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The Twitterization of News Making: Transparency and Journalistic Professionalism

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Abstract

Twitter makes visible some of the most fundamental divides in professional journalism today. It reveals tensions about what constitutes news, the norms guiding journalists providing them, professional identity and public service. This article argues that these tensions result from a clash between the institutional logic of professional control (Lewis, 2012) and an ethic of transparency. Drawing from extensive research on a political press corps, involving observation, interviews and analysis of tweets, this study witnesses the adoption of Twitter in the everyday working practices of reporters. It thereby also provides reasons why Twitter has been so successful in journalism. Tensions between professional control and transparency in journalism may, furthermore, be emblematic for divides in other professions today.

Keywords: News convergence, news digitization, mass media, Twitter, social media, news ethnography

The Twitterization of News Making: Transparency and Journalistic Professionalism

On the grey morning of November 29, 2010, ten reporters linger in front of the executive chamber on the second floor of the State Capitol Building in Albany. The entrance is blocked by State Troopers, as it has been since 9/11. The reporters have converged because they had learned that Sheldon Silver, Speaker of the Assembly, was meeting with outgoing Governor David Patterson. The reporters are here to “stake out” either official to get comments on today’s special legislative session. Immediately after Silver appears and answers several questions by journalists in the stakeout, a young reporter takes out his smartphone to tweet a quote by Silver. Two older reporters tease him for it. “Oh come on, put that away, will you,” says one, the other asks him reproachfully why he would want to tip off reporters not present. Another young journalist emphasizes that she only tweets occasionally, while her fingers, too, tap a message to the twitterverse. She only tweets when there is a “need for constant updates.”

Governor Andrew Cuomo started his first day in office on January 1, 2011 by symbolically reopening government to the people. The State Troopers gave way to whoever entered the executive floor from that point on, following Cuomo’s order. The Capitol press, including those journalists who challenged their younger competitor-colleagues (Tunstall, 1971) earlier, also gradually gave more public admission to the inner workings of state house reporting in the following months through their tweets. They did this by voluntarily or reluctantly, yet in the end wholeheartedly in most cases, incorporating Twitter into their day-to-day practice. By June 2011, dismissive comments about constant tweeting almost seemed like distant history.

The conflict, or rather disagreement, between these two generations of reporters reflects divides in journalism today: about the constitution of news—as something shifting and processual or fixed and definitive; about professional roles and norms—providing (relatively) exclusive and filtered or instantly shared information and impromptu analyses; about addressees of that information—the broader public or informed insiders. Twitter has evoked controversy ever since it became the social medium of choice in journalism (Farhi, 2009; Hermida, 2010). This has certainly to do with the ambivalence about Twitter itself, whether it is an elitist social network or an inclusive space of deliberation. Tensions within journalism, however, mainly revolve around the perceived degradation of traditional norms in tweets. Previous research suggests that tweeting journalists violate objectivity standards and gradually adopt principles of accountability and inclusivity (Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012). They subject fact checking increasingly to networked expertise rather than institutional expertise (Hermida, 2012). Rather than compartmentalization, journalism on Twitter has a stronger commitment to dialogue (Artwick, 2013). Journalistic engagement on Twitter varies, as does the extent to which old standards are violated and new ones adopted. Interested in how journalists negotiate these differences, this article poses the research question: What are the main disagreements among journalists about journalistic professionalism that arise from Twitter? (RQ1)

While content analyses of tweets (Cozma & Chen, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012) and survey studies (Engesser & Humprecht, 2012; Gulyas, 2013; Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013) provided important insights on the adoption of

Twitter and its significance for journalism, a comprehensive qualitative examination is still missing (see Bélair-Gagnon, 2013 for a notable exception). The analysis presented here provides a contextualized depiction of Twitter adoption and engagement in journalism, which considers subjective experiences of political reporters as well as their concrete practices. The article further asks: What is the relationship between degrees of Twitter adoption and reporters' understanding of journalistic professionalism? (RQ2) How and why do journalists adopt Twitter? (RQ3)

The main argument of this paper is that disagreements, which Twitter-aided journalism evokes, speak to institutional divides in professional journalism at a time of sweeping transformation of news and public communication in general. These divides are rooted in the opposition between an ascendant ethic of transparency and established understandings of journalistic professionalism. The empirical foundation is a mesosociological examination of adoption, engagement and discussion about Twitter within a political press corps. It is based on observation of reporting practices, interviews with journalists and analysis of tweets. The remainder of this introductory section focuses, first, on how the field of journalism studies has considered transparency and, second, the conceptual framework that informs the analysis.

Transparency in Journalism

Professional control entails that processes generating outcomes remain opaque to the outside. A news account, according to this conception, draws its authority exactly from its opaqueness and dissociation from its constructedness. Transparency demands the exact opposite: journalism following this principle draws power from revealing how it materializes, who produces it and under what circumstances. Transparency has long been an important counter-current in the professionalization of journalism. For example, the introduction of the newspaper byline around the 1930s in the United States (Schudson, 1978, p. 145) can be considered as transparentizing and pushing back against professional compartmentalization in journalism.

The proliferation of online technologies and the rise of digital culture set off another push for transparency. An open journalistic culture, according to Deuze (2003), has a dialogic relationship with the public, which it provides with information rather than preconceived interpretations. Journalistic truth claims must be based on transparency, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) argue, in order to distinguish journalists from other content producers: by being honest and open about their methods, journalists are reliable, trustworthy and respectful to audiences.

