

Vlogging from the War Zone: Mohammed Nabbous and International Citizen Journalism in Libya

by

Amanda Alexis Lindsey Beckett

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on Mohammed Nabbous, a Libyan citizen who produced widely circulated reports during the first month of the revolution which overthrew Muammar Gaddafi, after his over forty years in power. Nabbous' work is a generative example of citizen journalism, and what Media Scholar Ethan Zuckerman terms bridge blogging. Nabbous was one of many contributors who overcame barriers to communication, including government blocks to Internet access to provide vital on-the-ground information to outside news agencies during the Libyan uprising. Though there are significant differences, what occurred in Libya can be situated and contextualized regionally as part of a series of revolutions in the Middle East in 2010-2011 – a period often referred to as “the Arab Spring.” Nabbous' role as source and citizen journalist provides rich terrain in which to analyze emerging definitions of journalism and debates over the role of and need for foreign correspondents.

Nabbous was killed while covering a firefight in Benghazi only one month into what became an eight month long civil war in Libya. In the week after his death, some of those who eulogized Nabbous on Twitter debated whether his contributions merited acknowledgement as works of journalism, and whether Nabbous had in fact been a journalist. This thesis analyzes 500 of the most widely distributed Twitter messages which eulogize Nabbous, and draws on the wider context of debates about professionalization, news media, changes to the news industry, and journalism ethics.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Amanda Alexis Lindsey Beckett.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to A. Patrick who kept me going through the thick and thin, through the days and nights of writing and research. Thank you.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Arab Spring

After two-and-a-half weeks of protests in the heart of Cairo, Egypt, the world watched as president Hosni Mubarak relinquished control of the country on February 11, 2011. Not only was the world watching, but we were listening for the first time to the voices on the streets, thousands of miles away. The Egyptian people followed the path taken by Tunisians a month before, planning and organizing peaceful protests in an effort to oust their leader, all the while painting a digital picture that Facebook and Twitter users watched from a distance. The scene had been set by the Iranians two years earlier, in 2009, when Twitter was branded as an important factor in what would be months of protests following presidential elections which saw President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad re-elected. While the Iranian protests never amounted to an overthrow of government, the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings had once again inspired international pundits to proclaim a “Twitter Revolution” (Myers, 2011; Lister, 2011; Morozov, 2011). Social media seemed to be coming of age as the linchpin of free speech that had been hoped for (Morozov, 2011).

These successful revolutions kindled hope among others in the region who longed for political change. Following Egypt and Tunisia, on January 27th protestors hit the streets in Yemen, on February 14th Bahrain, and on February 15th the fervor of potential revolution hit Libya. These revolutions, and the media enthusiasm that surrounded them, ignited what was quickly coined “the Arab Spring.” But while the protests in Tunisia and Egypt had been mostly peaceful and had led to revolution after a matter of weeks, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya saw the Arab Spring wear on into a winter, and watched the weeks slip into months, and even years (Joffé, 2011A). Rebels and protestors took to Internet-based platforms, including blogs and in particular social media like Facebook and Twitter to tell their own stories. While it mustn't be forgotten that the revolutions of the Arab Spring were wholly orchestrated and

enacted by people who risked life as they knew it for the change they hoped for, social media served as a portal through which the outside world shared a cooled, telescopic experience of events on the streets. Among those voices reaching out to far-flung audiences from Libya was computer engineer Mohammed Nabbous, who, when protests broke out, set up cameras and satellite internet connections in order to broadcast images from the center of the Libyan protests, Benghazi's Tahrir Square.

The Libyan government loyal to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi cut internet access within the country to a trickle just like the Egyptian government had done a month earlier (Valentino-DeVries, 2011). Similarly, international reporters had been thrown out, and news media in the West found that the only source of information coming out of the country was coming from those with the technical skills to bypass government blockades and get information out via online channels. Only days in, the Libyan protests turned violent as the Gaddafi government struck back with military force (Gazzini, 2011). Nabbous, twenty-eight years old at the time, with a team of friends and family, set up a news room and started using Livestream.com to broadcast video from the main protest sites. The Livestream platform, launched in 2007, allows users to broadcast streaming video online. It offers a free service which is supported by advertising as well as premium services.

On Livestream, Nabbous coordinated with informants inside Benghazi and with media representatives outside, such as National Public Radio's Andy Carvin. Carvin had already shot to notoriety in the preceding months and years through his perceptive and passionate coverage of other Arab Spring protests using Twitter (Zuckerman, 2011; Sneenivasan, 2011; Silverman, 2011; Myers, 2011,; Stelter, 2011). In a process sometimes referred to as curating, Carvin, never leaving his desk in Maryland, had set a reliable system of verification and worked to amplify many voices like Nabbous who were working on the ground during

revolutions (Hermida, Lewis, Zamith, 2012). Nabbous developed a strong reputation, partly due to Carvin's retweeting and tweeting of his work. He was subsequently interviewed and treated as reliable source, contributor, and expert by several mainstream Western news media organizations through crackling voice-over-internet connections (Lemon, 2011; Stout, 2011; Carvin, 2011; Carvin 2012B).

The Gaddafi regime retaliated against anyone involved in the protests. What started as peaceful protest quickly became armed rebellion and then civil war. In response, the United Nations deliberated enforcing a no-fly zone to prevent military jets from bombing rebels and civilians alike (Gazzini, 2011: 164). It's this context where the outside world remained uncertain about what was going on inside Libya and hesitant about interfering in a civil war that Nabbous said he was compelled to take to the streets, camera in hand, to document the violence perpetrated by his government and to plead with the international community for intervention. During one of these outings, while chasing reports of an armed conflict in Benghazi, Nabbous was shot and killed. The audio he had been broadcasting live over the internet from his mobile phone traces his movement as he followed a firefight and then went silent (Nabbous, March 19, 2011; Lemon, 2011).

After several hours, clear audio streamed the voice of Nabbous' wife, brokenhearted, announcing his death. Over the following week, the same media who had been interviewing Nabbous days earlier as a key source and journalistic contributor were now broadcasting and tweeting announcements of his death (CNN, 2011). Many journalists around the world mourned 'one of their own' -- even as the U.N. no-fly zone, the foreign intervention that Nabbous had pleaded for, went into effect.

Through the din of war and the networked world of social media, Nabbous had contributed to international news media both as a rebel and a technician, and *also*, as a

journalist. Though he had had no previous training in the profession, and after only weeks of experience in the field, Nabbous was remembered by professional journalists as a colleague. Many mournful media announcements lamented the honorable death of a comrade in the line of duty (Lemon, 2011; Stout, 2011; Hogens, 2011; Walker, 2011; Koutsoukis, 2011). NPR's Carvin went as far as to compare Nabbous to the venerable American broadcaster, Walter Cronkite.

This thesis will analyze this debate and the journalistic work of Nabbous as he was transformed from a concerned citizen with sharp technical skills to a journalist recognized the world over. Being both a rebel and a journalist, and contributing to the rebellion as a journalist generate an enormous amount of questions that bring to bear debates about international reporting, new media, and journalism ethics. I will first discuss current issues in international reporting, including the decline of well-funded overseas news bureaus of traditional news, and the ways in which alternative media have stepped in to compliment or supplement traditional news media reporting on foreign events. I will then discuss the importance of framing in international news before examining how networked framing allows the emergence of narratives not possible in traditional news. Next, I will discuss objectivity as a defining quality of professional journalism, and the ways in which Nabbous throws into question distance and objective methods long associated with and expected from professional journalists. Finally, I will analyze messages posted on Twitter, to examine his recognized status as a journalist.

1.2 International Reporting is Dead

To understand the rise of a figure like Nabbous, it's vital to consider the state of foreign correspondence in English-language newspapers particularly in the UK and North America. For decades now international reporting has been fading from public interest and public

attention (Sambrook, 2010; Moore, 2010; Otto and Meyer, 2010; Archetti, 2011; Enda, 2011). In a study undertaken by Media Standards Trust examining the international content of newspapers in Britain, author Martin Moore notes that, while what he calls “high-quality” papers have maintained an international news section restricting overseas events to a middle point of the overall paper, mid-range papers often provide no such specialized space. International news in these papers takes the form instead of “reporting a la carte on international news, usually only when there is an obvious connection to the audience” typically as consumers or as a holiday destination (Moore, 2010: 18).

The study also showed that, over the space of three decades, the prominence afforded to international reporting in British newspapers had dropped by forty percent (Moore, 2010: 5), and that the number of world news stories found within the first ten pages of newspapers had dropped by eighty percent (Moore, 2010: 17). The displacement, or all together neglect, of international reporting in British papers is part of a trend in decreasing international news coverage. News editors assembling the day's news are reacting to a perceived disinterest on the part of their audiences.

American Journalism Review Senior Contributing Writer Jodi Enda writes foreign news reporting in American papers has become a “modern, industrialized assembly line” in reference to a solution the Tribune line of newspaper has hit on to reduce costs: formatting and printing identical stories in several papers nationwide (Enda, 2012). Since 1998, eighteen newspapers and two chains have close all of their foreign bureaus, with most closing down their last bureau since 2003. In their report on the decline of foreign reporting, Otto and Meyer write that, “While this trend is particularly stark in the US, most media organizations in Western countries are struggling to fund their foreign affairs coverage at a time when their business model of selling news in print is threatened by the shift of audiences and advertising

to the internet” (Otto and Meyer, 2012).

While newspaper consumption on the whole is in decline, it can hardly be surprising to find that the exorbitantly expensive field of international reporting has been the hardest hit. While the newspaper medium is perishing, however, other media have remained strong or gained prominence, such as television and online media. Those seeking news about the world may be turning away from traditional and professional sources and broadening their news consumption habits. Media scholar Richard Sambrook writes that,

In 2009, 500 billion minutes per month were spent on Facebook globally, there were an average of 55 million messages per day on Twitter, YouTube served 2 billion video streams per day. The average American user spent six and a half hours per month on Facebook, used Google for an average of two hours per month but only spent about half an hour on CNN – slightly more than the average news website (Sambrook, 2010: 38).

