

## THE SOCIAL REPORTER IN ACTION

### An analysis of the practice and discourse of Andy Carvin

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#### Abstract

This study analyzed journalist Andy Carvin's live coverage on Twitter along with his discourse on journalism and social reporting. Carvin was chosen as the subject for study as he is perhaps the most prominent example of the practice of journalism based on emerging techniques of collaborative verification, transparency and co-creation. A textual analysis of 3188 tweets published by the journalist between 11 November 2014 and 21 January 2015 was conducted to investigate his techniques, particularly in terms of verification and crowdsourcing. The elements of journalism in Carvin's discourse and practice are discussed following Kovach and Rosenstiel's work on the essential principles for journalism practice. Findings suggest that a social media journalist can integrate both collaborative reporting and established journalistic values of accuracy, trust and verification, with the community acting as a distributed and networked newsroom. Results show the use of specific and effective techniques to overcome misinformation and serve as a trusted node in the network. This study contributes to the emerging body of work that addresses how journalistic practice is evolving and adapting in networked and shared media environments, where the journalist plays a vital role as a mediator of information, but as one of many voices.

**KEYWORDS** Andy Carvin; citizen journalism; crowdsourcing; ethics; social media; Twitter; verification

## Introduction

Of all the social media platforms that have emerged over the past decade, Twitter has emerged as the network for the real-time distribution, consumption and interpretation of news and information (for an overview, see van Dijck 2011). The integration of Twitter into journalistic routines and practices has become an area of research, with scholars exploring how news organizations and journalists negotiate the affordances of an always-on, event-driven ambient media space operating beyond the formal structures of the profession (for an overview, see Hermida 2013). This study addresses how journalists function in a live, breaking news environment, serving as network hubs on Twitter (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014) or as forum organizers (Artwick 2013).

Established practices of verification are challenged and reshaped by the volume, velocity and visibility of platforms such as Twitter (Hermida 2012; Singer 2012). At the same time, the scale of social media offers access to diverse and potentially alternative sources that go beyond traditional sourcing practice. Bruno (2011) describes the “Twitter effect” as the power of the platform to offer in-depth coverage of natural disasters, wars and political protests that promotes the idea of a journalism open to a diversity of sources.

To delve into the opportunities, techniques and challenges of live reporting on Twitter, this paper is a case study of journalist Andy Carvin’s Twitter feed from late 2014 to early 2015. Carvin offers an interesting subject for research as he has been at the forefront of the development of collaborative sources, reporting and fact-checking (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014), going on to found the collaborative news service, Reported.ly, in December 2014 (Castillo 2015). In particular, this study considers how core elements of journalism as outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) align with emergent reporting practices on Twitter.

Social media platforms have developed as a hybrid space for the cultural production of journalism, with a mix of material from the public, institutions and professional journalists. Yet researchers in the field have not yet found a way to fully integrate this reality into the academic discourse (Hermida 2010, 2012; Robinson and DeShano 2011; Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012; Van Der Haak, Parks, and Castells 2012; Barnard 2014; Brandtzaeg et al. 2015; Wall 2015). The present research aims to contribute to a better understanding of collaborative journalism.

## Literature Review

Twitter acquired a prominent role in news coverage after the US election campaign in 2008 (Messner, Linke, and Eford 2011). The image of a plane landing on the Hudson River served as a catalyst to draw media attention to Twitter as a platform for breaking news. That same year, the BBC’s decision to inform its users about the hostage crisis in Mumbai demonstrated how news organizations were integrating tweets into their news coverage (Hermida 2010). Even though using content from social media could be considered a text version of live television (Bennet 2013), this innovative and challenging way of reporting was questioned by the audience. Subsequent crises in Honduras, Iran, Haiti, Egypt, Libya and Japan highlighted the

value of the micro-blogging platform to the newsroom as a source of raw and immediate reports from people at the scene.

Hermida (2012) suggests that journalists consider Twitter no more than an opportunistic resource for news media to fill the news vacuum that tends to occur in the aftermath of a breaking news event. The fact that Twitter, embraced by news media companies to cover the Haiti earthquake in the aftermath of the event, was quickly forgotten when media correspondents managed to reach Haiti (Bruno 2011) supports this assessment. Recently, more in line with the benefits described in the early research on the role of Twitter in journalism (Stassen 2010; Murthy 2011), some media have developed teams for live coverage on social media. Curated live blogs have emerged as arenas for curating material from journalists and the public (Reid 2013; Thurman and Walters 2013). For example, “Watching Syria’s War,” a collaborative project by The New York Times, is seen as “extremely cautious, extremely circumspect and extremely transparent,” voicing out the ambivalence of social media practice by mainstream news media (Browne, Stack, and Ziyadah 2015, 1344).

