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# NETWORK NEWSWORK: SOCIAL APPROPRIATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS ROUTINE JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

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## ABSTRACT

Based on in-depth interviews with journalists at conventional news organizations, this paper examines how journalists socially appropriate user-driven networked informational sources into their newswork routines, a practice I term “network newswork”. Drawing upon current notions of networked journalism, I problematize the distinction between “networked” and “network” forms of newswork to explore interlacings between this emergent practice and established news production practices. A comparative analysis of Kuala Lumpur-based journalists from global channel *Al Jazeera English (AJE)*, Malaysia’s national news channel, *Bernamea TV*, regional Channel News Asia, and three international news agencies, reveal that “network newswork” practices are determined by organizational factors and structured by long-established conventional journalistic norms and routines. An organization’s news orientation, as well as its material and human resources determine how - and if - journalists incorporate “network newswork” into their work routines. Notwithstanding these qualifications, anecdotal evidence as well as journalism’s historical amenability for transformation suggests that the use of user-driven networked media in multiple phases of news production is fast becoming a habitual institutionalized facet of newswork, no more extraordinary than practices like contacting sources via phone or interviewing elite sources. We are thus approaching a time when “network newswork” practices are crystalizing into a regularized journalistic form we can call “networked newswork”.

**Keywords:** *network journalism, networked journalism, network newswork, news production, Al Jazeera English (AJE), social media, comparative analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary news production occurs within the intersections of institutionalized journalistic norms and routines, and a transforming and transformative networked media environment. Drawing upon existing notions of journalism in this new media environment, this paper examines how conventional journalists socially appropriate social media into their daily routines of news production.

The notion that journalism now occurs within a networked media ecology has been conceived as “network journalism” (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Heinrich, 2011) and “networked journalism” (Beckett & Mansell, 2008; Jarvis, 2006).

The idea of network journalism is not new. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Bardoel and Deuze (2001) conceived that media professionals and journalists in the digital network age would find themselves working in an environment of “sheer abundance of information”. This situation of “information abundance” – or what Keane (1999) at the turn of the century called “communicative abundance” – includes the informal collaborative production of news involving both news reporters and news audiences.

According to activist-blogger Jeff Jarvis (2006), “networked journalism is a form of journalism which “recognizes the complex relationships that will make news” wherein “professionals and amateurs” collaborate to gather information. Similarly, Wardle and Williams (2010) and Williams et al., (2010) view “networked journalism as journalistic “initiatives” to tap into audience’s expertise to “to improve the quality of journalistic output” (Wardle & Williams, 2010, p. 788). In other words, networked journalism is a “crowdsourced” journalism (Muthukumaraswamy, 2009). While tapping into the audience for news is “at the heart” of networked journalism, this “crowdsourced” collaborative form of journalism also “retain[s] essential functions of traditional journalism, that is, to report, analyze and comment, edit, and disseminate” (Beckett & Mansell, 2008, p. 93). Parallel to the idea of collaborative networked journalism, Heinrich (2011) proposes that journalism in interactive globalized spheres should be viewed as “network journalism”, i.e. journalism in a network. Heinrich’s (2011) “network journalism” model positions news outlets as central ‘nodes’ that draw upon “information from various sources” all positioned within a “dense” interactive network of “information gatherers, producers and disseminators” (p. 9). Accordingly, Heinrich’s model places emphasis on mapping the networks of information flow and collaboration between these central journalistic nodes. As suggested by these complementary conceptualizations of contemporary forms of journalism, “networked” or “network” journalism essentially relates to the transformations brought upon traditional notions of journalism by interactive digital online networks, more commonly conceptualized as user-driven social media.

Focusing upon the news production aspect of conventional journalistic forms, this paper draws upon this admittedly tenuous “networked”-“network” distinction to propose the term “network newswork” (as opposed to “networked newswork”) for exploring how user-driven networked media impact the news practices of conventional news organizations and journalists. The choice of using the term “network” rather “networked” in describing news production in relations to web-based digital resources also stems from the logic that if newswork were described as “networked”, it implies that these networked resources are *already fully integrated* into conventional norms and routines of news production.

In other words, the assumption would be that newswork is already “networked”. While we can quite safely assume that most conventional modern newsrooms are extensively ‘digitized’ (e.g. using digital computer and broadcast technologies to capture and create news content and also to record and organize work flows), we do not yet know whether these same newsrooms are “networked” to the same extent that they are ‘digitized’. Although networked forms of news production are intrinsic to new ‘participatory’ forms of journalism as practiced at news ‘organizations’ like *OhMyNews*, *Salon.com*, *Media Channel*, etc. (see Bruns, 2005 for a range of case studies) as far as traditional channels of news is concerned (i.e. broadcast television news channels, paper-based print newspapers) it is not yet known to what extent

networked resources have actually reorganized conventional news production structures and routines. And this is precisely the core question this paper aims to address.