The Pew Research Center has found that as of May 2013 72% of adult Americans use Social Networking Sites (Pew, 2013). To modernize some of the numbers above, 700 billion minutes per month are now spent on Facebook globally, 190 messages per day on Twitter, and 2.9 billion hours spent watching video streams on Youtube (Statistics Brain, 2012). Pew’s research has also shown, however, that only fifteen percent of adults get most of their news through social media, and among adults eighteen to twenty-nine years old that number makes up still only a quarter (Pew, 2013). While these numbers are increasing, this report suggests that the large majority of American’s still find most of their news through traditional media. Online sharing of news reflects what media scholars Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green call “spreadable media” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013). The Authors insist, “if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead,” and that the public are participants not in the distribution of

media, but its circulation (2013). 'Spreadability', they write, "refers to the potential – both technical and cultural – for audiences to share content for their own purposes" (2013: 3). The authors argue that shaping media flows is in the hands of the audience, and that journalism produces the kind of content that people want to spread; content which creates conversation.

As audiences turn elsewhere for their news and traditional news organizations feel the financial pressure of supporting overseas reporting, much of the infrastructure that had been set up during periods of growth in international reporting is now coming apart (Sambrook, 2010). Expensive international bureaus are being closed by many large American TV networks. While in the 1980s, most networks maintained fifteen foreign bureaus, Sambrook states that now most have only six or fewer (2010, 13).

Scholars suggest that the removal of frameworks for reporting and reading news is the cause of the decline in both interests and coverage (Moore, 2010: 38; Sambrook, 2010: 53). Since the end of the Second World War much international reporting was framed around the antagonism of the Cold War, from Korea to Vietnam. Much of what was reported on the world could be easily framed within the narratives established by the mounting tension between the American and Soviet superpowers. Without these well established and familiar narratives of good and evil, editors struggled through the 1990s to find a common thread in international news that would be well-received by readers (Morozov, 2011).

In television, however, Sambrook argues that the tumultuous events of the 1990s, from the first Gulf War to the ethnic civil wars in Eastern Europe and the Challenger tragedy, provided an emotional impact which drew audiences to live coverage of dramatic events (2010: 7). For television audiences and TV news producers, dramatic images were the selling point for news. As long as the story could be explained through compelling visuals, it would be worthy of air-time.

As world populations became more mobile, and businesses moved toward the model of globalization, public awareness of the world also became more globalized. Transnational news topics which rose above national boundaries, such as terrorism, economics, and global climate change became new frameworks for global news (Sambrook, 2010: 61). As well, increasing migration was resulting in more multicultural societies and meant that often news from overseas could be news from home (Sambrook, 2010; Zuckerman, 2010). Editors had long held that the ability to bridge between the culture and language of the home country and those of the news source was an essential element of international reporting, but with changing demographics traditional means of doing this may no longer be viable. Sambrook writes, "In increasingly multicultural societies, national identity is more complex and a white, middle-class male reporter may not be an adequate cultural bridge between the country he is reporting and the audience at home" (2010: 47). Traditionally, the American correspondent would have been valued for his American perspective, his ability to translate the meaning of overseas events for culturally similar viewers or readers back home. As Sambrook suggests, the blended societies created through migration blur the defining boundaries of a national perspective which can no longer align with only one cultural identity.

1.3 Long Live International Reporting

While many of the long-standing news organizations have had to shut down or consolidate their overseas operations, the rise of digital technologies and the internet have provided a possible compliment, or supplement, to the reporting of professional journalists (Sambrook, 2010; Zuckerman, 2010; Moore, 2010). In recent years, news organizations have realized the bulky bureaus of the Cold War era are effectively, and maybe more importantly cheaply, replaced by a single reporter with a digital camera, laptop, and internet connection

working out of a hotel (Sambrook, 2010; Zuckerman, 2010; Moore, 2010). Permanent staff reporters need not be maintained when many freelance reporters, living permanently in the countries they report from, can be tapped for contributions and reporting during times of crisis. However, news reporting may also come from non-professional sources, equally digitally connected (Zuckerman, 2010).

By the end of the twentieth century, many newspapers and news networks were undergoing a transition to becoming multimedia organizations (Singer et. al., 2011: 59). Access to the means of producing multimedia news, as well as publishing it, however, was increasing, and professional news organizations saw the information market flooded with non-journalistic sources. Non-governmental organizations, citizen journalists, and governments reached out to interested audiences, bypassing the journalistic process and establishing direct connections with the public (Moore, 2010: 42-46; Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira, 2012: 1; Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2013). This saturation of available information again stirred up the established narratives, tightly controlled by the institutions of journalism. Journalism scholar Candis Callison writes,

The circulations of other narratives has laid bare the notion that facts get constructed, produced, and socialized. Still the circulation of journalistic truths form parameters and limitations as to what counts as truth, particularly for those detached from the events at hand (Callison, 2009: 6).

While other narratives were, and are, being added to the stream of information available to news consumers – evading the careful control of journalists and editors – traditional news values and the familiar editorial controls still shape how news is produced, distributed, and circulated, even when not produced through journalistic channels. Likewise, journalists have

taken up the values of the network.

In the book *Participatory Journalism* by Jane Singer et. al., media scholars observe that “the widespread adoption of participatory tools suggests that journalists are seeking to accommodate input from the audience within the spaces that media institutions have tightly controlled” (2011: 18). With values permeating both ways across the boundary of professional journalism, Singer et. al. suggest that “the internet's participatory potential may be instigating a fundamental shift in established modes of journalism by bringing new voices into media” (2011: 16).

As publics are becoming more diverse, they are also seeking out more diverse sources of news on the world. Callison points out, “a host of internet-based applications offer possibilities for socializing about and talking to, with, or through news, while blogs, Twitter feeds, and other alternative outlets progress towards becoming distinct sources of news themselves” (Callison, 2009: 3). Instead of turning only to those tried and true news outlets of the twentieth-century, readers and viewers turned internet-users rely on their own judgment in tracking down the news that matters to them. Technologist and media scholar Ethan Zuckerman writes, in a 2008 paper on international news,

A reader interest in news from Ghana doesn't have to rely on her local newspaper, or even the New York Times, to cover Ghanaian news – she can access the websites of half a dozen Ghanaian newspapers, the online presence of radio stations like Joy.FM, and dedicated internet news sites like Ghanaweb. Via web streaming, several Ghanaian television stations can be viewed over the internet, including the Ghanaian Broadcasting Corporation (Zuckerman, 2008: 5).

International news may not always be international. Local news reporting is international news

reporting when accessed from abroad. In interviewing former CNN foreign bureau chief and co-founder of blog aggregate GlobalVoicesOnline.org Rebecca MacKinnon, Sambrook quotes her as explaining,

When people go to Google looking for something, they end up on blogs, on research reports, on press releases, on think tank sites – whatever organizations are most skilled at putting information out on the web and optimizing it for search. In mainstream media you only learn what the news desk thinks you should know... (Sambrook, 2010: 40).

Here, MacKinnon points out that Google users experience a very different kind of news consumption than that experienced through reading newspapers or watching television news. Television and print news present the consumer with as much information about as many topics as has been deemed necessary given the topic's relative importance compared to other news items of the day as well as selecting which topics are worthy. By contrast, a Google user can find a vastly larger amount of information surrounding topics he has personally ranked in importance. The television and print news have been tailored to reflect the voice of the publication, whereas the search results may come from a number of interested parties through which the consumer must sort, question, and ultimately decide to consume on his own. While MacKinnon has highlighted an explosion in news consumption possibilities through the internet, more does not necessarily mean better, and each consumer is left to determine the quality of the information on a case-by-case basis. Without the interpretive frameworks of traditional media narratives, consumers are free to seek out more or less information and choose their own sources with the help of curators, social networks, and search engines, for better or for worse.

The availability of information from non-traditional, non-mainstream sources also has

the effect of rerouting flows of information in times of crisis (Papacharissi, 2010: 159; Papacharissi, 2012: 266). When governments or other interest groups may seek to staunch the flow of information to tightly control messages during times of conflict or unrest, alternative news sources may persist (Zuckerman, 2010). As Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira write, “blogs and microblogs rise to prominence as news disseminators when access to mainstream news and/or other communications media is restricted or blocked” (2012: 1). When the flows of information are redirected, the frameworks used to make sense of international events fall into the hands of those providing, disseminating, and circulating the information. The construction of the news, which once took place in newsrooms and behind the scenes, can be developed organically, in real time, and in full view.

In their study of the circulation of news on Twitter during the Egyptian revolution in 2011, Sharon Meraz and Zizi Papacharissi argue that:

Backstage negotiations between sources, reporters, editors and other stakeholders are largely hidden from the audience [in traditional news production]. On #egypt via Twitter, the framing process unfold on the front stage as those crowdsourced to prominence interact with mainstream and non-mainstream media and diverse publics (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 159).

The process of reporting and editing is altered by being both public and open, and new narratives may emerge. As Meraz and Papacharissi point out, the public negotiation around the #egypt hashtag was a networked process which allowed a many-to-many emergence of recognizable narratives. In circumstances of conflict and crisis, this public process may allow those about whom the story is written to become participants in the construction of their own history. The process of what Meraz and Papacharissi term “networked framing” is what I will turn to in the next section.

1.4 Gatekeeping and Framing in the Network

The term gatekeeping refers to the process of “selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news” (Shoemaker, Vos and Reese, 2008). Events and facts are processed and presented according to the news sense of journalists and editors, and according to time and space in print and broadcast news. As discussed above, however, professional journalists' role as gatekeeper of information is being “undermined by digital technologies which enable users, as individuals or groups, to create and distribute information based on their own observations or opinions” (Singer et. al., 2011: 15). Members of the public – what had been until recently assumed to be a passive audience – are now able to contribute to the process of making news and are disrupting the control traditionally held by the news industry and professional journalism.

