JOURNALISM 2.0: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF MOBILE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Thomas Cochrane¹, Helen Sissons² and Danni Mulrennan²
AUT University, New Zealand
¹Centre for Learning and Teaching,
²Department of Journalism, AUT University

ABSTRACT
According to Hirst (2011) Journalism must change to survive in response to Web 2.0, however in “The Cult Of The Amateur” Keen (2007) argues that Web 2.0 (social media) is f***** (Ha, 2009), as it undermines and decimates the ranks of our professional literary ‘gatekeepers’. In response this paper explores the impact of social media upon Journalism education from two perspectives: both from the pedagogical changes Web 2.0 and mobile devices enable, and within the context of the changes in Journalism that social media use are driving. A participatory action research approach was adopted (Swantz, 2008), focusing upon pedagogical change while allowing the project to develop within a series of reflective interventions within the course. These interventions, or critical incidents (Brookfield, 1995, Sharples, 2009), included the exploration of Twitter, blogging, QR Codes, and Facebook as part of the course. Drawing on this experience, the paper presents an emergent framework for a response to social media within Journalism education, illustrating the positive impact of integrating the use of Web 2.0 tools on student engagement and contextualising theory within authentic learning environments.

KEYWORDS
Journalism, Pedagogy 2.0, Social Media, Web 2.0.

1. INTRODUCTION
Journalism is in crisis (Hirst, 2011); how does traditional Journalism respond to a world where consumer preference is for music that is now distributed via the Internet rather than purchased on CDs, video that is streamed either live or on demand rather than DVD, and news that is distributed via a host of social media channels such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and viewed on mobile devices such as the iPad rather than print media? Not only is traditional Journalism in crisis but Journalism education also needs to respond to the implications of the wave of social media.

The Internet has transformed the news industry: its ability to make money, the means it uses to distribute its product and the way news workers practise their trade. The rise of social media sites has even affected the nature of Journalistic identity, altering how journalists are viewed and how they view themselves. The editor in chief of The Guardian newspaper and executive editor of its sister Sunday paper, The Observer, writes that in the past journalists were considered figures of authority because they had the access to news sources. They were the gatekeepers and the public trusted them to set the news agenda and to tell the important stories of the day accurately, fairly and quickly. Now many readers want to make their own judgements, create their own content and learn from peers as much as from traditional media sources (Rusbridger, 2011).

Consequently, there has been a decline in the number of people relying on conventional sources of news. According to the most recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2011) in the United States more people in the 18 to 20 age bracket (65 percent) now say they get their news from the Internet and only 21 percent cite newspapers as their main source. Even among the over 50s, 34 percent use the Internet to access the news while 38 percent read a newspaper. Further, more people are getting news via smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices. In fact nearly half of American adults claim to get some local news and information on their cellphone or tablet computer (Rosenstiel et al., 2011).
It’s a situation that has been developing in the fifteen years since most newspapers went online and this period has seen a long-term decline in newspaper sales. Between 2005 and 2009 newspaper companies saw drops in circulation in North America (11 percent), Western Europe (8 percent) and Oceania (6 percent). The biggest declines in the UK (15.9 percent) and US (13.3 percent) coincided with two of the highest penetrations of social media. The third country with a high social media use, Australia, saw a smaller decline in newspaper circulation of 2.5 percent (The Economist, 19 July 2011, p4).

With increasing numbers of consumers getting their news for free online, it is clear that the traditional media business models are no longer working and new ways of thinking about news gathering, distribution and the news audience are required. Some news organisations are adjusting well, recognising the opportunities afforded to those willing to adapt.

Television news now includes more amateur footage, often taken from video-sharing websites such as YouTube. During events such as the London riots and the Oslo bombing some of the most dramatic pictures came from amateurs. The unsteady shots, often including the voice-over reaction of the person holding the camera, add an honesty and authenticity to the footage that viewers respond to. During the Arab Spring, organisations such as Al Jazeera aggregated social media content, including YouTube video, material from Facebook and Twitter messages and delivered it to its television viewers, many of whom did not have access to the Internet. Journalists at the BBC constantly monitor Twitter and use postings either to gauge opinion, get reaction to or eye witness accounts of events or to drive the public to their news site.