Somewhat ironically then, transparency is now what objectivity was in the first half of the 20th century (Schudson, 1978), namely a means of maintaining professional autonomy in the (networked) public sphere (Allen, 2008). Especially with the emergence of blogging and social media, transparency became a pivotal transformative and re-legitimizing efficacy in journalism (Hellmueller, Vos, & Poepsel, 2013; Hermida, 2010; Lasorsa, 2012; Robinson, 2007; Singer, 2007). As a recent newsroom ethnography demonstrates, transparency has helped the BBC reconstitute its reputation of impartiality in a social media-saturated news environment (Bélair-Gagnon, 2013). Lewis and Usher (2013) showed that the implementation of hacking in news production instills newsrooms with open source culture, which also thrives on transparency.

Transparency is a primary virtue of the twitterverse (Murthy, 2013). Rather than mere disclosure, Twitter promotes participatory transparency (Karlsson, 2010): when journalists present themselves on Twitter, they enable and implicitly invite others to interact with them and to get involved in the news production process.

Institutional Change and Boundary Work

Like any other institution, journalism operates according to a distinct logic (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Institutional logics are symbolic constructions, which concretize as practices and social relationships. They serve as guidelines for institutional behavior and “create distinctive categories, beliefs, expectations, and motives and thereby constitute the social identity of actors” (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003, p. 797). Next to incentive structures—encouraging certain actions and discouraging others—Rao and others consider social identity as a key link between institutional logic and individual behavior. Through assuming an identity, adopting a role and exercising duties guided by values deriving from its logic, actors feel as part of an institution.

A new identity may initiate change and replacement of one logic by another, as Rao and others showed in the shift from classic to nouvelle cuisine in France. However, institutional change never occurs simply by implementing new technologies or legal norms (Friedland & Alford, 1991). These innovations are important but are always mediated through nascent symbolic orders and reformations of social relations. Furthermore, the replacement of institutional logics is not seamless but a dialectic process involving contention.

Early 21st century professional journalism undergoes such transformation. Lewis (2012) argues that the opposition between professional control over content—content, which is considered news—and open participation is at the heart of the current transformation of journalism. Open participation is enabled by new media and encouraged by digital culture. It requires content to be openly distributed rather than centrally controlled. As means to publish thrive and public communication becomes participatory, news proliferate while professional journalists’ share of them dwindles.

As any other profession, journalism is engaged in turf wars over professional jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). One way to conceptualize jurisdictional struggles is through boundary work

(Gieryn, 1983), which has recently taken hold in journalism studies (Lewis, 2012; Revers, 2013; Robinson, 2010; Winch, 1997). Boundary work attempts to expand an institution's sphere of influence towards others. Because institutions are often in disagreement about jurisdictional claims, boundaries are negotiated and fought over within themselves, which is what we find in professional journalism today.

With the rise of the internet, professional journalism became enclosed, challenged and partly subsumed by a more expansive sense of news production, which blurs definitions of what constitutes news and their producers. The jurisdictional struggles of journalism broadened and diversified as a consequence. Journalism sees itself confronted with its usual rivals, not least those it covers who now participate on media platforms as equal participants. Journalism also feels challenged by other opponents (e.g. blogs, activism, citizen journalism). It is irrelevant in this context whether these "opponents" may in fact reproduce journalistic norms more than challenge them (Vos, Craft, & Ashley, 2012). What is important is that these perceived external threats manifest themselves as internal disagreements about how to adapt to new conditions: to draw sharp boundaries and asserting journalism's autonomy from other types of news production, according to its own distinctive logic; or to make boundaries more fluid and permeable for practices, norms and identities, which are more adequate for the new news environment. The latter does not mean giving up on journalisms' original jurisdiction and its operating principles entirely. It is rather an impetus to diversify professional practices. The analysis presented in this paper specifically focuses on disagreements and boundary struggles around Twitter.

Method

Data Gathering and Analysis

This paper draws from field research conducted at the New York State Capitol in Albany between April 2009 and June 2011 and two additional weeks, particularly geared towards Twitter, in February of 2012. It involved 300 hours of observation, most of which occurred between November 2010 and June of 2011, 42, partly repeated, semi-directed interviews with 31 journalists and four spokespeople.[1] Because I interviewed some reporters who left the beat before Twitter was relevant, overall 32 interviews with 25 journalists from 14 news organizations are pertinent for this article. All except one of these informants (an editor who oversees statehouse coverage) were fulltime Capitol correspondents. I also monitored relevant Twitter feeds and online news sites and systematically analyzed a small body of 4492 tweets.[2]

Part of the observation took the form of attending common events and gatherings within the building. I also conducted more focused observation with four journalists who granted me access to shadow them in their offices and around the building. They worked for three different news organizations. Two of them were passionately tweeting newspaper reporters and de facto multimedia journalists. One was a newspaper reporter and refused to tweet. Another one was a TV reporter who tweeted lightly. Field stays took five to six hours on average. Field notes consist of descriptive notes, hyperlinks to online news items and tweets.

Spending time with tweeting journalists raised my interest and so I expanded my ethnography to the twitterverse in December of 2010. I closely monitored a core group of 25 Twitter feeds of individual reporters and news bureaus and more casually followed 45 others by officials, aids, lobbyists and reporters who left the beat but still engaged in conversations. The core group generated around 200 daily tweets on average and over a thousand on eventful days, for instance when a same-sex marriage (SSM) law was passed on June 24, 2011 (1621 tweets). According to my informants, the days before passage of SSM law, which attracted nationwide attention, was the first time they fully exhausted Twitter's capabilities and when they set precedents for future tweeting endeavors. I conducted a content analysis of tweets, which the core group generated between June 16 and June 28, 2011 when the debate about SSM leveled off (overall 4492 tweets). I only coded for one variable with 17 values: forms of Twitter engagement.