Along the path of discovery and legitimation, the Iran presidential elections brought to the front the relationship of news media with the user community (Newman 2011). The use of citizen content by the media during the Iran crisis received considerable media attention (Hermida 2012). Only a year later, the Arab Spring gave birth to a veritable community of users around the timeline of Andy Carvin (Carvin 2013). Barnard (2014, 10), building on field theory, explains how Carvin’s earned reputation as a Twitter journalist makes him the “greater example of Twitter’s relevance to cultural capital.”

Carvin, along with Lewis and the team of reporters recruited by Reported.ly in 2015 (Kim Bui, Asteris Masouras, Malachy Browne and Laura Petrillo), represent the epitome of “social journalists.” This group of reporters, familiarized with the new tools and techniques required to check and verify information in multiple formats in a context of warp speed (Hermida 2012; Silverman 2013; Schifferes et al. 2014), have led the way in journalism practice on Twitter (Vis 2012; Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014; García de Torres et al. 2015). They are also pioneers both in the use of crowdsourcing techniques—a participatory online activity in which a task is shared via an open call (Estellés-Arolas and González-Ladrón-de-Guevara 2012)—and the integration of social media narrative tools into everyday practice.

Carvin was initiated in the practice of collaborative journalism as:

I was experimenting with new ways of conducting journalism ... At the beginning of the Arab Spring I was simply retweeting what they were saying, but as the revolutions expanded I ended up using Twitter to create an online community of volunteers that served as sources, translators and researchers for me. (Carvin, quoted in Gan 2013)

Lewis (2011) used crowdsourcing to ask for information that would in time allow him to find an alternative truth to the official versions of the deaths of Ian Tomlinson (in 2009) and Jimmy Mubenga (in 2010).

However, research on the use of Twitter by journalists reveals that, in general, reporters are unfamiliar with collaborative sourcing and verification techniques and do not feel comfortable with social sources (Brandtzaeg et al. 2015; Thurman 2014). Studies show that traditional sources are by far cited more than social sources (Knight 2012; Hänska-Ahy and Shapour 2013; Paulussen and Harder 2014).

The practice of collaboration with users via crowdsourcing is even less common among reporters (Thurman and Walters 2013; García de Torres et al. 2015). Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) found that crowdsourcing is only the 12th option for journalists using Twitter. Artwick (2013) examined the role of “forum organizer” among US journalists and discovered that the variable “Ask” (defined as a public call for information) represented only 1.6 per cent of the tweets analyzed; most of them were general questions and requests for feedback or verification. None of the journalists interviewed by Thurman and Walters (2013) mentioned crowdsourcing as a verification method in live-blogging.

Within a normalization frame (Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012), journalists use Twitter primarily to monitor and collect news and as a source of feedback; the traditional relationship between journalists and news sources is not challenged by the micro-blogging platform (García de Torres et al. 2011, 2015). Rahmzadeh Heravi and Harrower (2016) suggest that journalists are reluctant to use media for verification because it is time-consuming. In their study, lack of trust stands out as the strongest deterrent in the use of social sources (64 percent of respondents), in contrast with others such as reporters, newswires or direct contact with individuals, that were highly rated. The relationship between trust and knowledge of social media, according to the data presented by these researchers, shows a positive correlation.

Barnard (2014) outlines Twitter’s potential to influence the way news is gathered, edited and distributed. The analysis of the debates carried out around the hashtag #wjchat allowed him to recognize these emergent individual journalistic practices on Twitter: information collection (access to a variety of news, hashtag searches and awareness system); news dissemination (one of the most visible affordances, made possible without direct authorship via retweets); sourcing (connecting with potential sources); public note-taking (live-tweeting practices, increasingly common among citizens and professionals), public engagement (conversation and interaction); journalistic meta-discourse (criticism and reflection that explores the structural and practical realities of the field); personal interactions and other professional interactions such as sharing and making recommendations.

