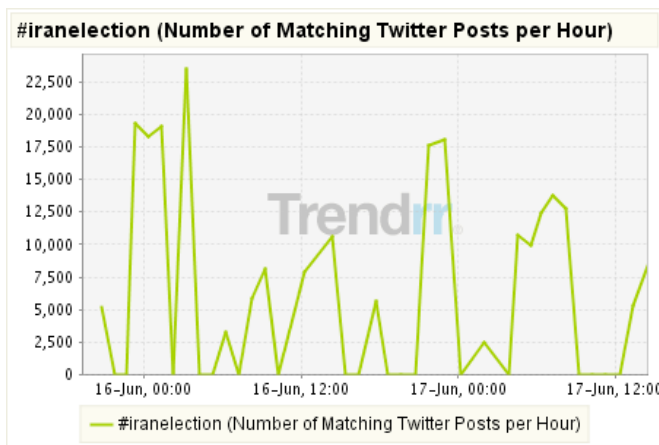
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3.



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