



More people turning to social networks for news



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FIRST POSTED: MONDAY, JUNE 25, 2012 02:00 AM EDT



(Shutterstock)

The mass media is becoming the masses' media.

Today, more and more news correspondents are coming from the epicentre of the news – actual core-respondents – like the Blue Jays' Brett Lawrie.

Used to playing on the field, recently @blawrie13 became a field reporter, tweeting a play-by-play when a tragic shooting took place at a busy mall in downtown Toronto. "Pretty sure someone just let off a round bullets in eaton center mall ... Wow just sprinted out of the mall ... Through traffic ... [sic]."

The third baseman was one of many people who broadcasted the events that day.

@PaprbakPrincess tweeted, "I am getting more info on this horrible Eaton Centre shooting on Twitter than actual news sources."

The digital generation is increasingly turning to a social network, rather than a news network to find out what's happening in the world. According to schools.com, more than 50% of people have learned of breaking news via social media.

But they're not the only ones. Traditional media use it too.

Whitney Houston's death, the earthquake in China, the Hudson River plane landing, even the American forces' raid on Osama Bin Laden – just a sampling of major news stories ordinary citizens broke on Twitter first.

Josh Greenberg is an associate professor at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication. He says, "Social technologies have intensified the pace of news-making by accelerating the speed with which events are turned into

'news.'”

The flow of content has also changed, explains Greenberg. “Where in the traditional era of mass media content flowed from what was largely a centralized news source to what was largely seen as an undifferentiated 'mass public', today content flows both vertically and horizontally — not only from a single source to many receivers, but through networks of sources and receivers.”

With so many networks it seems that everybody’s talking and nobody’s listening. Storify – chosen by Time as one the 50 best sites of 2011 – brings some cohesion to the wild, wild Web. It allows users to aggregate information from different media, add their own context, and turn it into a single shareable Web page.

Storify says users can “turn what people post on social media into compelling stories.” And its users include high-profile media such as the New York Times and some of Canada’s biggest players as well.

Burt Herman, a former war correspondent and co-founder of Storify, recently told an audience at Stanford University that “Anyone in the world can be a reporter, but not everyone can be a journalist.”

In his presentation, Herman explained one of the largest differences between his site and traditional journalism.

“As opposed to quoting experts, instead we are using the audience as a way to create the story.”

Greenberg notes how these “citizen journalists” can present perspectives that traditional media ignore or marginalize. With the rise of citizen reporting though, he says new problems relating to credibility and trust can be introduced.

“These are issues that have always faced traditional media as well. However, in some respects it’s easier to hold an institution like Sun Media or the CBC to account than it is a blogger or citizen reporter who is live tweeting a protest from what may be an anonymous Twitter account.”

But, there’s still danger in the most trusted names.

In February 2010, Gordon Lightfoot was quite surprised to hear of his own passing. After someone tweeted his death, practically every news outlet in the country picked it up.

These days, truth is defined as – and subjugated to – that which is exposed first, so media organizations must strive to be the first to post a story.

Now, with the Web breaking news faster than you can say “this just in,” keep in mind it’s easy for social media to become so-faux media.

Do you use Twitter to follow the news?

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Yes, if it's a breaking story.

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