Framing the news, fitting news events into a familiar pattern of sense-making for consumption by a particular or general audience, involves boiling down a wealth of facts into one or another form of a truthful story, which will correspond to a narrative. Robert Entman describes framing as a process of bringing forward certain aspects of an event to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993: 52). Framing influences the uptake of facts by the reader, and is an elaboration of Erving Goffman's idea of framing (1974) as a cognitive shortcut for understanding and assigning meaning to issues and events. Entman suggests that “The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (52). The frames use – and perpetuate – already present cultural conventions which are deployed by the “receiver” as part of the sense-making process. Traditional framing by mainstream news media has

been slow to change, and typically follows a well-worn and predictable path. However, the grip of traditional news media sources on international news framing has loosened, and networked environments are allowing users to impact news agendas “through practices that blend broadcasting with social conventions” (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 140). With online tools, users are remaking the news framing process.

In their study of the #egypt hashtag on Twitter during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Meraz and Papacharissi found that organically developed hashtags worked to frame information in a way similar to traditional news¹. Hashtags, acting to collect information around certain topics for retrieval by other users interested in that topic, could highlight qualities of the information in a tweet and refocus attention around those qualities, impacting how users responded, and contributed, to the tweet. The hashtags, they write, “enact, enable, and sustain the framing of select interpretations, aspects or frames to an event over time” (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 144). Meraz and Papacharissi also found that, from the ranks of contributors, both elite and non-elite, gatekeepers arose who enjoyed more prominence and power to control the framing of communications and the distribution of information. During the protests in Egypt, activist and journalist agendas both contributed to reframing the movement as a revolution, “and thus in some way, prefacing its destiny through expressive gestures that were affective, premeditated, and anticipatory” (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 158). Comparatively, this process breaks away from the traditional flow of power in news production. Where journalists and editors maintained control over how to tell stories, in their analysis of the #egypt hashtag Meraz and Papacharissi found that this control was more

¹ As an event is discussed on Twitter, hashtags emerge as users highlight aspects of a topic by adding a hash symbol (#) before a keyword. Because using common hashtags streamlines discussion, users will gravitate toward hashtags which are well supported or which they feel better represent the situation under discussion. It is by this process that the number of hashtags applied to a topic is refined, refining the defining aspects of the topic and framing the discussion. This process happens in public, as opposed to framing processes which happen behind the closed doors of the newsroom.

diffuse, and that the power was therefore more dynamic. While the reframing of the movement in Egypt as a revolution was not the cause of its success, it was the diffused process of framing which worked to shift the conception in the news from that of a protest, to a revolution. Those involved in the process were able to infuse the narrative with their own sentiments and, clearly, hopes.

In the case of the exchange of information on Twitter in the Egyptian revolution, the role of bridging information which had been traditionally performed by foreign correspondents was being taken over by the network, and individuals who gained prominence in the network were able to control how information flowed. Meraz and Papacharissi define network gatekeeping as “a process through which actors are crowdsourced to prominence through the use of conversational, social practices that symbolically connect elite and crowd in the determination of information relevancy” (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 158). Whereas the power to control information held by mainstream media is derived from name, brand, and long-standing reputation, in the network, power stems from the conversational and social relationships established between users usually applicable only to one topic, broadly or narrowly defined.

As previously mentioned, and as applicable to the instance of Twitter conversation on both the topics of Egypt and Libya in early 2011, National Public Radio senior social media strategist Andy Carvin is an example of just such an elite. He derives power as a gatekeeper on Twitter not only from his association with NPR as a valuable source of news, but because of the many relationships he developed with individuals on the ground during the Arab Spring and his ability to coordinate and redirect the information in the Twitter stream. For many Twitter users, Carvin became a major source of news during the Arab Spring and also a draw

to Twitter as a news source. In a panel interview by *One Just World*², Carvin explains his Twitter reporting style:

The way I've used Twitter over the last couple of years is to identify who are the major actors in different revolutions and protests particularly in North Africa and the Middle East, and identifying those who are active online as part of organizing their protests and revolutions as well as documenting them. And so my Twitter account allows me to essentially embed myself as a reporter within these communities of protesters and revolutionaries and not only follow them in real time but as we're trying to deal with the fog of war and separating truth from fiction. I then work with my other Twitter followers who have a whole range of subject matter expertise they apply to help research the claims that people are making in real time (Carvin, 2012A).

Carvin acts like a node through which information passes. A report comes to him, he sends it out for verification, confirmation comes back and he distributes it, all with the help of his followers on Twitter. He describes the process as both incredibly accurate and incredibly fast.

A 2012 study by Hermida, Lewis, and Zamith showed that Carvin's Twitter feed during his coverage of the 2010-2011 Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings privileged non-elite sources (8). This is in contrast, they write, to studies in the past which have shown that journalistic content tends to be shaped by the use of sources who represent the institutional elite in society. The results of their study show that non-elite voices had a "considerable impact" on Carvin's Twitter feed, and therefore a potential impact on "the content and tone of other media reporting, given the large number of journalists, editors, and news outlets who monitored his feed" (9). One reason given for Carvin's break from established journalistic norms is his non-

² One Just World is an Australian forum discussion on global development issues supported by World Vision Australia, International Women's Development Agency, and the Australian Agency for International Development.

traditional background and former involvement with the blogging site, Global Voices Online which seeks to amplify sources typically not heard in mainstream media. On Twitter, the authors write, “conversation, community and connectivity” are privileged over the “hierarchical structures within established news organizations”(11) and Andy Carvin is an example of “how a media professional operates within such a complex and fluid media system” (10). The authors cite Carvin as having practiced a “new form of journalism.” That analysis is reflective of what Carvin’s work means for the profession of journalism. In the case of Nabbous, who is not a professional journalist, it is possible to ask whether *his own* actions made the sources he gathered more available to professional journalists, like Carvin, who are using new electronic tools and hybridized ethics. Having done work to verify the reports and images he received from those on the ground in Libya, Nabbous was exhibiting a very journalistic mentality. He used a free version of what is sophisticated online broadcast technology to move the content which he was curating, and which ultimately was picked up by those like Carvin. It may be possible that at the same time that Carvin is practicing a new form of journalism, and Nabbous is practicing a new form of citizen journalism.

1.5 The New Non-Journalism

Journalists and non-journalists meet in networked environments and set to the task of framing news through conversational and social practices, often drawing on traditional journalistic values but also allowing for emergence through the prevailing winds of the network. Consumers become producers and producers become users – as Jay Rosen calls them, *The People Formerly Known as the Audience* (2006) – the production, distribution, and consumption of what was once considered international news becomes easier, faster, and more complex. Following international news can mean “living inside a stream: adding to it, consuming it, and redirecting it” (boyd, 2009). As Hermida points out, “journalism, which was

once difficult and expensive to produce, today surrounds us like the air we breathe” (2009). Sambrook refers to news as “always on” (2010: 7), able to be accessed, updated and added to at a moment’s notice, from almost anywhere with a mobile phone.

In her research with social network sites, Media Scholar danah boyd describes the network as follows:

The goal is not to be a passive consumer of information or to simply tune in when the time is right, but rather to live in a world where information is everywhere. To be peripherally aware of information as it flows by, grabbing it at the right moment when it is most relevant, valuable, entertaining or insightful. Living with, in, and around information (boyd, 2009).

This all-encompassing media environment is described by Hermida as 'ambient' and he extends the term to news production, writing, “ambient news has evolved into ambient journalism as people contribute to the creation, dissemination and discussion of news via social media services such as Twitter” (Hermida, 2009). Through this ambiance in production and consumption, framing emerges organically through networks.

Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira suggest that newly configured, ambient media environs exemplified through platforms like Twitter: “permits individuals to change the dynamics of conflict coverage and shape how events are covered and possibly how history is written” (2012: 3). In the case of the fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt,

Ambiance provided that always-on space, an electronic elsewhere that treated this movement as a revolution well before it had actually become a revolution leading to regime reversal. Affect and ambiance helped sustain the drive to collective imagination of what might happen before it actually happened (Meraz and Papacharissi, 2013: 159).

Yet, an ambient media environment so configured still leaves open the challenges associated with verification, and the journalistic aspiration of “truth-seeking.” Truth, as enshrined in journalistic codes of ethics like that of the widely-used Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ) is described as the key to justice and democracy, and it states that “The duty of the journalist is to further those ends [justice and democracy] by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues.” But, as Callison writes, “truth is, in a word, messy” (2009: 8). Truth as it is found in its natural environment is not the polished and packaged product of professional journalism media – the very process of journalistic writing and editing requires the selection of some facts over others in service to publishing edicts. And, many journalists acknowledge this as Carl Bernstein, one half of the investigative team behind the Watergate story that eventually brought down then US President Richard Nixon, has stated that reporting is an attempt to get “the best obtainable version of the truth.” (quoted in Ward, 2004). In other words, truth is multiple and iterative, but at some point, journalists have to go with the facts they have.

Traditional journalism thus aims to be a record of events, but accounts are molded into a form that is acceptable to the editor, who is trusted to meet the expectations of his audience and publishers and/or owners of the publication. Meanwhile, news in the network combines multiple sources – some more accurate than others – with multiple interests and ideas of what is true. The network publically negotiates which elements will be considered true, with trust falling to those who have been given higher status within and by the network in that moment (Hermida, Lewis, Zamith, 2012).

Raw truth will be shaped by whoever is trusted to shape it. Often, within a network, this means a group with similar opinions. boyd (2009) argues that networks are generally homophilous, reflecting like-minded people's opinions back at each other. However, this

homophilous space can also allow those who are most interested in an event to refine the news down to the elements that are of most use to them. Meraz and Papacharissi suggest that homophily on Twitter “afforded like-minded people the space to converse and collectively crowdsource frames and gatekeepers to prominence” during the revolution in Egypt (2013: 159). However, “what appears as a messy and noisy process on the surface, analysis of #egypt revealed was a complex networked process” through which alternative news frames surfaced (159). Trust, however, does not always lead to truth nor does the network process always mean that facts will emerge over rumor.