## NEWSWORK ROUTINES

Given that the integration of networked media into conventional contexts of news production (i.e. “network newswork”) relates to transformations in journalistic work, it is relevant to revisit some core aspects of newswork in relations to journalists’ networked media practices. In brief, newswork is a process informed by several iterative stages of “work”, from news surveillance and monitoring, news selection, newsgathering, fact-checking or verification, and reporting (Tuchman, 1973).

In an informational society, the journalist is not only a “media producer”, but is very much a “media consumer” as well. The advent of user-driven informational platforms such as blogs and microblogs, video sharing sites and social networking sites, as well as citizen journalism news sites like *OhMyNews* or *CNN’s iReport* expands the range of media that the journalist might (must) routinely monitor.

Prior to the advent of electronic databases and subsequent rise of the internet, the work of gathering news and any research it entailed often involved physical movement – meeting face-to-face with news sources and newsmakers, travelling on location, or even visiting physical archives and libraries. In the current networked age, online technologies also make it possible for journalists to remotely and digitally source for information without leaving the newsroom (or even their homes).

In certain cases, such as initial “breaking news” coverage of natural disasters or mass uprisings, journalists and news organizations may even rely entirely on the internet to gather information and source for relevant news material. Thus, “crowdsourcing” (Howe, 2008) can be one example of how user-driven networked sources might be incorporated into newswork routines in contemporary practices of journalism.

There are many examples of “crowdsourced” journalism, e.g. news aggregators like *Reddit* and citizen journalism sites such as *CNN’s iReport* where news filtration is minimal. Within conventional professional newsrooms, however, we must ask how, and to what extent “crowdsourced” news is incorporated into traditional journalistic norms involving news selection, filtration, verification and framing.

## “NETWORK NEWSWORK” WITHIN CONVENTIONAL JOURNALISTIC CONTEXTS

With regards to professional newswork norms and routines as discussed above, the body of work relating to conventional journalistic integration of user-driven media is fast-growing. There appears to be two emerging strands of research relating to “network newswork” within traditional journalistic contexts. One strand looks at the implication that new networked media bears for conventional news production (e.g. Bivens, 2008; Heinrich, 2011; Van Leuven, Heinrich, & Deprez, 2013). A second strand looks at new media sourcing practices at traditional outlets (e.g. Muthukumaraswamy, 2009; Phillips, 2010) and the incorporation of user generated content at broadcast and journalism news outlets (e.g. Harrison, 2009; Williams, Wardle, & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2010; Willnat & Weaver, 2014).

In a survey of journalists in the United States, (Willnat & Weaver, 2014) found that social media was very important to journalists’ work. American journalists spent between 30 to 60 minutes daily on social media networks. 53.8 per cent of journalists surveyed regularly

used microblogs such as Twitter for newsgathering and reporting. Many also invested time following blogs maintained by other journalists (23.6 per cent), Wikipedia (22.2 per cent), YouTube (20.2 per cent), LinkedIn (10.6 per cent) and citizen blogs (7.1 per cent).

Considering that journalists tend to follow a variety of social media, it can be argued that social media provides important sources, leads, and information for contemporary network/ed journalists. For example, Belgium media's reporting of Syrian uprisings in 2011, relied heavily on non-mainstream user-driven sources (Van Leuven et al., 2013) due to limited accessibility of Syrian military and government sources.

Interestingly, however, in their coverage of similar political uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, Belgium news outlets employed traditional sourcing practices more than they relied on social media. Traditional, authority news sources remained available and accessible to journalists in Egypt and Tunisia, rendering it less necessary for journalists to turn to social media. Although journalists did occasionally source footage or commentary from social media, particularly during breaking news, this emergent practice was situated against the backdrop of traditional journalistic practices.

Williams and colleagues (2010) found that "rather than changing the way most journalists at the *BBC* work, audience material is firmly embedded within the long-standing routines of traditional journalism practice". Journalists tend to emphasize the importance of "continuity in journalism practice, and play[ed] down the novelty of audience participation." Most interestingly, such attitudes tends to cut across technological platforms and age groups:

One might expect this from journalists working on established platforms such as radio and television . . . , or from older reporters sceptical of what they see as a new fad. But one might anticipate a different picture from newsrooms at the cutting edge of the *BBC*'s engagement with its audience: the UGC Hub and its centrepiece, the *Have Your Say* news discussion forum. (Williams et al., 2010, p. 86).

Williams and colleagues argue the UGC Hub is an extension of *BBC*'s "newsgathering machine" (ibid, , pp. 89-90) and also noted journalists' preference for "audience material" that most easily fit into the corporation's established journalistic norms. In Bivens' (2008) study of how journalists and their news organizations "adapt" to "reflect the possibilities enabled by new media", she found three significant changes to traditional journalistic practice, namely: shifts in traditional news flow cycles; heightened accountability; and evolving news values. Relatedly, Harrison (2009) found that "traditional gatekeeping barriers have evolved over time to ensure the maintenance of *BBC* core values.

Harrison's (2009) study involved a week long observation of *BBC*'s UGC Hub and identified four types of user-generated-content, i.e. UGC:

First a form of unsolicited news story; second a form of solicited content for specific extant news stories; third a form of expeditious content for specific items and features, and fourth a form of audience watchdog content" (Harrison, 2009, p. 1).