Rusbridger (2011), one of the pioneers of innovative web journalism, describes these new practices as offering a partnership with readers, creating a mutualised news organisation where there is a democracy of ideas and information. He believes that collaboration between journalists and readers makes for better and more effective storytelling. In this new environment, readers, listeners and viewers have the chance to become more than passive consumers of news. However journalists using or learning to use social media need to be aware of the possible pitfalls. They must learn:

1. How to filter huge volumes of information. Who is good to follow and who will fill their in-box with irrelevant information.

2. How to build a community of followers and feed them information without scooping their own organisation.

3. How to identify fake Twitter accounts.

4. How to avoiding lazy journalism that uses social media sites for a quick but weak angle on important stories.

5. That social media is a public forum and requires professional behaviour.

In response to these emerging issues, the authors have decided to explore the possibilities and implications of Journalism 2.0 within the context of Journalism education. Journalism 2.0 as defined by the authors of this paper involves the exploration of two parallel aspects of social media in Journalism education: exploring the embedding and modelling of social media in the delivery and pedagogy of a Journalism course, and the exploration of the use and impact of social media on the practice of Journalism in authentic contexts. This is based in the collaboration between an educational technology expert and expert Journalism lecturers within the framework of a community of practice (COP) investigating the potential of social media in the context of Journalism education. This was the first foray into integrating the use of social and mobile web 2.0 within the delivery of the journalism course, and the technology stewards previous mobile web 2.0 experiences in a variety of educational contexts were used to broker examples of mobile web 2.0 pedagogy to the journalism lecturers.

While there is a significant body of literature exploring the pedagogical affordances of web 2.0 (McLoughlin and Lee, 2010) and mobile learning (Traxler, 2011), these two are seldom explicitly linked, and there is limited available literature on the pedagogical impact of these tools within the specific context of Journalism education, see for example Ashton (2009).

The paper explores learning theories and pedagogical frameworks that can inform, support, and critique these innovations in communication studies and journalism. These include, for example: Social Constructivism, Communities Of Practice, Authentic Learning, Pedagogy 2.0, and Learner Generated Contexts. The paper discusses plans to build on this to create a foundation for potential international collaboration between student groups and industry experts. For example: (Cochrane et al., 2011, Cochrane, 2010b).
2. BACKGROUND

In preparation for the social media course, the course lecturer travelled to the UK and the US and spoke in depth to journalism industry professionals at the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) in the UK and the Los Angeles Times in the US. She also spoke to leading journalism schools in Cardiff and Arizona. In addition, she has interviewed an online editor at a major organisation in New Zealand and a news editor at a local paper. This information was used to inform the project in several ways:

1. How the journalism industry in three countries is using social media to gather and to disseminate information.
2. How leading schools of communication are reacting to changes in the industry in terms of their curriculum.
3. How the University might respond.

However the approach taken by the Journalism lecturers was to present case studies of the impact of social and mobile media on Journalism rather than integrate and model the use of these tools within face-to-face classes or beyond the classroom, making these explorations of social and mobile media theoretical rather than experiential. Consequently observed student use of mobile web 2.0 was limited to social networking with friends. Therefore another initial driver for the project was responding to the disruptive cellphone use in class by students leading to developing an appropriate response from the lecturer that would engage the students while providing an authentic use of cellphones as tools within a Journalism context. Discussions around an appropriate response to the disruptive (Sharples, 2001, Stead, 2006) nature of cellphones in class between the technology steward and the course lecturer formed the catalyst for a collaborative partnership. The technology steward brought educational technology (in particular mobile learning) experience and expertise, while the course lecturer brought professional Journalism expertise within the context of Journalism education. The key was to bridge theory and practice (Cochrane, 2009, Cochrane et al., 2009, Cook et al., 2008, Vavoula, 2007), rather than talking about social media use in class, the classes were reinvented as social media experiences with students encouraged to use their mobile devices actively for investigating social media use during the classes and then link these experiences to their out of class experiences and investigations of social media.