Two interview questions are particularly relevant in this paper. In one, I probed informants to draw boundaries regarding what they consider bad journalism. Another question asked informants what the most significant changes were in their jobs and how they felt about those. If they did not address technology (most of them did) I probed for it. In a two-week field stay in 2012, I addressed specific questions regarding Twitter in a set of additional interviews.

My approach to data analysis resonates with abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012): contrary to an inductive blank slate, I started with a set of theories[3] that informed question angles and that I played off against each other. However, data coding (as well as data inscription) followed inductive principles, such as defamiliarization with preconceived understandings. I used the program HyperResearch to code the data (fieldnotes, interview transcripts and tweets) and used its frequency functionality for the content analysis.

Case Selection

The Legislative Correspondents Association (LCA) in Albany was founded in 1900. As other state house press corps throughout the country (Dorroh, 2009), it has experienced cutbacks in the early 2000s. Over 30 journalists (numbers fluctuated) from 15 news organizations held permanent office space at the State Capitol during the research period. Some news outlets had one reporter, others up to four reporters assigned to the statehouse. Correspondents represented regional newspapers (Albany Times Union, Buffalo News), metropolitan newspapers (New York Daily News, New York Post, Newsday), TV stations (NY1, YNN), a national newspaper (New

York Times) and news agencies (AP, Bloomberg News). An average LCA reporter was a 43-year-old white man who has been working in journalism for 20 years. About half of them had been on this assignment for more than five years. Being an Albany correspondent was considered a top job for regional journalists and either a long-term or final position of their careers.

The LCA was heterogeneous and reporters ranged from traditionalists to full-blown multimedia journalists during my research. Professionalism was a constant subject of discussion between them. This case study made visible the conditions to be studied, which are institutional divides and boundary work. The analysis rests on the assumption that the essence of these divides, if not their magnitude, is indicative for U.S. journalism. Cutting across organizations and in accordance with a news ecosystem perspective (Anderson, 2013), this research seeks to make claims on an institutional level of analysis. Though this case study cannot generalize in a statistical sense, it makes general logical inferences, based on a dialogue between empirical detail and theory with the goal of theoretical revision, innovation and future testing.

Results

The empirical analysis proceeds from adoption to resulting conflicts. The first main section deals with how the LCA adopted Twitter and fathoms why it has been so successful (addressing RQ3). The second main section begins with a breakdown of different forms of engagements (drawing on the content analysis of SSM tweets) to specify what reporters do on Twitter. The following four subsections identify transparency as a consistent theme in Twitter-aided reporting: 1) weakening of competitive boundaries and gatekeeping authority through instant sharing, 2) recognition of competitors, 3), higher visibility of the journalist as a person, 4) critical outspokenness. The focus is on differences and controversies regarding these transparency-inducing engagements between three groups of adopters—intense tweeters, light tweeters, traditionalist non-adopters (addressing RQ1 and RQ2). The final section discusses these findings and draws broader conclusions regarding institutional divides and expansion of professional boundaries through transparency.

Twitter in Journalism: Triumph and Diversity

Paths to adopting Twitter. At the time this research began, the Albany state house was already a fully digitized newsbeat. Most LCA reporters wrote online stories, many blogged and produced multimedia content on top of their core legacy news responsibilities. Twitter became relevant in 2010 and a central news reporting infrastructure in the spring of 2011. Initiation and intensity of Twitter engagement varied. Besides three non-adopters, the spectrum ranged from early and full immersion in Twitter-aided reporting to mere passive use (monitoring).

Table 1 about here

Ten early tweeters started in 2010 or earlier. Seven of them were under 30 and can be considered digital natives. Half of them started tweeting on their own initiative, the other half was encouraged by their organizations. Four of them were curious but did not tweet much immediately, the other six were passionate tweeters from the beginning and forerunners of Twitter-aided reporting in the press corps. Eleven late tweeters started during spring of 2011. They included some of the most influential journalists, according to their seniority and organizations. Four were either encouraged or ordered by their news organizations to tweet, seven individually decided to get on Twitter, mostly inspired by their tweeting colleagues. Two reporters only passively monitored others' feeds, one of who was skeptical but not opposed to Twitter. The other belonged to the traditionalists who had more than 30 years of working experience and were the most outspoken objectors to Twitter. Their seniority and the fact that two of them had colleagues in their bureau who tweeted guarded them from tweeting obligations.

I refer to those who embraced the whole range of tweeting practices as intense tweeters or enthusiasts. Neither was early adoption necessary for, nor did late adoption exclude from intense engagement. Seven early and three late tweeters constituted the group of enthusiasts. Light tweeters or skeptics advertised their own stories on Twitter and were more restrained when it came to promoting others' news stories, live tweeting, commenting and conversing. Their tweeting activity varied, whereas that of intense tweeters was constant. Regarding normative commitments, light tweeters constituted the middle position between traditionalists and intense tweeters: they were typically ambivalent about Twitter-aided journalism.[4]

What accounts for these differences? In the LCA, several patterns emerged. Besides age and seniority, area of work influenced tweeting intensity: journalists who did more enterprise journalism were less prone to tweet constantly than those who dealt with daily news. Organizational factors also registered as important conditions, such as economic viability, editorial philosophies and policies. Furthermore, the influence of tweeters, measured by number of followers, usually corresponded to the influence of their organizations (in contrast to an Australian study; see Bruns, 2012). This is why late tweeters, mostly constituted by reporters from such outlets, had twice as many followers on average than early tweeters (Table 1).