These categories of UGC parallel Williams and colleague's findings regarding the different types of "audience material" flowing into the UGC Hub (Williams & Wardle, 2009, pp. 91-92). Similarly, Muthukumaraswamy (2009) found that differing typologies of crowdsourced journalism are influenced by a variety of different factors:

Response to crowdsourcing vary by audience demography and reach, as well as the complexity of subject matter. “Generalized news coverage” garners contributions from both “non-expert” and “expert” audience members, while “specialized news coverage” depend on people with expert knowledge in the news subject. (Muthukumaraswamy, 2009, p. 58)

Muthukumaraswamy further notes that crowdsourcing requires dedicated effort on the part of news organizations, and “insufficient motivation” from editors can negatively influence the amount of crowdsourced material that a news organization receives and uses.

If we approach the issue of news sourcing from the perspective of non-journalists news commentators, namely bloggers, it is interesting to note that blogs rarely engage in original reporting, and but regularly provide commentary and criticism of current issues covered in mainstream news media. In that sense, blogs use news media as “news source”. (Bruns, 2007; Matheson, 2004; Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) & George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, 2011; Singer, 2007). However, as Bowman and Willis (2003) write regarding “a new media ecosystem”,

... online communities discuss and extend the stories created by mainstream media. The communities also produce participatory journalism, grassroots reporting, annotative reporting, commentary and fact-checking, which the mainstream media feed upon, developing them as a pool of tips, sources and story ideas.

Thus, as Singer (2011) proposes, the relationship between bloggers and journalists is “symbiotic and complementary”. To the extent that journalists may also blog, or microblog, it is also interesting to examine symbiosis between news reporting and blogging. Based on their content analysis of 22,000 *Twitter* postings by journalists, Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) found that journalists’ tweets included links to their online, networked sources, and information about their newsgathering process, as well as sharing news updates and expressing individual opinions. We can conclude from their findings that even if *Twitter* postings do not necessarily make it into their news stories, social media is inevitably part of the newsgathering and story crafting process. Interestingly, however, Lasorsa and colleagues found that journalists from large media organizations such as national newspapers and national television stations do not disclose their newsgathering process or their personal thoughts as much as their colleagues at smaller news outlets do. This finding suggests that while social media might be part of a journalists’ news monitoring and reporting repertoire as well as a platform for broadcasting personal view points and self-reflections, the extent that social media is used incorporated into the norms and routines of news production is likely dependent on the type of organization a journalist works for.

## **SOCIAL APPROPRIATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF NETWORKED SOURCES**

Two conclusions can be drawn from the literature regarding the integration of user-driven networked technologies into conventional news production contexts. One conclusion relates to the social appropriation of new technology, while another highlights news organizations’ treatment of social media as news source. To borrow from Williams and colleagues’ study on “audience content” at the *BBC*,

... most news journalists perceive UGC in newsgathering terms first of all ... when discussing audience material with *BBC* news journalists, they are likely to think of it as a source of news material to be processed in the same way as other material flowing into the newsroom. (Wardle & Williams, 2010, p. 783)

Writing from the perspective of online journalism, as early as a decade ago before the rise of social media, Singer (2005) provides a salient explanation for this conventional journalistic treatment of user contributions by arguing that journalists tend to “weigh” the benefits of user generated content from a “traditional professional perspective” and will “normalize participatory formats till they are subdued with traditional practice”.

Relatedly, Orlikowski and her colleagues (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski & Iacono, 2006) in their work on organizational use of information systems, argue that

While much of academia tends to view technologies as stable and unchanging (see Orlikowski & Iacono, 2006), Orlikowski and her colleagues (e.g. Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski & Iacono, 2006) argue that human use and appropriation of technology is dynamic and can affect change in both the materiality of the hardware and the symbolic use of the software. New technologies are not so much adopted into organizational processes, as they are socially appropriated to serve existing processes for example communication, record keeping, documentation, project management, attendance, to name just a few organizational processes.

Tomlinson (1999) notes at the turn on the century, “technologies have an independent causal (not so say, monocausal) role in the production of social norms, practices and relations”. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2005) similarly point out, “social arrangements” and “organizational forms” develop around “new artefacts or devices” and practices associated with new technologies. To the extent that user-driven media is “normalized” (Lasorsa, et al., 2012) so it becomes journalistic, we could also ask whether such non-institutional content might eventually become an institutionalized routine aspect of journalism.

Problematizing news media as “political institution”, Cook (2007 [1998])((2007 [1998])) argues that the institution of journalism is constituted in two ways:

First the news media are not simply distinct organizations, but make up a collective institution – a site of systemized principles of action enduring across time and supervising a central area of social and political life. Second, journalists’ activities are not merely constrained, they are enabled if not constituted by such an (intertwined/ institutional) approach.