### **Ethical Issues**

As a source of information, Twitter is available to both news media and citizens. Initial reports of China’s earthquake in 2008 circulated on social media first, rather than coming from official sources. Similarly, in 2010 tweets warned of a tsunami in the towns of Ilocos and Duao after the earthquake in Chile, whilst official sources were silent (Fraustino, Liu, and Jin 2011; Castillo, Mendoza, and Poblete 2013). Citizens are concerned about the accuracy of information, but they look also for current and unfiltered information (Fraustino, Liu, and Jin 2011) that

mainstream live blogging does not provide. The democratization of information flows challenges control and is linked to de-professionalization (Splichal and Dahlgren 2016). In the past, sensationalism and excessive reliance on official sources, well exemplified in the historical prosecution of O. J. Simpson or the coverage of the Gulf War, were the paramount problems of real-time reporting (Thussu and Freedman 2003). Today the emergence of conversational (Bordewijk and Van Kaam 1986) has raised social media practice problems related to accuracy, transparency and control (Singer 2012).

The experience gained in crisis coverage by the BBC in past years has enabled the corporation to develop and sustain a set of old and new practices and norms according to Belair-Gagnon (2015). For example, during the attacks on the headquarters of Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015, the BBC decided not to publish images deemed too graphic and delayed the publication of information that might harm the security of citizens. Instead reporters took the necessary steps to check videos and pictures published on social platforms and contacted witnesses willing to communicate by telephone (Loughran 2015).

At the core of Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2001) principles of journalism, there are three fundamental tasks: assembling and verifying facts and transparency—so audiences can make their own assessment of the information. Hermida (2012) argues that a networked architecture does not require an abandonment of verification, but a reframing of the discipline in the context of citizen participation. When it comes to transparency, journalists are divided, though research suggests there may be a tendency to “tweet first, verify later” (Barnard 2014).

Transparency, defined as informing readers which information has not been confirmed, is one of the principles mentioned in the National Public Radio (NPR) Code of Ethics (NPR 2012) regarding the use of social media. The public broadcasting company asks reporters to challenge those publishing information on social media to provide evidence, raise doubts and ask questions. The guidelines caution journalists to assess rumors circulating on social media and to reach out to other sources for confirmation. According to the results of the analysis of the social media guidelines of 12 news organizations by Lee (2016, 121), social media platforms are framed as risky and dangerous and the guidelines “indicate wide gaps between the fast-changing journalism norms and news organizations’ actual journalism practices, which still do not put much weight on audience engagement.” An emerging standard is to use information gleaned from social media but

with caveats about the validity of the details, such as adding that the number of victims in a major natural disaster or breaking news story may change. As Singer (2012, 6) explains, “in the meantime, we want to know what’s happening right now, and so we tolerate the mutability of the information as part of the story itself.”

The lessons learned in the past decade—the consequences of misinformation in the Boston marathon bombings, the false images of Hurricane Sandy, and rumors during the Paris and Nice terrorist attacks in 2015—point to the importance of training and experience, collaborative strategies to improve citizens’ performance, multimodal verification, updated social media

guidelines and research on real-time big data analysis (Vis 2012; Castillo, Mendoza, and Poblete 2013; Tanaka, Sakamoto, and Matsuka 2013).

The debate on the impact of social networking on citizen journalism is ongoing. Hermida (2013) envisions a future of co-creation of news, involving multiple actors. Wall (2015) argues that the space is not controlled by traditional news media and that the social media streams of professional journalists are leading sources of information. Barnard (2014) points to a shift towards a convergence of traditional and digital practices on Twitter, resulting in a combination of dispositions that integrate many norms and values typical of the participatory Web, namely openness, participation and collaboration.

Both in online and offline practice environments, it is widely accepted that quality journalism requires independence, to be a monitor of power, provide public criticism and compromise, keep the significant interesting and relevant, the news comprehensive and proportional and, finally, allow practitioners to exercise their personal conscience (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). These traits of quality journalism are often not examined in detail when assessing the potential risks and opportunities of social media.

### Research Questions

The objective of this study is to analyze Andy Carvin's live coverage on Twitter along with his discourse on journalism and social reporting. This study builds on previous work by Bruno (2011), Vis (2012), Thurman and Walters (2013), Barnard (2014) and Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith (2014), to address the following research questions:

RQ1: Does Carvin's practice effectively promote active citizens as participants in a community of verification and discussion?