Why Twitter succeeded. Most LCA journalists ultimately embraced Twitter. Motives to start and keep tweeting were economic, relating to business interests of news organizations, as well as professional, relating to journalistic objectives. Economic motives included branding, improving consumer loyalty, expanding audiences and advertising legacy news. Professionally, Twitter was seen as a means of acquiring information, shaping public debate, providing public service and engaging more closely with audiences.

Many older reporters first recognized Twitter's economic utility, which accounts for their initial skepticism, and only embraced it once they perceived its professional merits. To give an example: one senior journalist was encouraged by his supervisor to tweet. His company believed tweeting was valuable "as a way of putting our material out there, as a way of building a profile in the world" and ultimately creating advertising revenue. Although this is why his company was interested in him becoming an influential tweeter, he said generating revenue was "not really what's on the forefront of my mind. My goal is to be interesting to my followers. My ultimate goal is to find more followers. I want to make sure what I put out there is worth clicking." The SSM debate was revelatory and turned him into one of the most active LCA tweeters:

> I started getting it: there is no quicker way to get a piece of news to an audience of that size. And it's very organic—you send it out there and then it gets retweeted. It's like an echo and each time it echoes it reaches another audience. And if they see your name pop up two or three times they start following you; it kind of builds on itself.

For young, digital native reporters, professional motives were apparent from the start. They perceived tweeting as an important skill and building a following as a career asset. They emphasized Twitter's journalistic and individual rather than organizational appeals. A reporter in his early twenties said Twitter only really enthralled him when he came to the Capitol beat six months before our interview, despite that he had been tweeting for over a year before that:

> It is invaluable … As an aggregation tool it's outstanding because I have all the other reporters, so I know what everybody else is doing; … you have the people you cover, so you're getting primary material from them; you have an instant analysis … that helps you, especially when you're new, put things in context. It's the greatest!

He reported events on Twitter that did not get covered in the paper as a service to his readers, he said, before adding that social media skills were highly valued in his organization: “If you are looking at a beat or a job in five years you don’t want to lose out because the other guy has 10,000 Twitter followers and you abstained from that.” This is not just a future scenario, according to another informant. He told me that a top newspaper recently hired a former colleague of his because of his Twitter presence and following. The young reporter’s bureau chief, in contrast, said he “was told to” to get on Twitter as “part of our strategy.”

There was a self-evident belief across different organizations my informants worked for: adopting new forms of communication like Twitter helps news businesses survive. Particularly the business concern for consumer loyalty found a complementary professional belief, which is that contemporary journalism has to be more engaged with its audience. This overlap of economic and professional concerns for audiences, together with the participatory promise of Twitter, accounts for its success in journalism. The belief in new media was handed down organizational hierarchies. An editor who supervised Capitol correspondents for his paper responded to criticism that online and social media journalism superficialize public information, arguing that television started this process: “That train left the station long time ago ... Humans have changed and now we as journalists have to respond to that.”[5] One of his supervisees echoed this sense of inevitability: “You don’t want to be the media institution left standing when the music stops and everybody sits down and you are the only one who is not occupying the media platform of choice that day.” This self-evidence will echo further in the following sections.

Twitter Engagements and Professional Divides

Before moving to intra-professional debates about Twitter, the following provides an overview of what LCA journalists do on Twitter and to what extent, based on content analysis of the same-sex marriage (SSM) Twitter debate. Because information received through Twitter turned out to be helpful for covering the beat, some of the most skeptical reporters had monitored for a while before tweeting actively. Besides more obvious examples, even seemingly useless information proved beneficial: for instance, a reporter who physically attends a press conference may miss or not recognize the significance of a statement, which somebody else highlights in a tweet. Apart from competitor-colleagues, spokespeople and political aides were LCA reporters' most responsive counterparts. Enthusiasts tweeted after work, usually about more personal matters, but few of them were on Twitter 24/7.

Substantive live coverage—including statements, decisions, votes—was the most prevalent form of engagement in the content analysis[6] of SSM tweets (31.9%), which is not surprising given how eventful this period was. Next to substantive news, 18.8% of tweets were situational and procedural, dealing with political processes and protest action, in which images and videos often augmented textual eyewitness accounts. One percent of tweets made political documents (e.g. press releases, bills, etc.) available. Two percent of tweets informed about the inexistence of news (no-news updates), which is typical at times of heightened anticipation.

Apart from these news-driven tweets, a significant portion referenced other content. All active tweeters promoted their own and their colleagues' news stories and tweets (24.4%). They also frequently referred to and retweeted their competitors (15.9%), though light tweeters did it less or not at all. LCA Twitter feeds were filled with wit and irony and the SSM debate was not an exception (5.8%). Some intense tweeters voiced explicit commentary and criticism about political processes (1.7%), which sometimes overlapped with irony. Hashtags also served as outlets for commentary: conventionally, Twitter's hashtag functionality aims at classifying tweets to specific issues and providing users with discourse beyond their social network. Hashtag commentary occurs when reporters insert critical, witty or emotive statements (e.g. #badsign, #ohalbany, #wow), which applies to 2.7% of SSM tweets. All tweeters, furthermore, engaged in some form of analysis (4.7%), which involved interpretation, drawing connections, prognoses, historical context and reference to previous political pronouncements and decisions.

