

# “Gunman at Yale” So worth tweeting! How ‘citizen journalists’ can turn a drama into a crisis on social media

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 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/07/20/gunman-at-yale-so-worth-tweeting-how-citizen-journalists-can-turn-a-drama-into-a-crisis-on-social-media-guest-blog-polissummer-2/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2014/07/20/gunman-at-yale-so-worth-tweeting-how-citizen-journalists-can-turn-a-drama-into-a-crisis-on-social-media-guest-blog-polissummer-2/)

2014-7-20

Last year, on the first day of Thanksgiving break, I was sleeping in my dorm room at Yale when I got waken up by a phone call from school: there was [allegedly a gunman on campus](#). That was only three months after I went to the United States, and I couldn't believe what I used to see on TV was actually happening around me.

***This article by Polis Summer School student Jingyu Yuan.***

Several minutes after the campus-wide call, two close friends of mine came to hide in my room and we double checked that we locked the door. About ten minutes later, I saw an NBC truck parking right outside my dorm room, which arrived roughly at the same time as the SWAT team. This was when we realized the seriousness of this matter.

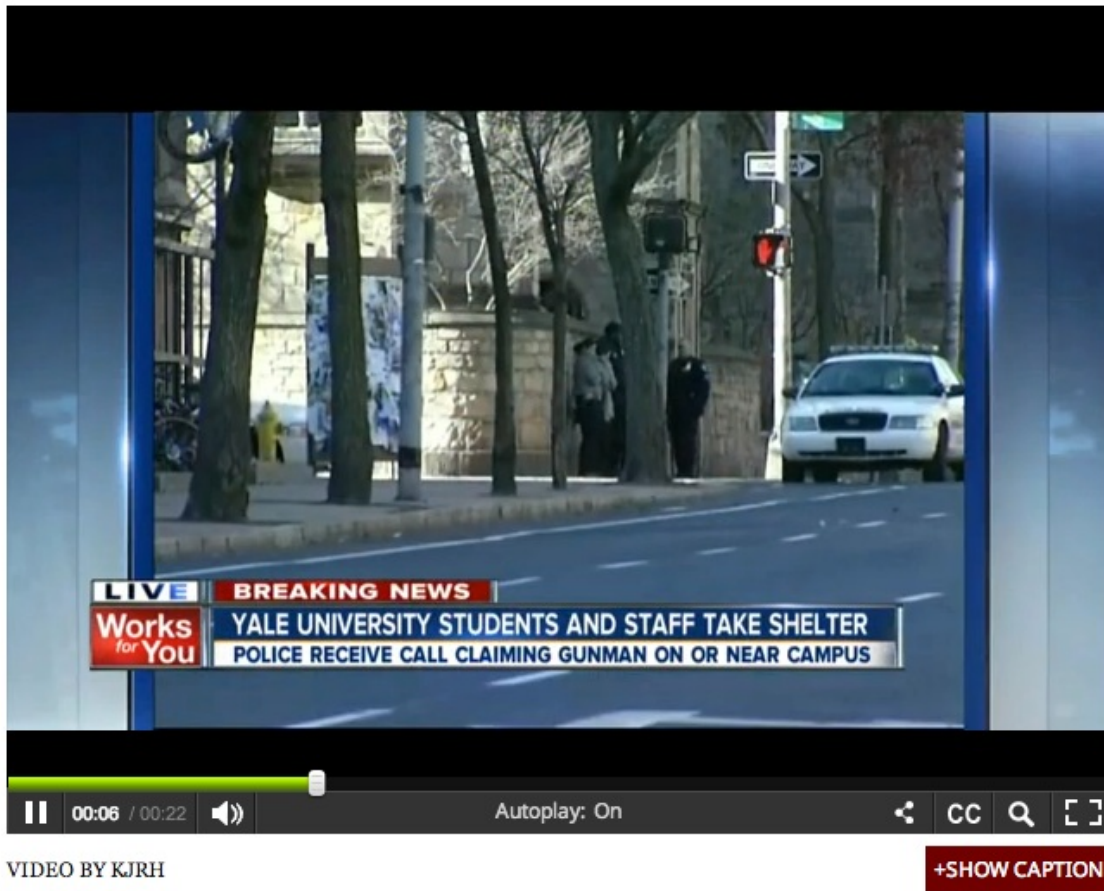
A female journalist was doing a live report, which I watched on the NBC channel on the internet. NBC repeatedly broadcast this breaking news, and they were obviously handling this with prudence, since almost everything the reporter said came with quotation marks.

Apart from the location where the gunman was allegedly spotted, the areas of the university that were under lock down, the words from the police on what actions had been taken, NBC didn't provide much new information as time went on.

# Yale University campus lockdown partially lifted after phone call warning of gunman

POSTED: 11:02 AM, Nov 25, 2013

UPDATED: 2:54 PM, Nov 25, 2013



People started tweeting, with some greatly exaggerating the circumstances. A friend of mine posted online a screen shot of NBC live news where the SWAT team was entering the gate of Yale's old campus. Considering this was the only picture she posted, I thought it could be misleading since SWAT team has always been associated with serious terrorist acts.

My friend sitting next to me started yelling: 'let's make Yale number one on trending topics!' Before long, the hashtag "gunman at Yale" was trending on Twitter with sensational rumours, but the prompt and accurate tweets by NBC prevailed.



Meanwhile, regardless of the police's warning to stay away from windows, I crawled towards the window in my room and took a picture of about twenty SWAT team members marching in the middle of Yale's old campus. I posted this picture on renren -the Chinese equivalent of Facebook – since I wasn't on Twitter, with the captions: 'if I didn't know better, I would think that they were shooting the "The Walking Dead" at Yale!' I just thought it would be a funny post.

There was a clear distinction between how a professional TV network like NBC handled the news report and how people on social media reacted. NBC's report was largely factual and was simply intended to inform. There was nothing dramatic about it whatsoever.

However, people who were witnessing this, including me, tried every means to sensationalize the story and exaggerate their feelings, driven by the thought that this could be an once-in-a-lifetime thrilling experience worth bragging about.

It was funny to see how my friends simultaneously tweeted how spooked they were and texted their parents that there was absolutely nothing to worry about. No one really cared about the responsibilities of 'citizen journalism.'

There was no gunman and a man [has been charged for making a hoax phone call](#).

***This article by Polis Summer School student Jingyu Yuan.***

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