Drawing from Cook’s constitution of journalism, “institution” has a two-fold meaning. Firstly there are the “institutions” that impact social life in the form of distinct organizations (e.g. government agencies, political parties, NGOs, corporations). Secondly, there is the institutionalization of social rules and resources through the habitualization of regularized practices stretching over long periods of time across space (see Berger & Luckmann, 1971; Giddens, 1984).

The question with regards to “network newswork”, is to what extent user-driven networked sources, namely social media, is being “habituated” into “regularized practice” in news production? Is it an “institutionalized” practice of news production? If not, will it ever become so?

## CASE STUDY

The discussion above on network/ed journalism and journalistic adoption of new media are based mainly on media organizations featured as single case studies (e.g. (Harrison, 2009; Wardle & Williams, 2010; Williams, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Wardle, 2011; Williams & Wardle, 2009; Williams et al., 2010) or an aggregated description of multiple news organizations or journalists (D. Lasorsa, 2012; D. L. Lasorsa et al., 2012; Willnat & Weaver, 2014).

In contrast this paper involves a comparative analysis of “network newswork” as practiced in a global, internationally-oriented news organization, versus a national, politically-oriented news reporting environment. As proposed by seminal communication scholars, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch (1995 [1975]), and emphasized by Hallin and Mancini’s (2004; 2011) in their comparative study of national media systems, comparative analysis is a highly useful conceptual tool. It is useful for drawing out hidden aspects of a single-country case study that would otherwise remain buried were it not compared and contrasted against the findings of a comparable but contrasting cases.

Following the conceptual trail of Hallin and Mancini, this study proposes what I elsewhere (A. Firdaus, Forthcoming; A. S. Firdaus, 2012) call a “glocal-comparative analysis”, to examine “network newswork” convergences and divergences among journalists producing news for different news spheres, but all doing in the very same city and country – thus providing a “glocal” context for transnational comparative analysis. Specifically, this paper examines manifestations of “network newswork” among global journalists at the Kuala Lumpur offices of global news channel *Al Jazeera English* (AJE), and their local counterparts working for Malaysia’s national news channel, *Bernama TV*.

These two news outlets thus constitute this paper’s “core” case studies. However, in addition to *AJE* and *Bernama TV*, this study also involves a number of other different types of news organizations that serve to “contextualize” the professional realities of global and local journalists at the two news channels under study. These “contextual” news organizations consist of the Kuala Lumpur bureaus of the following news organizations: regional broadcaster *Channel News Asia* and international news agencies *dpa* (*German Press Agency*) and *Kyodo News*, as well as the main Kuala Lumpur newsroom of *Bernama National News Agency* (*Bernama TV*’s parent organization).

*AJE* and *Bernama TV* typify news outlets that are amenable to such global-local juxtaposition. At the time of study, these news channels both maintained major operating bases in Kuala Lumpur and thus present us with two highly “comparable cases” of similar yet contrasting categories. Both are 24-hour news channels and this facilitates comparison of similar news production practices. At the same time, these news channels each operated in two distinctly different news spheres – *AJE* in the global news sphere and *Bernama TV* in Malaysia’s local national news sphere. These channel’s contrasting news spheres facilitates comparative analysis of specific modes of news production and new media adoption.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This paper’s comparative analysis is based on in-depth interviews with journalists at *AJE*, *Bernama TV*, *Bernama National News Agency*, *Channel News Asia*, *dpa*, and *Kyodo*. Based on snowball sampling, 23 journalists were interviewed. Table 1 below provides a brief profile of each interview participant. Interviews were conducted in Kuala Lumpur between February

and September 2010. Interviews were audio recorded with permission, and later transcribed to enable thematic analysis.

**Table 1 Journalists Interviewed**

News Outlet	Job Descriptions	Other Professional Roles
Core Case Studies		
Al Jazeera English	News Editor	
	Output Producer	
	Planning Editor	
	Interview Producer	Output Producer, Deputy News Editor
	Assistant Program Editor	Editor
	Producer	Reporter
	News Presenter	Reporter
	News Presenter	
Bernama TV	Assistant Producer, English Desk	News Reader
	Assistant Producer, Mandarin Desk	News Reader
	Executive Producer	Stringer, Channel News Asia
	BJ no.1, Economics & Finance Desk	
	BJ no.2, Economics & Finance Desk	
	BJ, General News & Politics Desk	
	Assignment Editor	
	Visual Editor	
Contextual Case Studies		
Bernama News Agency	Former Chief Executive Officer and Editor-in-Chief	Editorial Advisor, Bernama TV
	Reporter, General News Desk	BJ, Entertainment Desk, Bernama TV
	Website Editor	
	Deputy Chief Editor, Foreign News Desk	
Channel News Asia	Malaysia Bureau Chief	
Dpa	Malaysia Correspondent	
Kyodo	Malaysia Correspondent	

**FINDINGS**

**Organizational news orientation**

Each set of news outlets examined here differ in terms of their main target audience and main coverage area. *AJE's* news orientation is global; *Bernama TV* and *Bernama News Agency*



maintain a national hard news orientation; and the three “foreign” news bureaus also focus on national news but tailor their reporting for a transnational audience, rather than a national polity. These varied news orientations influence each outlet’s particularized adoption of “network newswork”.