Intense tweeters engaged most frequently in discussions,[7] mostly with other journalists (2.6%) and seldom with sources (0.4%), though this occurred more often during less eventful times. The SSM debate is, furthermore, exceptional in that it involved relatively frequent dialogue with the public (1.0%). Occasionally, LCA reporters made use of crowdsourcing (0.5%), including asking followers what question they would want to ask an official. 0.4% of the tweets were corrections of hasty errors and 3.4% were meta-discursive, meaning they discussed journalism and media. Fewer tweets than usual contained personal information (0.4%), which I attribute to long working hours and momentary national attention during that period.

Degrees and breadths of Twitter engagement reflect different conceptions of good journalism. The following analysis examines these differences, which are most pronounced between traditionalists and intense tweeters and more nuanced among light tweeters/skeptics.

Gatekeeping vs. instant sharing. As suggested by the analysis of SSM tweets, tweeting journalists believe in the value of instant sharing of verbatim statements, documents, updates on political processes, etc. Instant sharing fosters a processual rather than definitive conception of news (Boczkowski, 2010), which not only affects news making routines but the "fundamental paradigm" of journalism (Robinson, 2011, p. 202). Some LCA reporters denoted processual journalism as developing news, which included (live) tweeting news bits, linking to preliminary versions of stories on blogs, updates throughout the day and often resulted in legacy news stories. Developing news had two important implications for LCA reporters:

Opening the floodgates of competition. Most reporters generated developing news but differed regarding quantity and type of information they published. Reporters benefitted or became aggravated by developing news of competitors. Publishing exclusive stories is in the former category and journalists of more traditional news organizations, which never broke news online, greeted it with surprise and gratitude. Remarks in this vein came from 1) light tweeters and 2) tabloid reporters. One young reporter told me his boss "loves it when the New York Times breaks a big story at three in the afternoon because it gives us time to pick it up, match it and write it in the [newspaper]." His boss identified the story about Governor Eliot Spitzer patronizing prostitutes, which the Times broke online in March 2008, as a turning point. Another tabloid reporter asked: "I don't know why you would give away an exclusive like that? I guess they feel that the online is as important as the print, but I don't get that." Though articles in print were generally still held in highest esteem, only these particular journalists considered online newsbreaks a sheer waste. Correspondingly, they adopted Twitter but were reserved tweeters.

The stakeout episode at the beginning of this article concerns developing news, which aggravated some journalists. In explaining why he doesn't tweet, one traditionalist drew boundaries in respect to his tweeting colleagues' inability to withhold information in stakeouts:

> There might be two or three of us, you might find out something is going on and we're staking it out. Somebody tweets that "the Governor is meeting with the Assembly leader." So it goes from two people there to fifteen people there. And I'm like: "Are you breaking news? Wouldn't it be better to wait and you'd have a real story coming out possibly? Why are you sharing this information?" That's what I don't get about this instant sharing of information. I think it ends up harming what's supposed to be your real product at the end, which is hopefully a good story for your readers.

By “real product” he meant a story in the newspaper. Some light tweeters agreed to this position. During a visit to Albany in April of 2013, I talked to one of them about the episode that opens this article. She told me about a stakeout a week earlier where a handful of journalists had agreed not to tweet about it and was seemingly happy about this.

Opening the floodgates of politics. Besides tearing down competitive informational boundaries, concerns about instant sharing involved gatekeeping authority over political news. For this perceived undermining of professional autonomy, traditionalists were not just critical but outright dismissive of Twitter. Thus, for one of them tweeting was just stenography:

> I think there is much more of a stenographer style of reporting of just getting it out one-sided because you have heard it from someone say[ing] it first, instead of a traditional way where you would check out the information first. ... That’s why I think this has been a disservice. I think it’s not good for the profession.

Another traditionalist referred to tweets as “news candy,” meaning its purpose was mainly to please politicians. This started for him with blogging: “They ate it up; no question about it... It’s not really journalism. It’s another means of billboarding or headlining stuff.” The third traditionalist spoke of “performative information,” meaning it was strategic communication but pretended to be news. “People here who are bloggers and who tweet,” he said, simply reproduced attacks and revocations by politicians. Instead of checking out the information, “they put it right out there; unfiltered; unchallenged … are we the ones who are doing it? I’m not sure that’s the case, but I think we’re more easily used; we’re more easily manipulated.”

Contrary to tweeting journalists, who perceived instant sharing of information as a public service, traditionalists saw it as a professional disservice. Firstly, they thought it helped political actors more than the public. One traditionalist said he was a non-tweeter because he did not understand “what’s the benefit for who I’m ultimately serving, which is my newspaper reader?” Secondly, they believed that journalists are supposed to confront opposite standpoints within every bit of news they publish as well as fact check it.

Even enthusiasts shared some of these sentiments. A young journalist who was socialized as a multimedia reporter said he tried not to “fall for the sexiness of social media” anymore. He described how political actors counted on elective affinity to get publicity by using social media in ostensibly innovative ways: “If you are somebody who is using these multimedia tools and blogs you are more naturally biased to respect them and to cover them and to think they’re cool.” Covering such social media spectacle compromised journalistic autonomy to him.

Ignoring competitors vs. mutual recognition. Instant sharing on Twitter not only involved “giving away” information but outright promoting competitors. This was common in the LCA, as suggested by the analysis of SSM tweets (15.9%), but more so for enthusiasts than skeptics. A utilitarian explanation for this is that they mutually recognized to bundle “network power” since composition of followers varied across the LCA. A cultural explanation points to a belief in the need to recognize good journalism and, essentially, meritocracy. Among intense tweeters, the principle of recognition trumped self-interest. For instance, when a reporter pointed out in a tweet that another reporter—who was not even on Twitter—had the “best lede of the day” (newspaper reporter 1, 2013), he implied that his own lede could not keep up with it.