RQ2: Which elements of journalism are challenged by Carvin's discourse and practice? RQ3: Does Carvin's practice follow the guidelines of the NPR Code of Ethics?

The research hypotheses are:

H1: Carvin's community of users is an integral part of his reporting.

H2: The discourse and practice of Carvin are heterodox, with new values (openness, participation and convergence) that overlap Kovach and Rosenstiel's elements of journalism.

H3: There is full compliance with the NPR Code of Ethics by Carvin.

Andy Carvin was a senior social media strategist at NPR from 2006 to 2014. During this time, he became known as "The man who tweets revolutions" (Kiss 2011) for his engagement with social media communities to report and cover the uprisings in the Middle East of 2011. He went on to launch Reported.ly in December 2014, serving as editor-in-chief to "to bring global news

directly to you through social media—and hope you’ll become a part of our online community” (Carvin 2014). During the period under research, Reported.ly won the 2015 Online Journalism Award for breaking news in the small category for its coverage of the Charlie Hebdo attacks (Ellis 2015). On August 31, 2016, Reported.ly suspended its operations due to a lack of financial support from its parent company, First Look Media.

This study is based on the textual analysis of 3188 tweets published by Andy Carvin (@carvin) on Twitter from November 11, 2014 to January 25, 2015. This period encompasses the run-up and launch of Reported.ly, covering a time when Carvin was seeking to build on his experience as an embedded reporter in social media communities during the Arab Spring by setting up a new type of news organization. The tweets represent 86.63 percent of the total number of tweets published during the period and the sample comprises Carvin’s social interactions (retweets, crowdsourcing messages and user’s mentions) relevant for this study.

To give an answer to the research questions, Carvin’s journalistic practice on Twitter (Barnard 2014) related to public note-taking and discourse was examined. Carvin’s real-time coverage was explored in search of evidence of collaboration and/or the promotion of active citizens, with special attention to the use of crowdsourcing techniques. The presence of indicators of essential principles and practices common to good journalism, according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001), were analyzed in Carvin’s practice and discourse. Finally, Carvin’s practices were examined to examine how they aligned with NPR’s Code of Ethics (NPR 2012).

### **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of Carvin’s practice indicates that what has traditionally been defined as hard news forms the bulk of his work, in line with the emergence of Twitter as a platform for breaking news. A majority of events covered by the journalist are major news events such as the Sydney siege (#sydneysiege) and Charlie Hebdo shootings (#charliehebdo). Some scheduled events, such as #ericgarner and #ferguson, develop into breaking news, with protests after the judicial resolutions are made public. Major news events coexist with other stories in Carvin’s timeline, such as the Philae lander touchdown (#cometlanding) and President Obama’s State of the Union address (#SOTU) (Table 1).

#### *Collaboration in Carvin’s Practice*

Carvin’s narrative is strongly supported by the community of users via retweets or mentions. Some stories are largely reported through retweets, as in Carvin’s first days of coverage of the Arab Spring (Gan 2013). This technique of “RT (retweet) coverage” is found both in in-depth coverage and in short live reporting; also, there is evidence of a

**TABLE 1**  
Narrative patterns

Variables	Retweet	Fieldwork	Mixed
In-depth stories	#Yemen #FLmarriage	#sydneysiege #ericgarner	#charliehebdo #ferguson
Short stories	#SOTU #SecKerry #cometlanding 2 NYPD shot King Abdullah Lapid #israel Rehtaeh Parsons	#marionbarry Hossein Derakhshan Suicide bomber Istanbul	

mix of RT coverage and active practice. In major breaking news events and crisis situations, Carvin actively seeks information and engages in fact-checking and verification in rapid exchanges with users (Table 2).