In the week following the death of Nabbous, over a thousand messages concerning him were posted on Twitter. Along with tweets directly discussing his status as a journalist, many referenced the mainstream news reports which also described him as a fallen journalist. His death was being framed in multiple and sometimes competing ways by the network, and some of those frames were in competition with each other. One of the battling frameworks for eulogies of Nabbous hinged on whether he was considered a journalist or a citizen journalist. I will next discuss the boundaries of professionalization in journalism and the shifting values of those boundaries in a networked context.

1.6 Objectivity

Since the early twentieth century the idea of objectivity has come to define journalism from both inside and outside the profession. Journalism schools and professional associations attempt to redress the human tendency toward the subjective and guide current and new practitioners toward the recording of an unemotional (detached), unbiased (independent) account of events deemed newsworthy. However, the notion of journalistic objectivity has continued to evolve along with other changes reshaping the news media world

(Ward, 2004; Singer, 2008; Schudson, 2013). With the means of publishing, sharing, and distributing increasing at never-before-seen rates, change is happening at what seems to be a dizzying speed. As news and the means of production travel further and faster than ever, the goals and values by which journalism is defined may need to be rewritten (Rosen, 2006; Singer, 2008; Ward, 2004; Singer et al, 2013).

From within the profession, journalists have traditionally relied on the objectivity norm to draw lines between what is journalism and what isn't; at least, in principle. However, the usefulness of this norm for producing news is being called into question by scholars, audiences, and journalists themselves (Singer, 2008; Blaagaard, 2012). The Society of Professional Journalists removed "objectivity" from its Code of Ethics in 1996, but it remains a tacit aspect of journalistic practice and identity for many, particularly in North America. Since the idea of objectivity is so closely tied to the professionalization of journalism and its claim to distinctiveness. Journalism historian Michael Schudson (2013) argues that evolutionary times for objectivity mean uncertain times for journalism. As objectivity in professional journalism is redefined, a consuming public must also weigh its importance for accurate, accessible, and relevant news, particularly news consumed in a networked environment. To begin I will discuss the rise of objectivity to its fraught place of dominance in journalism.

Drawing on the social theories of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, journalism historian Michael Schudson highlights four conditions which lead to the objectivity norm being adopted as a standard for journalism practice during its professionalization in the early twentieth-century: the need to celebrate internal solidarity; to settle boundaries for those considered inside the group or those cast out; the need to transmit norms within a large institution; and finally the need for a small number of supervisors to maintain control over a large number of subordinates (Schudson, 2001: 152).

The first two conditions surround in-group/out-grouping in the early days of the burgeoning profession. While newspapers had mostly been the mouth-pieces of varying political parties, professional journalism established itself apart by moving away from political spin toward an account of events that was supposed to have been free of political interest. Objectivity was an emblem of modernity, allowing professional journalists to set themselves apart from the then popular and biased “yellow journalism.” As the news industry and the profession of journalism grew, objectivity allowed for the socialization of large and disparate groups of initiates. The objectivity norm created a set of rules which could be easily transmitted by editors encouraging a kind of uniformity in the work of their reporters, and allowing them to maintain a level of control over a clockwork production of news content.

In its break with political parties, journalism undertook a new role as a nonpartisan informer of the public. The concept that a voting public should be informed regarding the status of society was also a relatively new concept at the turn of the twentieth-century. Schudson points out, however, that democracy has undergone several changes within the past half-century which disrupt this notion of what role journalism should play in terms of both information and democracy. It may be time to rethink journalism's obligation to the voter, he explains,

It is not that I am convinced that the new journalistic environment is bound to produce great leaps forward in journalism – although, in truth, I think it has already done so – but that I do not think the 'journalistic paradigm' is of particularly long or lofty pedigree, nor do I think we should expect it, or want it, to persist indefinitely into the future (Schudson, 2013: 194).

While Schudson may assume a more historical perspective, many point to the dire need for a fourth estate particularly in these times of increasing complexity and global interconnectedness and at a time when economic models for the news industry are in disarray.

Regardless of aspirations for the profession or the news industry, there is general agreement on the need for objectivity to be re-examined and re-imagined as a guiding norm for journalists of all kinds. In the next section I will discuss ways in which the objectivity norm has been conceived of by those who would conserve its function in today's journalism, as well as by those who find it unnecessary or even contradictory to the ways in which news flows in the network.

1.7 Rethinking Objectivity

As a response to the criticism of objectivity, Stephen J. A. Ward provides a thickly woven account of the rise of objectivity since the seventeenth-century and the adoption of the notion into professional journalism in the early 1900s. Like Schudson, Ward's account traces the history of partisan journalism in the early part of the twentieth century, and the newspaper's shift from its role as political mouth-piece to impartial shepherd of an informed, voting public. With the establishment of journalism's professional organizations, and the inclusion of objectivity in their guiding principles, objectivity, Ward argues, took its place as the defining characteristic of American journalism. Though the notion of objectivity has since seen much criticism it still remains a strong source of professional identity for American and Canadian journalists. Ward suggests that, though a purely objective truth may be impossible, the rehabilitation of the term allows the notion still to provide a guiding ethic behind the production of news journalism (Ward, 2004: 216).

Ward maintains that the ethics of journalism reflects the time and place in which it is being practised (Ward, 2004: 3). His historical account of objectivity situates the notion in time and place and traces the changes that are inherent in the progression of this narrative, outlined chronologically. This chronological narrative, unfortunately, effects a teleological

appearance to rise of journalism in objectivity. The chronology transitions through the enlightenment and early modern period in science, and suggests a natural progression towards modernity, with the adoption of objectivity a perfunctory marker of professionalism and rationality.

In discussing the naturalization of objectivity within professional journalism, Ward seeks to situate objectivity in journalism not as a complete abandonment of the self, but as an adoption of an “objective stance” (Ward, 2004: 281). Ward argues that this objective stance functions as a method, similar to that adhered to by many practitioners with public responsibility, such as judges, ethicists, and journalists. The objective stance is a ritual of practices undertaken by the journalist to allow him to stand back from events and provide a report as close to the truth as possible. Without those practices, Ward fears, the profession would disintegrate into emotional hedonism, and journalism would deny its responsibility to maintain democracy (Ward, 2004: 381).

Yet, rituals do not completely divest professionals of their wider personal commitments or histories. Science studies theorist Donna Haraway in her work on situatedness points out that seeing can only happen through eyes, and eyes are located within a body (Haraway, 1988: 581). Haraway’s situatedness may provide a way forward for objectivity in journalism and incorporates the responsibility of journalism to be objective with the responsibility of the reporter to be situated and accountable to his positionality. Accountability is found in tracing the pathways that see knowledge pass through a human filter, as opposed to the objective “view from nowhere.”

Ward follows up his treatment of the problem of objectivity with a second book, *Global Journalism Ethics* (2013), in which he taps into the ability of individual journalist to meet expectations surrounding the objectivity norm and expressly ties the work of journalism to that

of supporting and encouraging democracy. By tying objectivity to the behaviour of the practitioner, however, the objectivity norm in journalism becomes a question of moral conduct and some might argue, a commitment to Western style democracy and notions of ethics. Equally problematic is that the idea that metrics for such ethical conduct are based on how close an individual journalist or an individual reporter can be to the industry standard, however the industry itself somehow escapes critique by Ward.

Marcel Broersma suggests, alternatively, that the professional norms of objectivity in journalism can be understood not as method, but as a performative discourse that also acts to reinforce the boundaries of the profession and elevate journalistic accounts of events. The claim to an objective truth provides the discourse which transforms a reporter's account of an event into truth. Without that claim, the discourse falls apart and the performance of journalism authority loses meaning, in essence razing the profession to the ground (Broersma, 2010). Responding to critical suggestions that journalism allow reflexivity to take its place as an accepted constituent of the production of news, to make clear to the audience which choices have been made in the making of news, he suggests this would shift the claim from a representation of truth to a representation of mediated truth, and alter the discourse completely (Broersma, 2010: 31). Broersma asserts that a more reflexive journalism would attract smaller audiences on the basis of interest and draw its performative power from an “ideological correspondence between medium and audience,” instead of a claim to objectivity (Broersma, 2010: 31).

Broersma points out, however, that more subjective approaches have attempted to push back against the objectivity norm in the past. Civic journalism³, New Journalism⁴, and

³ As described in his 1993 book *What Are Journalists For?* Jay Rosen establishes a civic journalism as a form of journalism which has a responsibility to shaping the public discourse, as opposed to merely reporting bare facts. Rosen suggests journalists consider the public active members in society, and encourage the improvement of public discourse rather than being passive observers to the disintegration of it. The inactive website of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism

personal journalism⁵ all took a more subjective, less hands-off approach (Broersma, 2010: 31). Bolette B. Blaagaard calls these forms of journalism “pockets of resistance”(Blaagaard, 2012: 3) to the objectivity norm and adds to them citizen journalism. Media Scholar Jay Rosen describes citizen journalism as “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another” (Rosen, 2008). The immediacy and emotion of citizen journalism is part of what allows it to act as a bridge between traditional styles of journalism and new styles of communications mediated by digital technology and the internet. Harkening back to Haraway’s suggestions, Blaagaard explains:

As an arational form of communication, new media allows citizen journalists to contextualize and situate the news in a personal perspective, and with a bodily experience to back up their contribution. It thereby challenges the abstract and analytical, reshaping the relationship between the public and the private in civil society and challenging journalistic objectivity and mainstream representation (Blaagaard, 2012: 11).

The emotional, non-objective quality of citizen journalism provides the opportunity for the consumer to relate to the producer. Supported by the mediation, the social relationship takes the place of objectivity as the source of performative power. Blaagaard is suggesting that the performance of information transfer between a producer and consumer may need to relinquish its dependence on the idea of objectivity for validation.

Broersma suggests that the transition from an objectivity-powered performance to a relationship-powered performance will involve a paradigm shift (Broersma, 2010: 24). He

[<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/>] describes civic journalism as a philosophy and that “the way we do our journalism affects the way public life goes,” reinforcing the tie between journalism and democracy.