Thus the core of a community of practice (COP) was established consisting of a technology steward (Wenger et al., 2009, Wenger et al., 2005) and the course lecturer who began meeting weekly to explore ways to include social media in the journalism curriculum. The goal of the COP is to draw in other lecturers from the Journalism department and establish social media experts and evangelists that will bring about change within the department. The course lecturer is also among the first to teach in a new interactive classroom environment within the School of Communications. The lecturer has begun employing some of the ideas born out of this COP in conjunction with the use of a smart-board in the teaching of Specialist Writing, the core second semester post-graduate journalism writing paper, and Journalism Theory and Practice, a postgraduate Communications paper.

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

This section introduces the learning theory and pedagogical frameworks that inform the choice and use of social media within the project, including: Social Constructivism, Communities Of Practice, Authentic Learning, Pedagogy 2.0, Mlearning, and Learner Generated Contexts.

2.1.1 Social Constructivism

According to theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) learning is a social process of student exploration guided by more experienced peers. Social constructivism forms a theoretical foundation for pedagogy 2.0 and communities of practice that are enabled by the use of social media (Wenger et al., 2005).

2.1.2 Communities of Practice

Communities of practice (COP) is a social learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998, Wenger et al., 2009) that emphasises the process of membership in a community from initial peripheral participation to full participation as core members of the learning community.
2.1.3 Authentic Learning

Authentic learning (Herrington and Oliver, 2000, Herrington and Herrington, 2007, Herrington et al., 2009) is based upon situated learning (Brown et al., 1989) where explicit links are made between theory and practice using real-world (authentic) scenarios to represent and critically reflect upon on-the-job experiences.

2.1.4 Pedagogy 2.0

Pedagogy 2.0 (McLoughlin and Lee, 2007, McLoughlin and Lee, 2010) is a term coined to link social learning approaches with social media use. Pedagogy 2.0 forms a critical framework for integrating social media into education, focusing upon learner-generated content and learner-generated contexts rather than the delivery of teacher-generated content.

2.1.5 Learner Generated Contexts

Learner-generated contexts is a framework that bridges the gap between teacher-directed pedagogy and student-directed heutagogy (Luckin et al., 2010, Pachler et al., 2010).

2.1.6 Mlearning

Mobile learning is a powerful tool for enabling learner-generated content and learner-generated contexts (Cochrane, 2010a, Cochrane, 2011, Cochrane and Bateman, 2010). The ubiquitous nature of cellphones and the increasing student ownership of smartphones create a foundation for bridging both the digital divide and bridging formal and informal learning contexts (Vavoula, 2007). In particular, the rapid rise of Twitter uptake (McGiboney, 2009) is firmly associated with its essential link with cellphone use.

3. METHODOLOGY

A participatory action research approach was adopted (Swantz, 2008), focusing upon pedagogical change while allowing the project to develop within a series of reflective interventions within the course. Each of these interventions were borne out of discussions between the COP participants, tentatively implemented in class, student feedback sought, and then the impact reflected upon before refinement informing the implementation of further interventions. Critical incidents (Brookfield, 1995, Sharples, 2009) included the following activities:

- Implementing and evaluating blogging to enhance the course discussions
- Surveying the students to find out what social media and mobile computing devices they currently use and own.
- Creation of a simple in-class Poll to do this e.g. using Polleverywhere (http://www.polleverywhere.com) that can be accessed via almost any cellphone or Internet connected computer. For example: http://www.polleverywhere.com/multiple_choice_polls/LTE1MTE1MzUwNDA
- Embedding the use of Twitter in class
- Exploring QR Codes (Bar codes that can be scanned by cameraphones)
- Exploring the use of Google Plus (http://plus.google.com) for interviews
- Exploring the potential of mobile devices in Journalism, including smartphones and the iPad.

AUTonline (The University’s Blackboard-based Learning Management System) Blogs were used within the course “Journalism Theory and Practice”, where students were required to comment and post twice weekly. The theme of the course was the exploration of journalism practice in the digital age. Therefore it was logical to embed the learning within an authentic context. In addition, case studies were used to illustrate how journalists have used social media such as Twitter to great effect. Some students chose to discuss these in their blog posts. As part of the assignment, students were required to write a short reflection on how effective they found the use of the blog for their learning.