Carvin’s practice is oriented to clarify data and sources, provide live updates using live video streaming as a key source, together with fact-checking and verification. The community of users is actively engaged along the process and acts as a network of collaborators. For example, when reports of blogger Hossein Derakhshan being released (@h0d3r) first emerged, Carvin posted several appeals to @EskandarSadeghi and @Irozen to verify the rumors and ask for help with translation—“Did this just happen,” “Do you believe it’s true?,” “Has he made any public statements yet?” or “Can you summarize what it says? Google Translate sucks when it comes to Persian.” Similarly, during the #sydneysiege hostage crisis in Sydney, a combination of specialized knowledge by Carvin and the use of crowdsourcing allow him and his to community address misreporting in the media. Some mainstream news media incorrectly interpreted a flag in the cafe as being the ISIS flag and established a link between the suspect and the terrorist organization. Carvin intervened on social media to deny these reports: “I’ve seen the full flag, It’s the generic one,” “NOT true. The Mail Online has it wrong. It’s a generic black standard with the Shehada. Al-Nusra has more text,” “The ABC keeps replaying an interview with an eyewitness talking about ‘an ISIS flag’. IT IS NOT THE ISIS FLAG, people”). Carvin even reached out to journalists about the misreporting—he messaged journalist @lehmannatlarge, asking “are you guys familiar with the difference between an IS flag and non-IS Islamist flags? Big mistake for a front page” (see Figure 1).

As soon as an image of the attacker is captured by cameras, Carvin sets a new task for his community of users: the translation of a short text on a bandana on the head of the attacker, barely visible because of the low quality of the caption. Nevertheless, part of the text is deciphered. After a more accurate image is distributed, the text comes clear and Carvin’s collaborators proceed to carry out a new and precise translation (see Table 3). During the period analyzed, as in #sydneysiege, Carvin activates his community of users in order to verify reports, find out particular details or to outsource minor tasks. This includes general and



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specific requests to his followers and other Twitter users via hashtags, most of them to cover breaking news. Essentially, he mobilizes his community as a virtual newsroom, brought together by interest in a news event and enabled by the networked nature of social media.

**TABLE 2**

Crowdsourcing messages by Carvin

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**Verification**

- Slo-mo of that video reportedly showing Syrian boy get shot, then rescue a girl. Do you think it's legit? See 00:25. <https://t.co/blxSL0m18g> (November 11, 2014)
- There appears to be a flag on the left but res is poor. Greek flag? <https://t.co/u6wdCyQhWP> #VerilyLive (November 14, 2014)
- Anyone recognize this place? Was the photo taken in Syria or somewhere else? <https://t.co/wRQzdbPPvp> #VerilyLive (November 14, 2014)
- Are reports that shots were fired accurate? RT @WesleyLowery chaos near Ferguson City Hall (November 26, 2014)
- Any evidence of this? Footage? RT @deray Now being told that there are snipers on the roofs of area businesses. #Ferguson (November 26, 2014)
- So have Aussie officials named the hostage taker on the record, or is this coming from anonymous law enforcement sources? #SydneySiege (December 15, 2014)
- Same hat worn in the hostage scene photos? MT @jncatron: A picture of the #SydneySiege hostage-taker <http://t.co/lhZUGlBtt5> (December 15, 2014)
- Has Ch 9 confirmed its sourcing re: two deaths at #sydniesiege or are they just repeating what Ch 7 said? (December 15, 2014)
- \*Unconfirmed\* reports of an incident near Trocadero Plaza and the Eiffel tower. Anyone seeing credible reports or footage? (January 9, 2015)
- Sky News reporting hostagetaker at Kosher deli is demanding release of the Kouachi brothers. Anyone know how they're sourcing this claim? (January 9, 2015)

**Translation**

- Can Arabic speakers read the text around his head? cc @natashatynes #sydniesiege <http://t.co/kxDtyh3WMY> (December 15, 2014)
- Anyone who reads Arabic? MT @gfry @acarvin can U ask Ur network the meaning of this, plz. Is it #JeSuisCharlie? <http://t.co/KYTxddefRkr> (January 8, 2015)
- Take two: Anyone read Farsi? MT @gfry @acarvin can U ask Ur network the meaning of this, plz. Is it #JeSuisCharlie? <http://t.co/KYTxddefRkr> (January 8, 2015)
- Anyone speak Armenian and want to help do a running translation on the live feed? <https://t.co/3T7gHRhDUB> #gymri #armenia (January 15, 2015)
- Make that Farsi. RT @acarvin: Can anyone read the Arabic on this t-shirt? <http://t.co/RQmJ4q5cYO> (January 25, 2015)
- Can anyone read the Arabic on this t-shirt? <http://t.co/RQmJ4q5cYO> (January 25, 2015)

**Resources**

- Is there any live footage from #ferguson city hall? Sounds like a mess right now (November 26, 2014)
- Does the ABC have a live radio stream of #SydneySiege? I'm on a train w/ crappy wifi and can't get video streams to load (December 15, 2014)