⁴ New journalism, published in the 1960s and 70s and made famous by Tom Wolfe’s 1973 book *The New Journalism*, was a long-form style which typically employed literary devices to create a more emotional account of events.

⁵ Personal journalism tends to be defined as similar to new journalism and citizen journalism.

adds that such a shift may resemble a return to the more partisan journalism of the early twentieth century (Broersma, 2010: 31). On the contrary, a paradigmatic shift would likely not permit the return to a paradigm which had already been abandoned. It may be that a paradigm shift does not take us backward to a partisan journalism, but forward to an individualized journalism which allows representations to be understood as individual accounts. As Blaagaard explains, “citizen journalism is then not a parallel entity disconnected from mainstream media and general public sphere, but an interwoven part of our technological selves” (Blaagaard, 2012: 11). Blaagaard’s point opposes the notion that citizen journalism is something other which cannot cross with journalism. Instead, the two may be mixed in varying proportions both by those which to produce, disseminate, and consume news. This evokes the image of an ecosystem in which biological mixing sustains, as she puts it, our technological selves.

1.8 The Network

Singer builds on this notion of an ecosystem and elucidates the impact networked society has had on the ethics of journalism. In the traditional media environment, a one-to-many flow of information is packaged by journalists according to journalistic ethics which guide them in sorting what is truthful, and useful, from what is not.

In this environment, news about people and occurrences in the world 'out there' is delivered along a sort of media-controlled conveyor belt. It passes through the gatekeeping journalist, who weeds out what is bad and keeps what is good, before travelling out the door via publication or broadcast to the public. Members of that public wait eagerly in the metaphorical dark for the process to be completed and the information – neatly packaged and professionally, ethically vetted – to arrive (Singer, 2008: 64).

As Singer points out, that conveyor belt has now been replaced by a network of individuals bound together through interactions mediated by digital technology and the internet – an information environment that is non-linear, where information flows both through and around journalists (Singer, 2008: 65).

Sociologist Manuel Castells was the first to coin the term “network society” and he defines it as one in which “the ongoing transformation of communication technology in the digital age extends the reach of communication media to all domains of social life in a network that is at the same time global and local, generic and customized in an ever-changing pattern.” (2007: 239). Papacharissi describes an individual in the network society as one who “combines the use of several media, rarely sitting down to just read the newspaper, just listen to the news on the radio, only watch TV or participate in online political discussion groups, thus routinely functioning as a multitasking consumer/producer of multimedia” (Papacharissi, 2010: 52). The network society allows for many media to be both consumed and produced in a fluid act by users who are also producers expecting an interactive experience which has significant ramifications for the one-to-many model of traditional journalism media.

Singer also suggests, however, that the networked society does not necessarily negate the need for traditional journalism ethics, it simply shifts the rationale used to explain their importance. Similar to Broersma, Singer argues that communication within the network is based on relationships, and relationships are built on trust (Singer, 2008: 66). Without trust, relationships within the network become degraded. In Singer's model, the importance in truth-telling in journalism derives not from the idea that, otherwise, the public will have no access to the truth, but from the fundamental importance of truth in relationship building. The same holds true for other journalistic ethical norms such as authenticity, accountability, and

autonomy, which find meaning in the network not solely as journalistic ethics, but the ethics of relationships. The same ethics with different meanings suit a changing concept of the journalism “product.”

The digital product that journalists create within today's information network are neither finite nor free-standing nor final. Instead, their stories are part of a fluid, seamless, participatory, and inextricably interconnected media world, and ongoing development of those stories is a collective and ultimately uncontrolled process (Singer, 2008: 73).

Information, as well as the human individuals who create the information, are drawn together by the interconnections of the network, and so the distance of an objective stance may not be possible within the network. To maintain a distance from the information would mean being cutting off from the network and, necessarily, devaluing the product. Singer frames this as a caution to journalists attempting to practice objectivity in a digital environment. The importance of emotional involvement in the process of creating and circulating news precludes any ability to be emotionally cut off from the network.

Nabbous was notably affective in his coverage of the violence in Benghazi. In interviews with reporters, as well as his own video streamed online, he pleads ardently with the foreign audience he knows is listening for intervention in the political and military strife happening in Libya. His behaviour is well outside what would be considered objective for a professional journalist, and yet in the end he is celebrated as one by other journalists. In his coverage of the Libyan revolution Nabbous did, however, adhere to the values of authenticity, accountability, and autonomy which Singer highlights as relationship-building factors inside the network, and important for gaining authority.

Traditionally, much of the power wielded by news agencies was based on their

exclusive control over the production of information. In a network supported by digital technology access to the means of production are opened to everyone and that power is diffused. Media studies scholar danah boyd suggests that individuals can reach a state of flow where movement through the stream of information created by a networked society becomes easy (boyd, 2009; Castells, 2007; Papacharissi 2010; Papacharissi 2012). Information is added to and selected from at will. This creates a diffused system where individuals with the ability to control the flows of information can have more impact on shaping discussion than those simply producing the information. While the power has not been transferred from the elites of the journalism industry to non-elite in the network, it has the potential to be constantly shifting among diverse actors – producers, consumers, disseminators – throughout the network.

Explaining the particular way in which digital information flows through a networked environment, boyd illustrates how the information composed of bits differs from information composed of matter (boyd, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010: 51). One difference is that in the atomic world, the physical 'real' world, the innovation of the written word allowed records to be made; in the bit world in which the network exists, all exchanges of information are recorded by default. Utterances, ephemeral in the atomic world, are preserved and persistent in the digital world. They also become searchable, and search technology becomes increasingly refined, incorporating GPS (Global Positioning) and mobile technologies making practices of finding people, places, and information evermore precise. With greater precision in searching, individuals in the network have greater precision in selecting information which is most useful to them. The ease with which digital information can be copied, repackaged, and redistributed also increases the ease with which users can share that information with others who have similar interests. For Broersma's interest-based news audiences, for example, the

affordances of a bit-based world allow users to find the news that matters to them, across time and space.

As social networking sites expand introducing greater numbers of people to the negotiation of online affordances, boyd adds that,

While marking the networked publics as a distinct genre of publics is discursively relevant at this moment, it is also important to acknowledge that the affordances of networked publics will increasingly shape publics more broadly. [...] Thus the dynamics mapped out here will not simply be constrained to the domain of the digital world, but will be part of everyday life (boyd, 2010: 54).

The social norms which arise out of the affordances boyd describes and attributes to a bit-based world are bleeding over into the atomic world. With millions of users finding new ways to realize their identities and connect with others through popular social networking websites, a level of general fluency in these norms is present in the general population – particularly in industrialized countries. Socialization of the population into the bit-based norms is increasingly shaping the atomic world to meet user expectations attributed to boyd's digital affordances.

1.9 BridgeBlogging and Networked Societies

In the case of journalism, users, as both producers and consumers, are able to reach farther afield for their information and audiences, disrupting traditional patterns in news dissemination. Ethan Zuckerman describes a group of bloggers who defy these traditional norms through a combination of technical and linguistic savvy to provide an alternate narrative of their own stories. Bridgeblogs, he writes, are “weblogs that reach across gaps of language, culture and nationality to enable communication between individuals in different parts of the world” (Zuckerman, 2005). Unlike many bloggers who are usually writing for a

small set of local readers, bridgebloggers are writing for an international audience. Typically writing in English, or a language that is not their own, bridgebloggers attempt to give an international context to the first-hand accounts given in their blogs. They build bridges across cultures and add global relevance to local stories, usually taking place in languages and cultural circumstances different from those of the reader.

As described in an earlier section of this thesis, traditional journalism organizations have turned to technical solutions to boost the international reporting output under financial constraints. However, due to always-shrinking barriers to entry, the world of producing international news has been blown wide open to non-professionals. As Zuckerman describes:

The decrease in price and increase in quality of consumer video cameras, and the integration of cameras into mobile phones, have greatly expanded the set of people who can create audiovisual content, while the rise of publishing platforms like Blogger and Youtube makes it at least theoretically possible that amateur media authors could reach a global audience (Zuckerman, 2010: 67).

Availing themselves of new digital technologies, Zuckerman's bridgebloggers may now be able to successfully fulfil the role of a digital foreign correspondent. This parallel has caused extensive turmoil within traditional journalism as members of the profession, as well as members of the public, struggle both with reinforcing the boundaries between what is professional and what is not, and redefining them.

Availability of newer technologies and financial struggles in the American market are not the only industry changes moving news sources online. In Iran, for example, Zuckerman describes how political crackdown on newspapers pushed independent journalists to online publishing; after the restriction spread to include broadband access the technical challenge was met and journalists and bloggers worked around the blocks (Zuckerman, 2010: 67). The longer a government attempts to suppress public influence of mediated representations of the

social narrative, the stronger the counter-power becomes. The government crackdown on journalism, and subsequently, internet use in Egypt and Libya during the protests in 2011 has already been mentioned. Despite the crackdown in both situations, those with the know-how were able to undermine the government and maintain a flow of information to the outside. The ability to tell stories across cultural and linguistic boundaries combined with technical ability to allow bridgebloggers, or video bloggers (vloggers) to bring first-hand, authentic, and affective stories straight to viewers and readers thousands of miles away.

While the success of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions was immediate and inspired pundits to proclaim a Twitter revolution, the Libyan protests turned into a bloody, eight-month civil war before finally resulting in the gruesome death of Libya's longtime dictator, Muammar Gadhafi in late October, 2011; seven months after Nabbous was killed.⁶ Nabbous then, while key to the first months of revolution, ultimately played a small role in overall regime change. Such a point is often lost in heroic narratives that raise bridgebloggers like Nabbous, or platforms like Twitter to prominence as change agents and/or vital elements for bringing about political change.