Recognition was not only expected but demanded. Disregarding this principle involved public complaints on Twitter, which were mostly dispatched by enthusiasts against skeptics: “Gee. Thanks for the shout-out NY Post. (Not).” (TV bureau 1, 2012) Or: “If [name of telecast] is sourced as a ‘cable television show’ then I’m referring to the NYT as a ‘newspaper’ from now on.” (TV reporter, 2012) Both examples originate from one TV crew. While this irritation may have been a response to a perceived disrespect of newspaper towards TV reporters and national/metropolitan towards regional media, the fact that it was raised publicly on Twitter, on an eye-level and in front of an audience of thousands indicates the binding nature of recognition.

Connected to this, effortlessness and deceptive ephemerality of tweeting transpired in excessive frankness, which was lamented later on. One reporter was annoyed by a story in a competing newspaper one day, which seemed to deliberately ignore a recent story of his on a related subject. His tweets expressed his annoyance vividly but after a few minutes he deleted them. He apologized, "I was overly snarky in tweeting this earlier, so let me try again" (newspaper reporter 2, 2011), and referred to the story in a more reserved manner.

Reporters were aware of this and compensated the lack of editorial gatekeeping. They discussed the appropriateness of tweets with colleagues: "[Name] and I have both saved each other a lot of hassle with the occasional: 'Hey, I was about to tweet this; is this a good idea?' ... and often it'd been like 'no, it's not worth it.'" Reporters self-censored, often anticipating their editors' objections. The reporter who retracted his tweets said his editor paid attention to his Twitter feed: "I think my old editor didn't read my Twitter. My new one does because he'll like call me and comment on things I tweet, which I guess makes me now a little self-conscious." The retraction episode above occurred after work and was an act of self-censorship.

Authoritative distance vs. communitarian openness. Enthusiasts who submitted to the ethic of transparency exposed their personalities on Twitter. They used first person, were witty (in 5.8% of SSM tweets), commentated (1.7%), analyzed (4.7%) and revealed personal details (only 0.4% in this case). Such tweets shed more light on the person making the news and weakened journalists' public/personal boundaries. One skeptic—a quiet and reserved person—was told to tweet by his superiors and says he experiences transparency as an obligation:

> You have to embrace some of these things if you want to survive. ... You can be kind of funny and sarcastic on Twitter; no one is editing you, which is kind of fun. You can definitely be more personal on Twitter and if you're not you gonna come off kind of buttoned-down, you know, so I think you have to [be more personal].

Although he adapted, he did not reveal anything about his personal life. A young enthusiast working for the same outlet deleted 700 of his tweets before unprotecting his former personal account and engaging professionally on Twitter. Both journalists were witty and conversational on Twitter but working for a prestigious news organization seemed to limit their disposition to disclose their personal lives. The opposite was true for enthusiasts of regional media who fully surrendered to the gravitational pull of transparency. One of them tweeted about fatherhood, approved all friend requests on Facebook, where he shared family and party pictures. He connected transparency to claims he made in his reporting:

> I feel forced into being completely transparent ... Here I am demanding and asking that people be open and transparent with me ... and I feel I should too be open and transparent. ... The other part of it is: ... the easiest way for there not to be a picture of you doing coke on Facebook is to not do coke. ... To me privacy is just a shield for things that you don't want to be known.

He sought to create the impression of having nothing to hide. Though he may not have been a more open person than in the pre-internet era, social media enabled and encouraged him to disclose. Like other intense tweeters, he still wrote legacy news stories where he employed a distanced, authoritative self-presentation in accordance with traditional norms. Intense tweeters were able to reconcile diversification of performances and inherent contradictions of norms guiding them. One of them described the difference between his individual and his bureau's

Twitter identity. He said he tweeted “things that are appropriate as [name] tweets that would not be appropriate as [bureau] tweets” in terms of more personal information or “observations that are perhaps a little bit sharper.” On the issue of blurring news and opinion another reporter said: “As that line blurs people become increasingly transparent about what their position is” and as long as they explained that to readers “it’s a fair approach.” Traditionalists were dismissive, light tweeters reluctant of such normative inconsistency. One of the former kind said:

> I had a blogger who works for a newspaper tell me that they have a different standard than writing for the newspaper, that ‘our marching orders are to be bitchy and happening.’ I don’t get that. I don’t get how you can be a newspaper reporter one second and then you switch hats with a different set of standards.

One skeptic shared this attitude, though not as strongly. He separated public and personal social networks, using Twitter only for the former:

> I don’t use Facebook … for work, even though in [my company] we could and I think that there is some encouragement to do that. I just have a problem with the breakdown of personal versus work. I’d be afraid that if I started using it more and started posting my stuff on Facebook that … people could look at the postings, mostly of my friends, and then try to draw conclusions about how I feel politically about things.

This reporter only approved my long-standing friend request on Facebook after we did this second interview I just quoted from. His Facebook presence was much more reserved than those of some of his LCA colleagues, who shared pictures of their children and vacations and who also tended to reveal more about themselves and their views on Twitter.

Objective detachment vs. critical involvement. Skeptics and traditionalists took issue with violation of traditional norms on Twitter, especially regarding objectivity and the separation of news and opinion. There were gradations and opinion in a narrower sense was hardly expressed at all. The analysis of SSM tweets accounted for these gradations by distinguishing commentary, analysis, wit and hashtag commentary. It was striking that enthusiasts tended to be reserved or critical about objectivity while traditionalists and skeptics used it more sincerely in interviews.[9] Prompted to distinguish good and bad journalism, one enthusiast said:

> Good journalism ... is neutral about it's consequences or whom it helps, whom it favors. But it's not objective because if I was not bringing with me the cumulative value of my experience in the time here of what I've learned, I would not be doing my job. We're making judgments every day about what is important and what isn't.