*AJE*’s global news orientation necessitates that its journalists keep abreast of global conflict hotspots, large-scale emergency disasters, and a transnational range of underreported issues and “voiceless” communities (Pedrosa, 2008; Powers & El-Nawawy, 2009). Social media is found to be highly useful for monitoring breaking news and political developments globally.

I personally don’t have a *Twitter* But I made one just because – for certain stories ... when the earthquake in Chile happened, telephones weren’t working, nothing was working. So we were getting our updates from *Twitter*. And then the Gaza flotilla raid, we were also getting updates from some NGOs which had people on the boat. (Interview Producer/Output Producer)

This use of *Twitter* to monitor global news occurrences finds support in a Pew Research Centre (2011)((2011) report that found *Twitter* to have a very “international flavour” in its trending news topics.

*Twitter*’s “international flavour” is useful for one *AJE* News Presenter who follows a range of journalists and heads of humanitarian organizations tweeting from different global regions. Similarly, she follows the *Facebook* updates of friends in a range of countries to acquaint herself with the local nuances of globally-significant stories there and to discover news events in those countries:

I’ve got lots of friends who do use *Facebook* professionally, as journalists and whatever it is that they do. So they help to give me a bit of nuance on certain stories as well [via] *Facebook* “updates”. So I just check *Facebook* maybe twice a day. A friend of mine who works at a research institute in Jakarta would have posted something or rather about some political things going on in Jakarta, and I’ll have a look and I think “I didn’t know that that was going on”.

Further illustrating the relevance of global networked media sources to *AJE*’s journalism, this journalist also mentions following “very experienced” humanitarian organization representatives, climate experts, right wing American blogs, as well as user generated videos of newsworthy incidents. Other *AJE* journalists also take note of a global range of social media sources.

In contrast to *AJE*’s global news orientation, *Bernamea TV* covers national news for a local Malaysian polity. Its focus is on government news, including reporting the activities of key ministers and government agencies. It also reports on national political and economic news, using news frames that generally support the political and economic status quos. The increasing relevance of the blogosphere as a site for political contestation is occasionally acknowledged on *Bernamea TV*, wherein the channel might quote the Prime Minister’s official blog, or lift statements from the blogs of other politicians. In general, however, this does not happen very often. *Bernamea TV*’s close association with the state presents it with easy access to government sources, and possibly also a comfortable working relationship with sources, cultivated over frequent interviews and press conferences. Furthermore, the

national news channel's ingrained practice of relying on information subsidies in the form of press conferences, press releases and media events also ensures that it has a steady stream of news material. Therefore, the channel's national news orientation and its state-centric news practices largely preclude the need for networked social media sources. This echoes Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton (2012) findings about journalists large American news organizations who rarely tweet about their sources or newsgathering process.

### **Organizational resources versus organizational limitations**

Apart from organizational news orientation, a notable factor influencing journalists' adoption of "network newswork" is an organization's resources, or lack thereof. Of the six news organizations under study, at the time of study *AJE* had the most fully-equipped office, with a fully-fitted broadcast centre and newsroom linked to all the major news feeds, staffed not only by reporters, editors, producers, and a full team of technical and administrative personnel. As would be expected of such a well-resourced newsroom, journalists enjoyed regular networked-age amenities such as internet computers and smartphones with roaming capabilities (paid for by the network). Journalists at *Bernamea News Agency* also enjoy a similar work environment with regards organizationally-provided resources. *Channel News Asia's* small Kuala Lumpur bureau was reasonably well-resourced with sufficient hardware and travel and communications expenses paid for by the parent company in Singapore. However, with one journalist, one cameraman and one administrative assistant, the bureau operates at a considerably smaller scale compared to its parent newsroom in Singapore and to the larger newsrooms under study in this paper. Similarly, the Kuala Lumpur bureaus of international news agencies *Kyodo* and *dpa* consisted of literally a-one-person reporting team based out of their respective home-offices. It must be noted, however, that their home-office internet connection and phone communications were paid for by their respective organizations. The resource situation at *Bernamea TV*, on the other hand, was markedly different.

### **Bernamea TV: News production without network connection**

The idea of a national television newsroom not having access to agency news feeds and the internet may be somewhat difficult to fathom, particular in a highly networked and relatively advanced developing country like Malaysia. However, due to severe financial difficulties, this was the case at *Bernamea TV*, at the time of this study's interviews. The channel's ongoing financial difficulties parallels a global trend in which news organizations are grappling with unstable business environments, increasing competition, rising costs, and declining revenues. Such challenges inevitably mean that news outlets and individual newswriters must adapt to producing news with scarce resources (Keith, 2009).