A combination of cyber-utopianism and the belief that the internet can solve any manner of political problems quickly, which Evgeny Morozov calls "internet-centrism", has led to a dangerous faith among many that the free flow of information will inevitably lead to a free society. Morozov coined the term "Google Doctrine" to describe the hope that a flood of free information provided by the internet will result in a cascade of political freedom and the overthrow of despotic governments (2011: 5-9). Morozov reminds the reader that, while many were quick to proclaim the powers of the internet during the 2009 protests in Iran, these protests never actually resulted in a revolution. It simply gave a louder voice, audible across

⁶ At the time of his death, Mohammed's wife was pregnant with their first child, and that child was born before the end of the civil war, which claimed her father.

national boundaries, to a small segment of the population who were unhappy with the results of the election (7-9). In the Arab Spring the discontent evident on social media turned out to accurately reflect the will of publics who bodily took to the street to topple their governments. It was not the technology that made the revolutions, but the technology was there, in the networked public who expressed themselves through social media as a part of social communication. They took to the streets to congregate in person and so shared that congregation more broadly through media which allowed a shared social experience without necessarily co-presence.

1.9 Wither Journalism Objectivity?

While the ideal of objectivity in Anglo-American journalism enjoyed a rise and suffered a fall through the professionalization of practices and the struggle for their implementation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, objectivity has been redefined from the sterile construction of a single accessible – and therefore portrayable – truth, to a ritualization of practices, necessarily specific to time and place, to a performance that reaffirms professional boundaries and identities. Even as such, objectivity has a weak influence within the networked society, which is lending its social norms and practices back again to the atomic world, and only allows the assessment of reporting between that which is professional and that which is not. When the importance of professionalism breaks down through adoption and legitimization of amateur sources, the criteria upon which that boundary is established will be called into question, and may be rejected all together.

Since the ability to publish has been broadly opened up by digital technologies and the internet, public producers, external to the profession and traditional forms of regulation and distribution, have access to the power to challenge the narrative established from within the profession. When individuals or groups take this action, they bypass the debate on objectivity

and journalism ethics to contribute to establishing a new kind of narrative themselves, the ethics and goals of which cannot be agreed upon globally before the action is taken, but may be emergent of the process of acting from within the networked social sphere. Multiple, non-hierarchical controls of information flowing through the network undermine the traditional concept of journalism gatekeeping. Bloggers reaching out across the remaining barriers of language and nationality are providing a locally situated interpretation based on the sociopolitical norms of their locality, their reality, for a non-situated, international audience of anyone who will listen.

This model of bridgeblogging represents a disruption to the traditional concept of journalism's role in democracy which Schudson explains developed out of a change in the American political system around the turn of the twentieth century. When voting shifted from being an open act of comradery to an anonymous act of personal obligation, and elections began to surround issues rather than personalities, journalism stepped up to keep the voting citizen informed of the issues (Schudson, 2003).

In 2011 Libyan citizen Mohammed Nabbous defied the Libyan government to provide information to an international audience and, in the middle of a civil war, he produced information, digital video evidence to support it. Nabbous contributed to the flow of information in the networked environment of discussion on Libya. As that information was circulated through the network, it gained momentum, being amplified by elites in the network. When he was killed, the network circulated that information as well, and began to shape the way in which his story was framed. Through the network framing of his story, Nabbous was transformed into a journalist in the memory of other journalists, and in the public record of news.

The next chapter of this thesis will provide the results of analyzing 500 Twitter

messages posted in the week after Nabbous' death. These messages eulogized Nabbous in a variety of ways, reflecting his involvement in broadcasting news images from inside Libya and the perception of Nabbous as a martyr in the rebellion. Finally, the videos he created which are left behind and available online were analyzed and compared with previously mentioned boundaries of professional journalism.

2. The Journalist in the Vlogger

2.1 Introduction

New media are reshaping the way news is both consumed and produced, particularly through online platforms that allow users to connect with each other socially. As the public embraces the internet, particularly through social networking sites, online cultures of sharing have produced a news audience who find the news that interests them through recommendations from friends, family, and celebrities via social media. The news industry has scrambled to follow their audience online (Singer, 2008; Papacharissi, 2010).

Along with changes in seeking and distributing news, the internet has offered new ways to produce it. Digital cameras and video and audio recording tools at the consumer level have dropped in price while rapidly increasing in quality, putting news-quality video recording literally at our fingertips. Digitally produced, eyewitness material can be snapped up with an internet-enabled cell phone pulled out of your pocket in the middle of a newsworthy event, and uploaded to the internet moments later to be shared with friends and followers over social media before the evening news has a chance to send out a reporter.

The reporter's instinct to be first has infected many who are anxious to share their thoughts and deeds over internet platforms encouraging them to do just that. And in the rift caused by this tectonic shift of news consumption and production, a debate has emerged over whether the average citizen who produces and distributes news information can be considered a journalist. Nabbous provides a very human face to the debate about who is a journalist and what defines and bounds an "act of journalism". Nabbous' videos are still found online along with materials memorializing him which use his picture, his video, and his voice giving him a haunting presence online.

Nabbous's case raises questions about what it means to be engaged in news

productions with no professional training, and about those who use the network to distribute facts at a time when on-the-ground reports are hard to come by. His case also raises questions about independence and objectivity as result of his alliance with the rebels in Libyan uprising.

2.2 Background

When revolutions gripped the region and protest turned to violence in Libya, the outside world watched in horror and uncertainty. Foreign governments and international organizations puzzled out the international law and politics of intervening in what had fast spun out of control into a civil war. Libya, as a stateless state – Gadaffi’s Jamahiriya – meant that those opposing the government went up against decentralized political power and security forces entangled in the tribal system (Brahimi, 2011). After weathering international sanctions and internal protests lead by Islamists, Libya had been on its way to international rehabilitation and economic diversification in the new millennium before a sharp conservative backslide toward the end of the 2000s. That rehabilitation period mean that after decades of government controlled media, a short period of liberalization before the crackdown had breathed energy into public debates (Wollenberg and Pack, 2013). Despite reform having been reversed in 2010, the start of the revolution in February 2011 saw an explosion of interest in and opportunistic use of new forms of media. *Al-Jazeera*’s partisan reporting and heavy use of citizen produced media sparked a trend and rebel-aligned *Al-Ahara* was founded by the editor of the Arabic edition of *Newsweek* and former board member of *Al-Jazeera*.

In the midst of the chaos, Nabbous faced what he clearly perceived as a life threatening situation to coordinate others on the ground. Using backdoor internet connections,

salvaged satellite equipment, and borrowed mobile phones, he established a flow of information within as well as outside of Libya. And while the Libyan government was assuring the world a ceasefire maintained peace between the opposing sides, people like Nabbous were proving to the outside world that the ceasefire had broken down, and the government was taking military action against anyone threatening rebellion.

Nabbous is a generative example for examining the debate about when bloggers become journalists, and how effective the boundaries are between citizen and professional journalists particularly in times of war and conflict. In the week following his death, 500 Twitter messages were posted about his work and role in the rebellion. These messages establish how Nabbous was perceived and memorialized on Twitter by journalists and others interested in the fate of Libya. These messages also tap into a public discussion between those immersed in the ongoing transformation of online journalism.

Video material produced by Nabbous is still available through the video streaming account he used during his video broadcasts in 2011. In this chapter, I will analyze the footage in relation to qualities of international journalism and journalism objectivity mentioned in chapter one. This comparison will allow me to comment on the actions for which Nabbous was considered a journalist compare to the standards by which journalists are purported to hold themselves to as professionals and to comment on where he fit into new media cultures and ecosystems of user produced and distributed news.

2.2 Tweets

Launched in 2006, Twitter connects over 200 million users sending over 400 million messages daily (The Official Twitter Blog, 2013). These short, 140-character messages, called tweets, can be appended with links to outside websites, larger pieces of writing, photos

and videos. The tweets are sorted using keywords, and users streamline the process by using a number symbol (#) before a keyword to emphasize the subject of their message – keywords marked this way are called “hashtags.”

While Twitter was not a communication platform used by Nabbous, it was a site of an outpouring of grief after his death. Tweets concerning Nabbous were accessed through Topsy, a Twitter analytics platform which provides access to the Twitter Firehose, a database of all tweets. Through Topsy, a search was conducted for all tweets from the week after Nabbous was killed, from March 19, 2011 to March 25, 2011, using the search terms “Mohammed Nabbous”, “Nabbous”, and the hashtag #Nabbous. Over 1300 tweets were retrieved for that week and those search terms. This selection was refined by selecting only the 500 “top tweets”. These top tweets are determined by Twitter based on the potential each tweet had to be read. This depends on the influence levels of the Author, and the number of time the tweet was forwarded, or “retweeted”, by other users to their followers. The top 500 tweets were selected and downloaded in database form for content analysis.

2.2.1 Content Categories

The 500 top tweets were coded for several categories allowing an examination of the discussion surrounding Nabbous’s death. The first three categories were based on his status as a journalist, a citizen journalist, or a source for journalism. In the category of journalist, all tweets referring to Nabbous as a broadcaster or media person were included. A fourth category was based on a common theme emerging from the tweets, calling him the voice of Libya, or the voice of Freedom. The fifth category was added as I noticed many tweets focused on his role as a martyr for the revolution. There were also categories for tweets which were not written in English, or made no comment on any of the above topics. I will begin with

this last category.

2.2.2 Pointless Babble

The largest category coded for was the one that contained no information about Nabbous as a journalist, citizen journalist, source, voice of freedom, or martyr. Of the 500 tweets examined, over half of them (267) were in this category. A 2009 study by Pear Analytics of 2000 tweets declared that 40% of tweets on Twitter contain nothing but “pointless babble”, stirring up much discussion among pundits. Theorist danah boyd dedicated a post on her blog to responding to the study saying that

What [people are] doing online is fundamentally a mix of social grooming and maintaining peripheral social awareness. They want to know what the people around them are thinking and doing and feeling, even when co-presence isn't viable (2009).

Boyd also points out that much of our daily communications, either through utterances or body language, would seem “pointless” to a third party with no relation to the speaker or listener, but could be very meaningful to those involved in the communication by working to maintain social ties.

Many of the tweets concerning Nabbous in the week after his death expressed simply an awareness of the circumstances of this death. Some of the tweets expressed admiration or inspiration. Some expressed solidarity.