The expected outcomes of the project centred on the following:

- Generating research informed practice
- Enabling student-generated contexts in journalism education
- Establishing international collaboration
3.1 Participant Profiles

The project encompasses both Bachelor of Communications students who are majoring in Journalism and students on the Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism course. The lecturers participating in the project and forming the core of the Journalism 2.0 community of practice at AUT University include:

- A senior lecturer in journalism. She teaches third year undergraduate and post graduate classes. Her research interests include the future of journalism and journalism-source relations.
- A senior lecturer and Academic Advisor with the Centre for Learning And Teaching (CfLAT) at AUT. His research interests are in using technology as a catalyst for pedagogical change, with a focus upon mobile, web 2.0, and communities of practice.
- A lecturer in television journalism. She teaches second and third year undergraduate and post-graduate classes. Her research interests include the future of broadcast journalism and television journalism practice.

These three bring complimentary expertise to the project and form core members of the community of practice encompassing the project.

4. RESULTS

An initial survey of the participating 50 students was conducted using Polleverywhere, with the results showing that all of the students owned a cellphone, with 83% owning cameraphones, and 48% of the students owned iPhones. After establishing student access to Twitter via their own cellphones, the project explored the use of Twitter in the classroom. It was to encourage group discussion and involve students normally reluctant to speak publicly. For example: Using a Twitter hashtag to collate student Tweets and displaying them live in class from a video projector via Twitterfall (http://twitterfall.com) or Visible Tweets (http://www.visibletweets.com). It was particularly effective when used in the weekly news quiz. Students formed five groups and competed in a University Challenge style quiz based on the news of the week. The live Twitter feed in class saw a student’s friend randomly joining the Twitter stream and commenting out of context. An initial hashtag used the class number only resulting in communication without context. As this led to rather random looking tweets in students’ twitter streams further use of the Twitter news quiz used the words “class quiz” in the hashtag to provide some context for their followers. Students who had already built up a following on Twitter were initially concerned that “random Tweets” would annoy these followers and so we decided they should inform them that for the next half-an-hour the student was taking part in a class quiz and all Tweets should be ignored.

Another mobile media format explored was QR Codes. The students’ initial response was to label QR Code use as a "gimmick". This led to an exercise asking students to 'be aware' and recognise QR Codes in their daily environment, for example: Design News NZHerald 28 Sept. The exercise raised awareness and the students running the student online news site, TWN Online, experimented with QR codes on short summaries or “teaser stories” as a way of encouraging readers to go via the QR code to the full story online. Some also then investigated how QR codes could enhance their CVs. In journalism, it is expected that a CV will be no longer than one page. Inserting a QR code into the CV is potentially an effective way for the student to link to further content such as a “showreel” or set of clippings.

Class discussion, and the reflective statement, around the use of AUTonline blogs revealed that those students who were the most reserved in face-to-face debate were the most empowered by the use of Blogging as a form of expression, reflection and critique. Some wrote in their reflections that they believed the blog was a more democratic environment, as it was “harder for people to dominate the discussion as can happen in class” (Student). And: “One can let one’s thoughts be known without being interrupted” (Student). Others initially felt apprehensive about commenting in a small class environment on a blog post of someone they did not know in case they caused offence. However, all students grew in confidence across the semester. “Our posts have progressed from initial tentativeness and brevity to greater length and depth, written with more confident voices” (Student). It was generally agreed that the blog was a valuable learning tool.