Only a handful of the newsroom's computers remained connected to the internet at the time of interview, and journalists generally had to "fight" each other to use these limited resources (Broadcast Journalist, General News and Politics Desk). Because *Bernamea TV* shares (rents) office space with its financially-secure parent organization, the channel's journalists' were still able to log on to the internet at the news agency's library. However, the library is only opened during normal office hours, making it difficult to do research on the internet after hours and on weekends. Some journalists brought along their personal mobile internet phones or USB modems to work. However, one journalist (Assistant Producer, English Desk) argued that it would be too costly for her to use her mobile phone to surf the internet. A number of journalists at *Bernamea TV* are actually employees of the parent news agency who were temporarily seconded to the TV station to help with its staff

shortages. These journalists had fewer problems finding an internet-capable computer, as they still had access to *Bernamea News Agency's* newsroom and its roomful of networked computers and international news agency feeds. Even though *Bernamea News Agency* also withdrew its agency news feeds as well many of the journalists it “lent” to *Bernamea TV* (because the TV station defaulted on its staff secondment fees and its subscription fees to its parent agency’s news feeds), through these seconded journalists, *Bernamea TV* was still able to maintain some limited and conditional access to resources that the channel otherwise could not afford to pay for.

Interestingly, although *Bernamea TV* essentially lost internet-access due to its financial problems, the channel’s inability to pay subscription fees for agency feeds forced it into sourcing *YouTube* for visuals to air along its foreign news coverage, although it appears that this only happened once. Although *Bernamea TV* had ceased to report on world news due to financial constraints, when a massive earthquake occurred in Haiti in early 2010, the channel felt that the story was too big to ignore.

In absence of agency footage from their usual television news agency, *APTN*, the channel made a decision to use a *YouTube* clip of the earth quake to report the story, which it did very surreptitiously for only “five or ten seconds, not more.” This caution stemmed from the channel’s worry of the possibility of litigation over copyright infringement for broadcasting a *YouTube* clip without the permission of its producer, an anonymous *YouTube* user the channel was unable to identify or contact. (Assignment Editor; Visual Editor).

For a short while, when the channel first aired in 2008 and 2009, *Bernamea TV* made attempts to solicit user generated content by asking audiences to email in newsworthy videos or photos, but the initiative “just totally died”, according to one Assistant Producer (English Desk) who admittedly knew very little about the channel’s crowdsourcing initiative.

*Bernamea TV's* Assignment Editor was one of the very few people in charge of reading and responding to these emails, but as suggested by interview with the Assistant Producer, it is likely that not many in the newsroom knew this. This ultimately means that individual news desks would not have known where to find the channel’s collection of user generated content, if they ever wished to use it. According to the Assignment Editor, the channel decided to shelve the crowdsourcing initiative due to lack of “broadcast quality” visuals. Given the channel’s shortage of staff after *Bernamea News Agency* retracted many of its employees when the channel was unable to pay their secondment fees, it is also possible that the channel lacked the manpower needed to monitor audience contribution. Muthukumaraswamy (2009) notes, “crowdsourcing demands much more effort from a news organization in terms of coordination and oversight”. In contrast, *Bernamea TV's* competitor, news channel *ASTRO Awani*, through its active efforts at solicitation and development of a dedicated community news program *U-Wartawan* (translation: U-Journalist), was able to continuously sustain its crowdsourcing initiatives. Muthukumaraswamy (2009: 58) also explains that crowds are willing to offer their services as long as news organizations can come up with workable methods to “ask them” and it is likely that *Bernamea TV* was constrained from “asking” due to the shortage of manpower and internet service that resulted from its financial problems. However, according to the Assignment Editor, the channel does have plans to develop a crowdsourcing model based on registered contributors to ascertain the authenticity of material and to ensure more technically compliant (and presumably politically-correct) material.

## **Al Jazeera English: Vast resources and network connectivity facilitates “network newswork”**

In contrast to *Bernama TV*'s still-born crowd-sourcing attempt and its subsequent but unrelated loss of network connectivity,, *AJE*'s vast resources ensured uninterrupted internet access at its global broadcast centers. While *Bernama TV*'s journalists felt compelled pay for their own mobile internet services (a relatively undertaking in 2010), *AJE*'s globe-trotting reporters enjoyed company-paid internet access and mobile roaming.

For example, one *AJE* Reporter/Presenter describes how her constant use of *Twitter* while on assignment outside of Malaysia caused her phone bill to “go through the roof” due to “roaming” charges, but this was not an issue for her as the company pays for its reporters’ mobile phone service.

As mentioned above, social media feeds were crucial to the channel’s reporting of the Iranian democratic protests in 2009. Although Iran is located within the regional purview of the channel’s Doha newsroom, the autonomous nature of the channel’s globalized structure allowed the Kuala Lumpur broadcast centre to also use their own coverage of the Iranian uprising during its solo broadcast, leaving Doha’s coverage for the simultaneous global newscast. This reporting was based on the newsroom’s own monitoring of social media feeds as well as information taken from the channel’s Doha “go-to desk” during the Iran story cycle (*AJE* Assistant Program Editor):

Doha had their own desk and part of their job was to monitor all the social media. And as the protest became bigger and bigger and as it became more violent, the Doha Iran Desk was sort of the go-to desk. So what we’d do is we’d cover the story in the top part of the show, and then at 7.30G [GMT], at that half of the show, we’d go to our presenter in Doha who’s been following people posting stuff on *Twitter* and *Facebook*. And he would be telling us about some of the things that are being said on social media.