**Information**

- Has @nswpolice announce timing of a news conf yet? Assuming ppl have died, ideally theyd want to alert families beforehand #sydniesiege (December 15, 2014)

**Ideas**

- Curious to know if anyone is using crowdsourcing to tackle an initial review of Senate torture report. If so, how? <http://t.co/nL3RuLeUZ2> (December 9, 2014)
- Senate torture report is out. If @reportedly had critical mass, how should we have tackled crowdsourcing analysis? <https://t.co/6tnoNFlbWg> (December 9, 2014)
- What are your favorite—and most constructive—subreddits? Please weigh in here: <https://t.co/MVA03FG4tF> (December 22, 2014)
- What global news stories should @reportedly follow this week? Let us know here, FB <https://t.co/oYYsQLKrm> or reddit <https://t.co/SqAdj1sQZI> (January 5, 2015)
-

The tasks required of users are not unduly challenging, but rather form elements of what a journalist would do, such as observation or sharing information they already possess. The community of users provides resources, tips, translations and corrections on Carvin's assumptions. Generally speaking, the replies help to solve a specific task or provide clues or tips via text, links or pictures. No threats or sensitive issues were detected in the timeline.

### **Principles of Journalism in Carvin's Practice**

A commitment to covering issues of public interest is evident in Carvin's agenda during the period under study. Topics are treated with thoroughness, according to their importance and public impact. Carvin also demonstrates a commitment to engage with his audience through open dialogue, with his timeline acting as a forum for informed public discussion. The analysis did not find any examples of sterile polemics or polarized arguments.

Other elements associated with quality journalism emerged from his practice such as transparency, independence and loyalty to the community. In his #ferguson tweets, transparency becomes a key issue. As soon as Carvin reported what he was seeing on live video streams from Ferguson, the users became curious about his location. He responded promptly to clarify the situation—"I'm in Australia—what do you expect me to do?," "I type fast while listening to the live streams. Been doing this for years," "No, I'm in Australia. It's Thursday." In his tweets, he is open about his social media reporting practices: "I'm rarely there in person. I coordinate coverage remotely with sources on the ground."

Part of his reporting of what he is seeing on live video streams from Ferguson is an acknowledgement of his reporting methods. For example, when Carvin reported on the use of teargas on demonstrators, he also explained how he came to know that this was happening: "I'm not watching CNN. I'm watching live streamers. Either way, the effect is the same.

I've experienced both," "Do not know.—Both people claiming teargas and smoke bombs I'm in Australia at the moment" and "The cameraman immediately started to retch, then vomited, then coughed for 10 minutes." At the same time, Carvin actively seeks the participation of the users in the story, sending out calls for information and verification: "Got any proof?," "And you know this how?," "Where? City Hall?," "Got any proof or evidence? Last I heard it was just a police vehicle outside. RT @MusicOverPeople They set City Hall on fire."

For the coverage of #charliehebd0, the Reported.ly newsroom was already in operation. This particular and complex event demonstrates how Carvin sought to create a shared ethical framework with his network for reporting the attack. In his tweets, he urged his network to follow well-established journalism ethics, for example over the identification of victims: "Again, not going to report names until they're better sourced but one of the alleged attackers has a history in French courts,[sic]" "Seen it happen before and cause extraordinary anguish on their families, In one case the son had actually killed himself," "It's one of the most questionable practices in journalism. 'Police sources' get it wrong all the time during breaking news."

#charlieheβδο also serves as another example of pro-active work of verification on social media. With the aid of Reported.ly's @kimbui, Carvin sought to contest unofficial reports that identified one of the suspects as Mourad Hammy, aggregating information on his innocence via the hashtag #MouradHammyInnocent—"@KimBui & I have been digging into a bunch of French teenagers Twitter profiles to report on #MouradHammyInnocent," "And this seems to confirm his relationship with that school, at least of last year." During the process, Carvin openly admitted his mistakes and reported on his limitations, through tweets such as "Was it ever verified? The last I saw was a statement (and some counterclaims) but I hadn't seen footage surface. Did I miss it?" "Ah, I thought the presser earlier was the governor. Maybe the police chief? Started listening halfway thru + my turkish sucks."