In a tweet posted by author @LibyaAlHurraTV which reads “The Nabbous family will not be accepting donations on behalf of Mohammed. If you would like to help pls [please] support Libyan Medial Relief orgs.” (posted 12:50 PM, March 21, 2011), the author passes on the family's wishes, presumably preventing or correcting misinformation or possible scams. In an online community, such as that which sprung up around the memory of Nabbous on Twitter, members feeling desperate to contribute may be taken advantage of this way. Members may

also be fiercely protective, as in a tweet sent by author @lovelondon reading “If anyone has a single bad word to say about Mohammed Nabbous you will have a league of angry tweeters stopping u correcting u and blocking u” (posted 11:16 AM, March 19, 2011). This author sends out a warning that Nabbous’ memory will be preserved in a positive way, or the group will intervene. In the 500 tweets analysed, no negative comments were found, though this does not mean that they did not exist, as they may not have been widely circulated and therefore would have been excluded from the sample.

While these tweets do not contain information relevant to this study, they do serve a purpose. Whether group solidarity or supplying the group with new information, these tweets are performing social actions within the discussion community on Twitter.

2.2.3 Journalist, Citizen, or Source?

There were three ways tweet authors referred to Nabbous as a journalist: either directly, using the word journalist; indirectly, calling him a media person; or using the term ‘citizen journalist’ to express the transient nature of his participation in the world of journalism. First, ninety-six of the 500 tweets, almost one fifth, referred to Nabbous either directly as a journalist or indirectly as a media person of some sort. Some of the tweets referred to him based on the title of his Livestream.com account, Libya Al-Hurra TV, or Free Libya TV as in a tweet posted by author @shababLibya which read “Please pray for Mohammed Nabbous of Libya Al Hurra TV, he is reported to be critically injured” (posted 6:02 AM, March 19, 2011). Some tweets named Libya Al-Hurra as a TV station. Since this showed that the author considered Nabbous’ association with the media to be substantial, tweets of this form were coded as referring to him as a journalist.

Among those referring to Nabbous as a journalist were other journalists. One hundred

and eleven of the tweets were sent by journalists. Of those, however, only twenty referred to Nabbous as a journalist. The proportion of general tweets which describe him in journalistic terms is the same as the proportion of those sent by journalists themselves.

A much smaller percentage of the tweets used the term “citizen journalist” to eulogize Nabbous. Thirty-eight of the tweets used the term which has been a popular stop-gap solution for the debate about journalism and blogging. As Jay Rosen defines it, “when the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, *that’s* citizen journalism” (2008). In that case, a citizen journalist can be anyone with the means and opportunity to publish media. But they are not a journalist.

A tweet sent by staff of the tech blog BoingBoing quotes an interview with Andy Carvin on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered* saying “Remembering Mo Nabbous, ‘The Face of Libyan Citizen Journalism’” (posted 3:15 PM, March 22, 2011). Interviewer Melissa Block quotes Andy Carvin as calling Nabbous “The face of Libyan citizen journalism” (Carvin, 2011). While Carvin makes no dispute on air, his earlier tweets suggest he felt the term was pejorative.

Carvin posted a tweet asking others to stop using the term citizen journalist which reads “Let’s drop the word citizen from citizen journalist. Mohammed Nabbous was a journalist who died in the line of duty. He was Libya’s Cronkite” (posted 8:43 AM, March 19, 2011). This tweet comes only minutes after another tweet of his refers to Nabbous only as a contact. This separate reference was coded as referring to Nabbous as a source; there were only nine tweets total which referred to him this way. Carvin’s later tweets largely surround the issue of whether Nabbous would be remembered as a journalist, as well as promotion of obituaries dedicated to him by other news organizations.

Andy Carvin, who worked to coordinate sources of news from the Arab world online

during the Arab Spring, also worked to coordinate the memorial of Nabbous. As a highly influential user on Twitter, Carvin's tweets would have reached far and wide to anyone interested in keeping a close eye on events in the Arab region at the time. Of the twenty-five tweets authored by Carvin, ten of them referred to Nabbous as a journalist, one which reads "Is it safe to say that Mohammed Nabbous was the first independent journalist in Libya? Certainly the first independent broadcaster, right?" (posted 10:05 AM, March 19, 2011). In fact, these tweets sent by Carvin made up *half* of the journalists' tweets which referred to Nabbous as a journalist. While only a fifth of the tweets sent by journalists referred to Nabbous as a journalist, almost half of them were sent by this single user.

2.2.4 The Martyr in the Journalist

Jeffrey Halverson, Scott W. Ruston, and Angela Trethewey's 2013 article "Mediated Martyrs of the Arab Spring" analyzes the occurrence of nationalist martyr narratives during the Arab Spring. The authors found that social and electronic media played a part in spreading the stories of Khaled Saeed and Mohammed Bouazizi, two young men whose dramatic acts of protest set off the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia respectively. The narrative was spread through the employment of "virtual reliquaries" (312), which the authors say

"provided the opportunity for vertical integration, whereby sense is made and rhetorical vision is constructed out of contemporary events which are understood through a pre-existing narrative framework and the individuals personal narrative is woven through" (313).

Virtual reliquaries are defined as "electronic sites of encounter with the martyrs' stories and iconography, providing an opportunity for personal connection" (312).

Nabbous was called a martyr in thirty-two of the Twitter messages. This number is less than one tenth, however, after engaging with the database of tweets it was quickly clear that this was an important sub-narrative. In tweet authored by @septimus_sever we can see that

Nabbous is compared to the two martyrs discussed by Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey. It reads “Bouazizi, Khaled Saeed, Mohammed Nabbous....names we will never forget” (posted 9:19 AM, March 19, 2011). Khaled Saeed had been reportedly beaten to death by Egyptian police after being arrested, and photos of his disfigured body spread widely through social media were cited as the incentive in the Egyptian protests. Similarly, Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest of harassment by Tunisian officials. These two men were remembered for their catalyzing role in the protests and revolutions that saw both countries leaders step down.

While Nabbous was not a catalyzing force in the Libyan rebellion, his death may have acted as a force to solidify the rebel sentiment. Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey write that “the martyr’s sacrifice at the hands of the oppressor and the ensuing narrative is a means for communal engagement” (2013, 327). A tweet authored by @Gheblawi affirms this reading “for the sake of our Mohammed Nabbous and all the martyrs let’s not stop the struggle for freedom, honor their sacrifices and free #Libya” (posted 8:15 AM, March 19, 2011).

Some of the tweets about Nabbous reiterate his role as martyr by highlighting his role as witness. As Halverson, Ruston, and Trethewey explain, “both the Greek term martyr and the Arabic term shahid literally mean “witness”, contextually denoting one who witnesses or testifies to the truth of a statement or important course of events by dying rather than denying” (322). It is clear that Nabbous fits this definition of martyr. It is also here, perhaps, that the role of the martyr and the role of the journalist overlap. While the witnessing plays a key role in the identity of a journalist, especially in a war zone, journalists are not commonly expected to die for the truth. They do, however, take on as part of their identity a willingness to risk their lives to witness and report back the truth about events as they saw them. In this element of his identity lies the clearest claim to Nabbous being a journalist. According to watchdog and

advocacy group Reporters Without Borders, in 2011 sixty-seven journalists, two media assistants and four citizen journalists were killed, five of which were killed in Libya (RWB, 2011). It could be asked whether war correspondents are the martyrs of journalism, who die for their beliefs as witnesses.

2.3 Livestream

Livestream.com was founded in 2007 as Mogulus and provides services, both paid and free with ad support, allowing users to upload video which had been previously recorded or stream live video, broadcasting it to an online audience. Along with the video, Livestream also provides a chat stream, displaying comments by users who are watching the video and allowing interaction between viewers and producers in real time. Livestream can be used as a gateway for studio quality productions, but also for video logging, or vlogging, the video enabled counterpart of blogging. Nabbous used this vlogging system and the embedded chat stream along with the online calling service Skype and a mobile phone to coordinate accounts from rebels across the city of Benghazi.

His video broadcasting began on February 19, 2011, and ended the day he was killed, though the channel was maintained by his widow and other friends. Some of the broadcasts he made during that month are still available at the address of his original channel on Livestream. These videos were reviewed and the content was examined for insight into the value of the video for international news, as well as the objectivity of the video.

Not the punchy one-minute reports North American audiences are used to seeing on international news television, Nabbous' broadcasts consist mostly of split-screen video feeds from cameras trained on the streets of Benghazi. In his earlier videos he speaks Arabic, but after a few days of broadcasting he begins speaking English into the microphone, interacting with users commenting in the chat stream. In a video dated February 26th (Nabbous, Feb. 26,

2011), Nabbous confesses he is six minutes away from his twenty-eighth birthday as he sits alone in front of the TV with no one to celebrate with. A user evidently offers to call via Skype and sing him happy birthday and he thanks them, saying how nice it would be, as he struggles with the equipment and finally announces that his Skype connection is lost. The camera feed shows small groups mingling in the streets, calm. Moments later his phone rings, and he echoes into the microphone the words he's hearing through the handset: the caller is singing happy birthday. Thanking the caller, he hangs up and continues the commentary with the chat stream users. Someone asks him what he wishes for his birthday and he replies he wishes that the government would fall. The conversation turns to what will happen after the revolution, and he vocalizes the group's intention to meet up in person, get to know one another, and become friends. After the revolution he will stop broadcasting, he says. He'll pick up his equipment and go home.

In a later video from February 28th (Nabbous, Feb. 28, 2011) pre-recorded video shows scenes from opposition rallies. Speakers in Arabic talk to large crowds over loud speakers, and the crowds chant back. Cars passing by honk horns in support and children give victory signs with their fingers. Later, a young woman takes to the streets with a microphone, as Nabbous explains, to capture public opinion. Another video from the day shows supplies stored in the halls of a hospital. Medical staff fly through the scene wheeling an injured man on a gurney, and the camera moves to capture the wounded. Completely unlike the sanitized footage shown on nightly news channels in North America, the gruesome images that follow show the evidence the rebels want the world to see: bodies torn apart, seemingly by explosives. The casualties of what has become a civil war.

