

Social Networks and Journalism: a 5 minute interview

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This is a five minute email interview I did for Alix Abi-Aad, a journalism student at Leeds Trinity. I do quite a lot of these so I thought it was worth posting one for a change. Kinda practicing the preaching.

Alix Q: Firstly, with the rise of social networking and blogs, there are an increased amount of citizen journalists. Do you think this poses a threat to professionals?

"No – it's an opportunity. CJ provide vast amounts of material for free for journalists. This is a massive boost for newsgathering. Any other industry would be laughing all the way to the bank if this happened. Plus the public engage in vast amounts of interactivity on forums, comments etc providing even more free material for journalists."

Q: Newspapers and magazines have become quite substantially reliant on sites like facebook and twitter, even using them as primary sources. What do you think of this?

"It is a good thing in that it brings more diverse material to newsrooms and connects journalists with the public much more directly. But of course journalists should treat those sources just like any other and be critical and circumspect about their veracity and provenance."

Q: How far do you think twitter's changing the way we communicate?

"I think it is pretty marginal still. It contributes generally to speeding up communications and making us more connected to various networks of friends, experts, colleagues etc. It is difficult to generalise because people use it in so many different ways. It will become a bit like asking how we think the phone has changed communication. It depends how you use it. And I don't know anyone who only uses Twitter. it is a way of adding a comms tool to your other platforms like phone, email, Facebook etc."

Q: Do you think that social networking sites are expanding the way we report news or stifling it by creating even lazier journalism?

"I think they expand the sources and platforms for journalism. They help get stories out and sometimes help journalists to get witnesses, information or just opinions about stories. I don't think it makes journalists 'lazy' any more than PCs, the Internet, phones or print made journalists 'lazy'. What makes journalists lazy is lack of time and effort"

Q: A lot of celebrities are able to break their own news on Twitter now, for example last year Elizabeth Taylor replaced her publicist with the site and continues to share information before the press have a chance to report it. Do you think this is changing the role of the journalist from gatekeeper to gatewatcher?

"Yes. People are able to increasingly dispense with the nonsense of PR people who claim that they have to package everything that companies or celebs want to say. But just as we will still need journalists to help connect people to information/package information/filter information we will still need good PR people who help companies or celebs to manage their communications in a complex media world."

Q: Finally, do you think there is any chance that social networking sites will make newspapers redundant? If not, what can you predict happening in ten years time?

"No. Newspapers will be made redundant because we get bored of them and find better news sources. Newspaper newsrooms will provide that news in other platforms. As it happens, I think that physical newspapers will survive for years more because they are still a functional product and a pleasurable convenient platform for news. But they will continue to decline and social networking sites will contribute to that at the margin."

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