This particular finding resonates with Bivens’ (2008) assertion that... the flood of UGC linked to a breaking news item has actually reversed the traditional flow of news, compelling news organisations to act as distributors and pass on material to news agencies and other media.

In this case, however, intra-organizational redistribution of social media material within the *AJE* organization facilitated Kuala Lumpur based journalists’ “newsgathering” of social media, allowing the social media “go-to desk” in Doha to serve a role similar to *BBC*’s pioneering UGC Hub which collects “audience material” (Williams et al., 2010) to redistribute to other *BBC* newsrooms.

### **“Network newswork”: The lone-journalists’ reporting toolkit**

As mentioned earlier, this study’s interviews includes *Bernama TV* and *AJE* journalists working in newsroom environments in Kuala Lumpur. At both the *Bernama TV* newsroom and the Kuala Lumpur broadcast centre of *AJE*, news production is a team effort in which multiple newsworkers – reporters, editors, camerapersons, technicians, producers etc. – collaborate to produce news programs and bulletins, as well as pursue, package and produce individual news stories. Amongst these broadcast newsworkers, news gathering and sourcing do not often necessitate the use of networked technologies as there is sufficient manpower to deploy

to news events and to seek out and interview news sources. In contrast, correspondents manning small bureaus away from their home office do not have the same level of material resources and human support enjoyed by their newsroom-based counterparts (see Hannerz, 2004, ch.5).

Without the organizational support and backup of multiple co-workers, the news correspondents interviewed for this study often found it necessary to turn to networked technologies in order to cover simultaneously-occurring news events or to newsgather at multiple news sites. *Twitter* updates and *YouTube* postings allow them to overcome the physical limitations of being an individual lone-reporter and make it possible for them to do handle reporting on multiple events or from multiple venues. (Volkmer & Firdaus, 2013) *Channel News Asia* Bureau Chief, for example, relied on *Twitter* to deliver live reports of three simultaneous by-elections occurring in three different Malaysian towns:

I can't be at three places at one point! So I stay put in the office, switch on the video conference. I'll be video conferencing [with a news presenter in Singapore] and I'll be following *Twitter* for the latest election results.

Similarly, networked media's visual immediacy allows lone-reporters to "see what's going on" from multiple vantage points while covering a news event alone:

Especially if you're covering things like major demonstration, street protest going on. You are in one location. But there may be bigger things happening at another side of it. Maybe the riot police . . . are firing tear gas at the spot, but you can't see it. Those people on the site, they are *Twittering* about it and all that so you know what's going on. (Kyodo correspondent)

The same journalist also argues that social media is highly relevant in facilitating "virtual reporting" using "multiple sources" while "just sitting in your home". These correspondents' creative use of networked media to overcome the limitations that their one-reporter bureaus imposes upon newsgathering speaks with what Orlikowski (2000) opines regarding 'human appropriation of technology', wherein particular technologies are not so much adopted by organizational members, but are socially appropriated to serve particular organizational needs. This journalistic social appropriation of social media also exemplifies the role of technology as 'extensions of man', to borrow from McLuhan's (1967) technological determinist, but highly relevant, understanding of media.

It should also be noted that these journalists' appropriation of alternative informational resources do not merely serve to ease the difficulties of being a lone-reporter, but it also points to the extent of the journalistic autonomy these lone-correspondents enjoy. This experience resonates with observations in the limited literature on foreign correspondents (e.g. Gross & Kopper, 2011; Hess, 2001; Kester, 2010; Perlmutter & Hamilton, 2008). Not only are they relatively free from Malaysian state control, they also enjoy greater organizational autonomy in making their own news decisions away from their editorial superiors. For example, writing about the Baghdad bureaus of *BBC* and *CNN*, Murrell (2010) argues that journalistic autonomy facilitates agency in journalists and stringers' reporting of violent conflict in Iraq. From the more comfortable and safer vantage point of Kuala Lumpur-based correspondents, the notion that autonomy relates to agency is manifested in these lone-correspondents' freedom to enact individual agency in innovatively using networked technologies to overcome limitations of gathering news alone.

### **“Network Newswork” at conventional, mainstream news organizations**

The findings above explain how newsrooms make sense of and make use of the crowdsourced and collaborative logic that underscores “network newswork”. As shown in the case of *Bernama TV*, notwithstanding scarce resources, access to networked technologies and online sources is vital for the working journalist, and for a functional newsroom. As highlighted by *AJE* journalists, emergency, spot news and crises coverage, in particular, ‘demand’ that journalists be “networked” at all times, lest they miss the latest social media updates from news hotspots. Access to the internet and social media are important not only for the reporting of conflict or emergency stories, but also as a sampling of public opinion. (Volkmer & Firdaus, 2013)

These findings suggest that “network newswork” is an emergent practice that cuts across news spheres (e.g. global – *AJE*; international – *Channel News Asia & Kyodo*; and, local national), and organizational circumstances (e.g. resource-rich like *AJE*; one-person bureaus of international news agencies, and financially-strapped resource-poor organizations like *Bernama TV*). Other studies regarding user generated content and crowdsourcing at mainstream, conventional news outlets similarly indicate journalism’s increasing adoption of user-driven networked resources.