Nabbous' last two days of videos were hectic. He drove out of Benghazi toward Ajdebiya after being asked by an unknown contact online to confirm reports that there had

been bombing. Outside of Ajdebiya he found a power plant had been bombed, leaving a giant ball of fire raging between buildings and power lines. Frantically he filmed the scene, and rushed home to upload the video. Later, he assures the audience that Ajdebiya itself has not been invaded, that Gadhafi's forces are trapped between Ajdebiya and Benghazi and that both cities are safe. "Let's say I'm going to be safe here tonight," he says, "I've heard on the news that they're going to do a no-fly zone, plus they will attack any forces that are attacking civilians" (Nabbous, March 18, 2011 11:28 PM). Hours later, he reports that Gadhafi forces are defecting and retreating, and that everyone in Benghazi is happy (Nabbous, March 19, 2011 1:39 AM).

But suddenly things take a turn and a short video shows Nabbous breathless and frantic in front of the camera, struggling with equipment and promising a video which will show Gadhafi forces attacking Benghazi. "Where are the media?" he pleads, "they should be there right now taking pictures of what's happening" (Nabbous, March 19, 2011 2:40 AM). The video he promised is not available in the channel's library, and may never have been uploaded. The next video offers only audio; the audio streamed live from Nabbous' phone as he rode in the back of a truck capturing the sounds of machinegun fire and heavy battle. As the audio streams he names his locations, he says he has seen an airplane crash and shooting in the streets. The deafening sound of gunfire is punctuated by shouting in Arabic before, suddenly, the sound drops out (Nabbous, March 19, 2011 7:36). That was the moment he was shot.

2.3.1 The International Reporter

Nabbous' videos provided a glimpse into what was happening inside Benghazi at a time when other media sources were shut out. His coverage of events was responsive to inquiries he received online and by phone. He had become a hub for information and used his vlogging platform to share that information with the world. Scholar Ethan Zuckerman (2005)

describes three levels of online producers: journalists, diarists, and bloggers. The content produced by the journalists, he describes, is highly linked by users on the Internet; the purpose of what they produce online is to share it. They are the group least interested in engagement with their audiences, and so have limited commenting abilities on their websites. Although this has changed somewhat since Zuckerman's paper was written in 2005, the journalistic blogs he is talking about still basically exist on this model, also carrying a monetary or revenue model which identifies them. The diarist Zuckerman is referring to produce material online for only themselves, or a few friends to view. Their blogs can be protected, locked from viewing, so only those listed may connect. These blogs draw almost no links. The bloggers fit somewhere in the middle. Zuckerman reminds that the original term 'weblogging' which was shortened to blogging, referred to a literal logging of content on the web through linking. While some groups may link among each other, there are often cultural and linguistic boundaries which separate what Zuckerman terms "blogspheres" (2005). Bloggers who break through these boundaries he calls "bridgebloggers".

Nabbous initially set up his cameras with the intention of showing proof of what was really going on in Benghazi. Since his speaking starts off in Arabic and then switches to English after a few days of broadcasting, it can be assumed this change was in response to chatters he was getting feedback from on the embedded chat stream. Once he begins to engage with the English-speakers in the chat and on Skype, most of his communication turns to English. It is at this point that Nabbous becomes a bridgeblogger, in Zuckerman's terms (2005). He is now providing his information for non-Libyans who have been linked to his site. His high level of engagement with chatters shows that he intends to have a wide audience, unlike a diarist. He also engages freely, giving out his own mobile phone number for contact, and receives no remuneration for his work, unlike the group Zuckerman calls journalists.

It is contact with journalists like Andy Carvin, however, which provides a wider audience to Nabbous. As Zuckerman points out, journalists are the largest group of linkers on the production side online. Through his contact with well-known journalists Nabbous and his stories were amplified over Twitter, and presumably other online tools. Here, a blogger maintains the more intimate level of interaction while gaining the extended audience and linking power of a powerful journalist. Nabbous on his own is a different news producer than Nabbous with the support of a well-known NPR journalist like Andy Carvin.

Zuckerman writes, "At this moment of uncertainty and confusion, different groups are experimenting with a wealth of new models designed to produce international news" (Zuckerman, 2010). While print journalism is in decline in almost all of the Western world and media organizations are struggling to maintain the high costs of international reporting, many alternative sources for international news have sprouted up to fill the gaps. "It is possible that one of these models will emerge as the new modus operandi for international reporting" writes Zuckerman, "however, it is much more likely that aspects of each model will succeed while others fail, and that new and old players will chart their paths forward based on these outcomes" (Zuckerman, 2010).

Journalism, traditionally speaking, is no longer the only way to international news. As many more sources grapple with the problems that are faced by legacy media using new media solutions, new forms of international reporting emerge. As non-journalists take on journalistic ethical tactics, journalists take on the culture of online sharing. It is difficult to say whether Nabbous was a freelance journalist without any training, who found a voice through his own broadcasting site, or through the interviews he did with outside media; whether he was the equivalent of a freelancer or that of a source. What matters most in the networks he was part of is that he worked day and night to find reliable images from a war zone in the

middle of a revolution and that he shared what he knew with as many people as possible.

2.4 Rethinking Journalism Objectivity

In a video from March 17th Nabbous says he will only take news with an image. He goes on to say that without video the news is just a rumor and that his news station will allow only news with an image so that he can be sure the news is verified (Nabbous, March 17, 2011). Nabbous expresses a strong desire to avoid the appearance of propaganda in what he reports, wishing only to confirm or refute reports coming from other sources. Clemens Höges, a reporter from the *Spiegel Online International* page who interviewed Nabbous in Benghazi, on the day of his twenty-eighth birthday, says that much of the material Nabbous has received is not being published because of it would look like propaganda (Höges, 2011). While Nabbous has no training in journalism ethics, he clearly has an idea of what kind of impression he wants to give to his audience. It's "the truth" he wants to project, nothing more. It's clear from the way he speaks, he believes such truth will be enough to convince the international public that Gadhafi has committed atrocities.

While he is significantly interested in the truth, he is uncritical of the complicated and contradictory truths he sees. While the attempt to see from nowhere (Haraway, 1988), or to control one's own biases (Ward, 2004) is generally the mark of a trained journalist, Nabbous does not possess these qualities. He pleads with his audience, "he [Gadaffi] has to be stopped" (Nabbous, March 19, 2011) while also expressing indignance about the absences of professional media. His emotions are clearly on display as he files his final reports. He expresses outrage that the violence has penetrated Benghazi, and fear, overall, for the safety of those around him. The idea of objectively observing, indifferent to events, is clearly not a concern of his, nor does he show any sign that it should be. While the mundane, day-to-day

events of international news and politics may be best reported by a local foreign correspondent (Hamilton, Maxwell, and Jemer, 2004) – someone who knows the region, the politics, and the people the best – the intensity and deep emotional engagement of war may be overwhelming for a local journalist, and someone with no connection to the city being laid waste may have a better chance at giving the news without personal bias.

To turn back to the values of social media as laid out by Singer (2008) and boyd (2010), it is the personal experience which is the foundation of online sharing through social networking sites. It is the emotional, real time, unedited personal experience which supports the culture of Twitter and other blogging and microblogging websites, and that is exactly what is available through Nabbous's Livestream.com account. From the simple mention of his birthday, and the song sung to him by someone who was listening in, to the fear in his voice when he realizes the city is under attack, to the sadness in the voice of his widow as she announces to a waiting public that Nabbous has been killed, the experience one has through watching these videos is the experience of being there. It is this personal experience which forged the personal connections Nabbous made with those he spoke to online, and it was those personal connections which fueled the outpouring of grief on Twitter in the week after his death. Together, just weeks before, a small group of strangers had celebrated his birthday with him; on this week, together, they tried to make sense of his death.

3. Conclusion

The analysis in this thesis provides insight into the debate about bloggers and journalists not only through analysis of the content which is produced by each, but also through analysis of the content produced by the communities which arise between each, potentially bridging the gap between them. Whether Nabbous was a journalist or not is not the question that provides the greatest insight – rather what kind of journalist he was, how he navigated difficult terrain, what his expectations were of media and his own reporting provide great insight into an ever-adapting ecosystem of news.

As news media organization are facing the financial reality of the declining marketability of international news through traditional media channels, the work of Mohammed Nabbous emerges as an example of those new media alternatives which have arisen to fill the gap in international news reporting for both the organizations themselves, and for a public more engaged in the news production process. By vlogging images through his online broadcasting site, Nabbous typified Zuckerman's bridgebloggers in that he combined his technical skills with communication skills to convey eye-witness information from inside Libya to a foreign audience. His attempts to verify media and reports he was sent demonstrate that he adhered to certain elements of journalistic practice, but he did not exhibit a detached sense of objectivity as a component of truth-telling. He was open in his support for the rebellion, and made his contribution based on those beliefs. This affectivity, and its value in the network, were what made his contribution so powerful, if brief. Since Nabbous was killed only one month into the rebellion his contribution to it was not great, however the networked framing of his memory at the time of his death constructed his story as that of a hero.

While my analysis has discussed the ways in which Nabbous was remembered on

Twitter, as well as the ways the news he produced fits into an ever evolving news landscape, there is much more that can be investigated through the materials produced by this courageous and ingenious young man. One question surrounds the non-English twitter messages which were not analyzed for content during research for this paper. It may be interesting to note, however, that many of the French tweets referred to Nabbous as “the blogger of Benghazi”, suggesting that there may have been a whole other discussion going on in other languages.

Lastly, while it has not been within the scope of this project, it may be interesting to investigate how much of the material produced by Nabbous was used by traditional news organizations in their coverage of the conflict. In addition, it may be useful to ask questions about what kind of attribution or remuneration should be received by amateur contributors to news production, since the news agencies themselves profit from the use of images collected from amateur sources. While they may not be able to financially support their own overseas reporters, it must be clearly unfair to profit as a media company from the work of amateurs who themselves pay the price of hardship during war.

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