Another intense tweeter made a similar point, emphasizing that his most important principle was sensibility rather than objectivity, which he again distinguished from opinion:

> I don't feel necessarily a duty to give objective coverage when there is not objective debate. ... I don't believe in skewing coverage, in holding back on things I know to be true because they cut one way or the other. But I don't necessarily believe in giving all sides an equal weight just because they exist in the marketplace of ideas. ... My sensibility has some place in my written work; my opinion does not.

Both of these interpretations endorsed a less detached style of journalism and more categorical news decisions. One skeptic sounded different, saying she hoped "that I'm seen as being pretty objective" so that political actors would not consider her in their camp. One traditionalist scolded tabloids for taking sides, saying they "immediately throw objectivity to the wind." Contrary to enthusiasts, these reporters still perceived objectivity as an ideal to strive for.

While objectivity was contested, LCA journalists agreed on the need to shun opinion. However, on Twitter they commentated, criticized and, above all, ridiculed political processes, corresponding to a general tendency of blurred distinctions between news and opinion on Twitter (cf. Cozma & Chen, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012). For traditionalists, this was yet another reason to reject Twitter. Even enthusiasts were uncomfortable about blending news and opinion. A common rationalization combined the growing demand for news analysis with a narrow specification of opinion as moral judgment—"saying this is bad"—which they claimed not to indulge in. One enthusiast appeared to dodge a question about opinionating on Twitter:

> It's a little snarkier on Twitter. And I tried not to get involved with that but admittedly there've been some times where I have inserted plenty of snark but I still try not to cross that line into opinion ... there is a fine line that some folks probably do cross.

One traditionalist traces the tendency to opinionate back to the emergence of blogs:

> [The wall] is crumbling particularly because of blogging. Some bloggers have a style of being snarky or witty or funny or inserting themselves into the blog post. You automatically get some opinion, some adjectives, and a framing of the blog post.

Another traditionalist was opposed to tweeting reporters' rationale of diversification of performances and standards on different platforms: "I see a lot of times people do cross the line. And it's like, on the next day they are reporting on the same thing in a supposed hands-off [style in the paper] ... that to me is mind-boggling."

Because of the ideological consensus on omitting opinion from news, transgression was accompanied by distancing rhetoric. In tweets, distancing reflected in hashtag commentary (in 2.7% of SSM tweets). The following tweets are examples of this: "Skelos emerges from leaders' meeting with Cuomo and Silver to reiterate that he wants permanent, not temporary tax cap. #twostepsback" (newspaper reporter 4, 2011) or: "Gay marriage, no. Seahorse protection, yes. tinyurl.com/69hf267 #whosaystheydonothing?" (TV bureau 1, 2011) The pound sign served as syntactic separator to insert commentary. After the pound sign, reporters expressed what they really thought while preserving professional distance before it. As a form of speech enabling transparency, hashtag commentary was a subtle representation of professional boundary porosity.

Irony provides further semantic distancing. Rhetorically, irony establishes distance by expressing the opposite of what it signifies. Irony aims at exposing what is expressed and what is unexpressed. It may thereby foster critical reflexivity and challenge of authority but may also lead to nihilistic disengagement (Jacobs & Smith, 1997). Irony delivered by the LCA in tweets went both ways: it criticized political processes substantively but sometimes descended into absurdity and an outlet for frustration.

Discussion and Conclusion

The ethic of transparency raised expectations on self-presentation, communicative norms and practices, and extends self-understandings of journalists. RQ1 addresses disagreements about journalistic professionalism, which Twitter invoked concerning the following issues: Twitter fosters a processual rather than definitive understanding of news, perceived as an ongoing discussion rather than a final product. Thereby, inhibitions to directly turn information into news, connected to filtering and gatekeeping, are weakened. Journalists felt less bound to keep themselves, their appreciation of others and assessments out of tweets, contrary to requirements of authoritative distance, competitive lines of division and stringent notions of objectivity. The faceless gatekeeper has given way to a more human and status-equal interlocutor who shares information and informed judgment.

Transparency and the logic of professional control have an ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, transparency bolsters and sustains journalistic authority claims in the networked public sphere. On the other hand, journalists enter but do not control these newer media spaces, which operate according to principles that challenge professional boundaries on different levels. Twitter promises powerful alternatives of participatory journalism. Its implementation creates tensions with established normative commitments while selectively reinforcing them, particularly on the level of public service. This article demonstrates that journalists have different views about public service and, ultimately, the role of journalism in the public sphere. On the long run, however, what appears to happen is not so much subversion but expansion of professional boundaries, which accommodate diverse forms of journalism.

This leads me to RQ2, which focuses on the relationship between different views of professionalism and degree of Twitter adoption. Twitter reinforced oppositions about what constitutes good journalism in the Albany press corps that date back to the beginnings of news digitization in general and blogging more specifically. Traditionalists (and to a lesser degree skeptics) exercised an institutional resilience, which aimed at reproducing the logic of professional control and aspired to keep journalism as autonomous as possible. They held an essentialist conception of journalism: every unit of news must be treated as a closed entity, which they evaluated according to established standards. Traditionalists did not regard tweets as news. Intense tweeters, on the other hand, saw a tweet as a segment within a flow of news discourse, which they assessed holistically. Traditionalists and light tweeters conceived of journalism as subjected to one set of norms, irrespective of the outlet it occurred on. Deviation from these norms on one level (or platform) meant undermining journalism as a whole. Intense tweeters assumed flexible boundaries and diversified their performance in different venues.