### **CONCLUSION: NORMALIZATION OF “NETWORK NEWSWORK”**

Notwithstanding evidence that point to increasing regularity in the appearance of user generated content and social networking media within conventional news reporting of emergencies and conflict, closer examination reveals a very limited application of “network newswork”. (See also Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) & George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs, 2011; Williams et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2010)

It is thus pertinent to highlight a very important qualification regarding “network newswork” practices. Most notably, “network newswork” is incorporated only selectively into particular stages of news production, and is not practiced throughout the entire process. While “network newswork” features highly in the general pre-reporting surveillance stage of newswork, in the reporting stages of news production, user-driven networked sources are only integrated into journalistic news production under compelling circumstances.

Traditional journalistic “professional” practice dictates that journalistic integration of networked media sources occurs only under compelling circumstances when newsgathering in the field is not possible. Limited organizational resources for on-the-ground reporting – as in the case of one-person news bureaus, justifies innovative use of networked resources in sourcing and reporting the news. Increasingly, geophysical or security and political constraints like initial ‘breaking news’ of emergency disaster or erupting conflict also provide compelling reason for journalists to “crowdsourcing” their news.

However, whereas in-house reporting and news agency reports are considered credible at face value, without the need for further authentication, news organizations tend to approach material originating from “writer-gatherers” (Couldry, 2010) with skepticism and caution.

The conventional journalistic practice of “network newswork” is distinct from pure collaborative “crowdsourced” alternative journalism. Contemporary understanding and practice of “crowdsourcing”, by its very definition implies equal acceptance of any and all contribution from the “crowd”, without judgement or exclusion. While journalists at conventional mainstream news organizations may source information from the networked,

online crowd, and thus “crowdsource” for news, this “network newswork” practice does not constitute “crowdsourcing” in the pure sense of the word. “Professional” journalists are selective of the events and issues they learn of through their deliberate sourcing of such “news” from the networked crowd. They apply news value judgements and effectively filter which – if any – of the “crowdsourced” news actually makes it as “news”. They don’t leave it to news audiences’ “wisdom of the crowd” to judge the credibility of sources – as is the case for “crowdsourced news” in its purest sense (through participatory networked practices such as “Likes” and “Comments” and “Sharing”). Instead, conventional journalists take very seriously their “duty” to evaluate their sources and to verify the “facts” and “truths” of the “news” they source from social media. If they are unable to unequivocally ascertain the veracity of their sources and their news, they make it a point to emphasize to attribute such reports to “unconfirmed reports” or “unnamed sources”, lest they be accused of “false reporting” (Volkmer & Firdaus, 2013)

These qualifications above suggest that “network newswork” as currently practiced by mainstream conventional news media, does not revolutionize newswork, but contributes to evolutionary transformations to news production. One might even argue that contemporary news production at mainstream conventional news media, still privileges traditional modes of news production, as opposed to the pure, collaborative, participatory logic of a Jeff Jarvisian “networked journalism” as manifested in citizen journalism and many news aggregators. In conventional journalism, the “benefits” of “crowdsourced” news and social media is “normalized” (Singer, 2005) to fit existing journalistic norms and routines, and “weighed” according to the contribution it makes to conventional journalistic news production (Singer, 2010).

However, emergent and continual “habitualization” or “normalization” of “network newswork” into the “regularized practices” of conventional journalism suggests that this new form of journalism will eventually crystalize into a regular feature journalists’ daily newswork repertoire. Indeed, it is not difficult to find anecdotal evidence of “network newswork” in conventional news reports (e.g. regular news mentions of “trending” topics, use of screen shots from social media in news reports, sourcing the Facebook page of blog posts of news subjects).

We can conclude that the use of user-driven networked media in multiple phases of news production is fast becoming a habitual institutionalized facet of newswork, no more extraordinary than practices like contacting sources via phone or interviewing elite sources. We are thus approaching a time when “network newswork” practices are crystalizing into a regularized journalistic form we can call “networked newswork”.<sup>1</sup>

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## END NOTES

This paper focused on the organizational and routines level of analysis in its examination of “network newswork”. However, due to space constraints, we have not discussed microsociological individual-level influences nor macrosociological extra-institutional ideological-level influences (A. S. Firdaus, 2012). As argued by Shoemaker and Reese, journalists and their reporting practices are structured by a “hierarchy of influences” (Reese, 2001, 2007; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). It would be highly informative to understand the interplay between micro-, meso- and macro-sociological factors and their influence of journalists’ adoption of “network newswork”. In addition, it would also be highly useful to observe “network newswork” among online journalists in traditional legacy news organizations, as well as the newsrooms of the most traditional medium of news – newspapers.

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