But Carvin also pointed to the limitations of traditional mainstream media practices: "They're all citing the local police department statement. That's hardly "reporting"," "I'm relying on reports from those affected on the ground. Having experienced both I'm doubtful there's \*no\* teargas." Through his tweets, he made a case for the validity of reporting from a distance by using social media sources, at odds with the traditional journalistic practice of being on the scene. With #ferguson, he stressed how his reporting was more accurate than coming from mainstream media: "See? Told ya. MT @stlcountypd At appx 9.15p, tear gas was used on S. Florissant after smoke was unsuccessful in dispersing violent crowd."

Major news events dominated Carvin's Twitter stream. Interspersed were only a few tweets which refer to his personal life. These tend to provide some information about his location—"Just the view from my hotel," "Just a quick trip to Sydney for the week"—or about his family life, background and beliefs.

### **Principles of Journalism in Carvin's Discourse**

Carvin's reflections on journalism are dotted throughout his Twitter timeline, but specific clusters were found related to meta-discourse practices associated with the hashtags #AskReportedly and #wjchat, as well as around a discussion on the veracity of the "Syrian boy" video. Overall, there is consistency between Carvin's meta-discourse and practice. The elements of journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001) are evident in Carvin's discourse. There are no traces of commercialism, rather the reverse. Reported.ly, his social media project funded by First Look Media, is presented as a service for the community—"Absolutely. Immigration, crises refugee ... So many stories not being told. It's on my editorial agenda," "... trending stories? Definitely hope not." One of his tweets echoed a core element of journalism—"Journalism's first obligation is to the truth." The mission for Reported.ly is woven in his messaging: "We want to mitigate the rumor mongering and put claims into context, calling out what we know and don't know."

While verification is a cardinal element of Carvin's work, he does not interpret verification in the same way that Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) do. For Carvin, "verification is part of it. Overall situational awareness of the news event is even more important." His approach to verification is reflected in his reliance on retweets for his coverage of #Yemen, where he

acknowledges that verifying information was a major challenge—“@abdu You’ve been That confirmed? Hell, anything is truly ever confirmed when it comes to #Yemen?”

Sources in breaking news, especially if there are victims, become a major source of concern for Carvin. This is particularly noticeable in his coverage of #marionbarry, #sydneysiege and #charliehebd. His experience, particularly the Boston bombings, frames his coverage:

Lots of major reporting screwups—Gabby Giffords, Newtown, Boston Bombing—were due to anon law enforcement no indie verified.

That’s precisely what I mean. Sunil Tripathi was one of the names erroneously circulated after the Boston bombing.

That same mistake happened during Boston, too. This seems more solid but who knows honestly.

Le Monde editor in chief. Police sources contacted by Le Monde say no arrests have been made at this time (Boston Bombing/CNN redux?).

Everything today has felt like a replay of the Boston Bombing coverage. Totally false. Bad sourcing from US officials, just like Boston.

Carvin portrayed the community as a key element in his practice: “You need to be building your army of supporters and anyone else who can help empower your reporting,” “Community participation = empowerment,” “Best social media policy? Love your neighbors, listen, give back to the community and dont be a douchebag,” “My Twitter followers often work as researchers, translators, tracking shipping lanes, etc.” Following the thread opened on Reddit to ask for tips to crowdsource the coverage of the Senate torture report, he clarified his view on crowdsourcing:

In my experience, crowdsourcing helps with the big picture and often yields subject matter expertise, but not always—so it’s a good idea to have go-to people who may bring technical knowledge to a given issue. I’ve seen people try to crowdsource docs using tools like Google docs to manage assignments, etc. It works in a pinch, but it’s inefficient. And project management tools tend to turn off the majority of volunteers. So the trick is finding a system that really lets you manage the workflow but also keeps it simple and seamless for the volunteers. The Guardian’s MP expenses crowdsourcing experiment is a potential example of how to do that. (Carvin 2015)

His relationship with mainstream news media is ambivalent. Carvin’s practice relies heavily on journalists and news for tips and information. Mainstream media sources represented one-third of the sources during the Arab Spring, according to Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith (2014). During the period examined in this study, he praised his colleagues for the coverage of #charliehebd—“no, this is exactly the time to be proud of our journalism. I’m proud of many

other news orgs today.” But he also pointed out errors and openly contested information circulating on the media—“This video was covered by news outlets around the world as a real video. It’s a hoax, it should be called out as such,” “No, me pointing it out shows that news orgs need to be accountable for the footage they air. Fake footage hurts everyone.” Carvin does not hesitate to denounce questionable practices such as a reliance on official sources—“They’re all citing the local police department statement. That’s hardly reporting,” and inaccuracy—“Seeing lots of images of the Saudi flag rendered in black. Waiting for TV pundits to discuss a sudden proliferation of flags ISIS online,” as well the use of social media as a tool to promote traffic to the websites.