The most common view among the students was that the blog helped them discover the beliefs and motivations of others. The following were typical of the comments:

- “I learnt from my peers, their ideological standpoints and they way they reason.” (Student1)
- “Other students’ posts enabled me to see the same things from different perspectives.” (Student2)
5. DISCUSSION

Students were initially reticent to publish their thoughts publically via social media (either via blogging or using twitter). This was a new classroom experience for them beyond their previous social use of these tools with their friends only. To scaffold their introduction to the educational use of social media the ‘safe’ environment of the closed Blackboard blog tool was used to host students first course-related blogging attempts. This raised interesting discussions around the benefits and pitfalls of open versus closed media use. The key benefit of using open access social media tools is to facilitate the establishment of students’ professional social networks that can also enable commenting and interaction from peer groups and industry experts around the world. Therefore future iterations of the project will use open access blogs rather than the closed access AUTOnline blogs. Student blogs will also be introduced into more classes to establish a culture of critical reflection and engagement with social media throughout the journalism course.

An issue raised by lecturers is that of technology access: will the prescribed use of web-based social media within the course create a digital divide in Journalism education? Focusing upon mobile web 2.0 tools (for example: Twitter, mobile blogging) will ensure that all students have access to the necessary tools, as our survey indicated that all of the students owned a cellphone, with the majority owning a smartphone capable of high levels of integration with social media within virtually any context. This will also drive the ability to bridge the classroom environment with students’ informal learning experiences in the real world beyond the classroom, enriching their learning experiences, and enabling student-generated content and student-generated learning contexts.

The project has had a significant impact on assessment strategies: because we are using a social constructivist foundation formative feedback and peer assessment strategies become more important than in the previous teacher-directed learning environments, and these will be explored more in 2012.

The implications of the project will inform a social media integration plan for 2012 courses, resulting in a social media integration framework for 2012. Key elements of this will include the following:

- Scaffolded by establishing communities of practice
- A focus upon student-owned devices as enabling tools
- Exploration of social media platforms: Twitter, Blogging, and emergent tools
- Collaboration in authentic scenarios

For example, during 2012 we plan to extend the use of Twitter as a way of brainstorming in journalism, for example, by asking the students to tweet their story ideas. The 140 character limit will be used to test the clarity of the news angle and therefore the robustness of the idea, before the story is written as a blog post or online story and then pitched to followers via Twitter. One concern is that story ideas may need to be kept private until the story is written, otherwise the student could get “scooped” by another journalist. Therefore we could use the Smartboard environment in the classroom and the Postit software. Once the story is completed, it can then be pitched via Twitter to drive traffic to the AUT online news site, TWN Online (Te Waha Nui Online, Student Journalism Blog, http://www.tewahanui.info/wordpress2/). Two specific examples of the pedagogical impact of the exploration of social and mobile web 2.0 so far include:

- The personal engagement with Twitter as a virtual community building tool and collaboration tool by the lecturers and students, rather than the previous theoretical case studies only. Thus modelling an authentic use of these tools and appropriate etiquette.
- The use of Google Docs to collaboratively write, edit, and share this research paper itself, including previewing and critiquing its development on iPads during the weekly lecturer COP while drinking coffee in local cafes – nurturing a social atmosphere to the COP.

The initial COP comprised of two course lecturers and the technology steward proved to be a fruitful strategy for designing and supporting pedagogical change within the Journalism course. The Journalism lecturer COP has continued and been expanded in 2012, bringing into the COP two additional lecturers and funding teaching release time of one of the lecturers to take on the role of Learning and Teaching Fellow within the department to support and broker the integration of social and mobile web 2.0 within the curriculum. Thus the integration of social media and mobile web 2.0 within the Journalism course will be explored in depth in 2012, with a focus upon the lecturers modelling the use of social and mobile web 2.0 in response to the five issues of web 2.0 use in Journalism identified in the introduction of this paper, as these issues were evident in students’ initial explorations of the integration of the pedagogical use of these tools during 2011.
6. CONCLUSION

The exploration of the integration of social media, and in particular mobile web 2.0 tools in a Journalism course has had significant impact upon the classroom experiences of the lecturer and the students. Scaffolded by a supportive community of practice, the lecturers have been empowered to try new approaches to move beyond teaching about social media in journalism to modelling and integrating the use of social media within authentic contexts within the classroom and students learning experiences. Instead of attempting to put up barriers to the crisis created for journalism by user-generated news tools, the project demonstrates that journalism education can instead embrace and harness the potential of these tools in authentic scenarios.

REFERENCES