Intense tweeters were, furthermore, much less adamant in defending professional virtues of Twitter than its opponents were in disparaging it. This is partly explicable by the fact that they were lower on the totem pole of journalistic worth than traditionalists and skeptics. The main reason, however, was that they did not have to defend Twitter. This is addressed in the why-part of RQ3, which asks how and why reporters adopted Twitter. A self-evident belief in Twitter as a way to sustain the relevance of journalism has evolved. Twitter-aided journalism has become a doxa, in other words, which means that it has gradually withdrawn from the realm of competing discourses towards the realm of the undisputed and undiscussed (Bourdieu, 1977). The belief drew power from corporate and professional considerations. Journalists viewed Twitter as a possibility to engage and excite audiences for their work. News corporations viewed Twitter as a way to promote consumer loyalty, which can be monetized. The professional concern for audience engagement and the economic concern for consumer loyalty mutually reinforced each other, especially at a time of crisis.[9] I argue that this discursive formation, which was advanced within and across news organizations, through superiors and (competitor-)colleagues, is why Twitter has won over journalism (see also Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013).

The way in which LCA journalists adopted Twitter reveals several dynamics: time and degree of adoption were not clearly related. Innovation-friendly reporters served as role models at a time when news organizations and news events pushed other reporters to get on Twitter. Specifically the SSM debate, when LCA tweets received national attention, further promoted adoption. As they were drawn in by events unfolding, reporters discovered merits of news reporting with and through Twitter that outlasted the passage of SSM law.

Institutional logic assumes a consensus over means and ends of the institution in question. Currently, a consensus does not seem to exist in journalism. What usually happens in institutional transformation is that change agents challenge the established logic in moments of crisis and propose alternative visions (Fligstein, 1997; Rao et al., 2003). Journalism diverges in that change agents, while pursuing new avenues, still embody the logic of professional control. They do not explicitly challenge it but lead by example in advancing alternatives.

I should emphasize again that the push of transparency does not derive from technologies themselves but that technological developments and a cultural shift, which is defined by a growing insistence on disclosure of information and openness of procedures, mutually reinforce each other. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that social media technologies generate similar conflicts of professional control and transparency in other institutions, for instance medicine, law and education. Higher professionalization of these fields, regarding entry barriers and codification of knowledge, may evoke more institutional resistance than in journalism.

This article has indicated that journalists' discussion partners on Twitter are mostly insiders, which raises further questions about its significance as a public sphere. As Jacobs (2000) demonstrated, insularity and number of regular members are no adequate measures for the deliberative power of a given public sphere. The SSM debate suggests that the twitterverse has deliberative potential, which citizens can resort to when important normative questions are at stake. An indirect effect worth studying would be whether state actors feel being held accountable because of the sheer possibility of an attentive and engaged public on Twitter (see also Artwick, 2013). The fact that Twitter serves as a venue for meta-commentary about what constitutes good journalism (generally, on Twitter and the relationship between both) bears deliberative potential for journalists themselves, which is also worth studying.

This case study is based on a small sample of journalists and has yet tried to make more general claims about how transparency shapes journalism and pushes journalists to adopt new practices, norms and identities. It has viewed Twitter as a carrier of the ethic of transparency and thus an object of contention in the journalistic profession. Like any research evidence, this should be treated as provisional, if only for the methodological problem inherent in studying continuing change. Likewise, concluding that new technologies help reproduce rather than transform professional norms is as hasty as stating in 1890 that journalism will never institutionally differentiate from politics. Testing such inferences will have to wait until a historical assessment of the current transformation of journalism becomes possible.

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Footnotes

[1] I conducted this research on the condition of confidentiality. Quotes from interviews, fieldnotes and tweets will be anonymous.

[2] I consider interviews and observations the primary data of this article. The content analysis is intended to offer additional texture and context to the study.

[3] The central component for this paper is boundary work. Other theoretical resources were Bourdieuian field theory and cultural sociology.

[4] The three types parallel those distinguished by Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013): enthusiastic activists, the pragmatic conformists and skeptical shunners.

[5] A similar, taken-for-granted attitude was demonstrated among UK news editors' perception of user-generated content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008).

[6] Multiple categories could apply to tweets. The percentages reported refer to an overall number of 4492 tweets by the core group of 25 Twitter feeds (reporters and bureaus).

[7] Figures only include public discussions (responses and retweets), no direct messages.

[8] Research in Sweden found greater homogeneity among tweeting and non-tweeting journalists (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013).

[9] Comparative research suggests social media are more successful in commercialized and competitive journalistic cultures (Gulyas, 2013) where this crisis is more apparent.

Table 1
Types of Twitter Adopters

Types		Age		Seniority		Followers	Tweets
	N	Range	Mean	Range	Mean	Mean	Mean
Time of Adoption							
Early tweeters	10	24-52	35	2-32	13	2460	4717
Late tweeters	11	29-72	48	9-43	25	4969	4445
Engagement							
Intense tweeters	10	24-58	38	2-35	16	5837	7567
Light tweeters	11	30-72	45	8-43	23	1899	1854
Traditionalists	3	57-60	56	32-36	32	-	-
Passive	2	53-57	55	31-36	34	225	19

Note. Figures refer to April 2013 because number of followers and tweets were not recorded in spring of 2011 and cannot be dated back.