This study found that Carvin complied with almost all of NPR’s guidelines for social media (NPR 2012), notably transparency, evidence-based reporting, caution and appeal to other sources. Marion Barry’s death coverage provides a good example of how the principles of transparency and caution played out in practice. At the time, Carvin tweeted “WUSA’s @brucejohnson9 is reporting that Marion Barry has passed away. NOT CONFIRMED. Haven’t seen any other news org confirming this yet” and “yeah, we need more than one reporter, one source.” In seeking confirmation, Carvin reached out to mainstream news media web pages and journalists on Twitter with specialized knowledge—“Here’s the first report of his death, not confirmed elsewhere yet: Marion Barry dies at 78,” “Tom Sherwood has been reporting on DC politics as almost anyone else longer. He’s reporting two sources saying Marion Barry has died.” Then, as soon as the information was updated, and only then, Carvin retweeted a blogger from The Washington Post, the homepage of The Washington Post and the WJLA homepage.

### Conclusion

Real-time reporting on social media is an emerging area of study as journalists negotiate established norms and practices in an open, networked and participatory environment. Research in this area points to the need for journalists to integrate new sources of information, develop appropriate verification skills and adopt suitable techniques for audience engagement. This study has highlighted Carvin’s ability to navigate flows of information on social media, to pose relevant questions to relevant users, to draw on his experience of collaborative verification and to engage in an exchange with his network. Carvin acts as a forum organizer guided by both traditional journalistic principles and emerging values of collaboration and co-creation. The findings provide further evidence of the role of the social media reporter as a key node in a networked and hybrid media environment, whose mission is to “authenticate, interpret, and contextualize information flows on social awareness streams” (Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith 2014, 495).

Findings suggest that a social media journalist can integrate both collaborative reporting and established journalistic values of accuracy, trust and verification. Andy Carvin’s community of users was an integral part of his reporting. His loyal network of collaborators effectively function as an open and distributed newsroom, connected through social media networks. The discourse and practice of Andy Carvin are heterodox yet also integrate accepted journalistic principles, combining transparency, verification (with nuances), an obligation to the truth and

loyalty to the citizens and independence with values of openness, participation and co-creation. Control is surrendered implicitly in retweet coverage which serves to amplify other voices, especially when there is little verification of the content. Moreover, in the Reported.ly Reddit forums, the users were invited to make suggestions for coverage as well as comment on the work of the team. As a forum organizer, the journalist shares, to some degree, power and agency with the community.

Carvin's timeline shows how a journalist can attempt to surface truthful and accurate information in immediate and instantaneous news flows. But there are also questions as to when traditional practices are strained in breaking news situations when conflicting reports and rumors are being traded on social networks. Findings point to the value of a carefully curated and challenging timeline on Twitter that seeks to minimize error, question rumors and even contest reporting in mainstream media outlets. By being open about the limits of his reporting, Carvin demonstrates how journalists can play a valuable role in open environments at times of uncertain information. As he noted in one tweet, "Well, yes. Imagine if reddit had been staffed with journalists during Boston Bombing. Results might've been better."

As far back as 1998, Newhagen and Levy warned that established ways of working were challenged in networked environments, where users are both consumers and producers of information. Collaborative journalism, within a broad and flexible framework of journalistic principles, requires a profound understanding of the nature of social media spaces, together with the development, adoption and implementation of appropriate fact-checking and verification techniques, both traditional and new. There is scope for additional research on real-time reporting on social media and its impact on journalism practice, particularly in the use of retweeting and in the crowdsourcing of facts.

Carvin is perhaps the most prominent example of the practice of journalism based on emerging techniques of collaborative verification, transparency and co-creation. In crisis situations, when reliable and accurate information is at a premium, non-curated tweets can spread rumors and false information. Yet, at the same time, events have shown the value of the raw fragments shared by eyewitnesses caught up in the middle of breaking news events. This study contributes to the emerging body of work that addresses how journalistic practice is evolving and adapting in networked and shared media environments, where the journalist plays a vital role as a mediator of information, but as one of many voices.

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