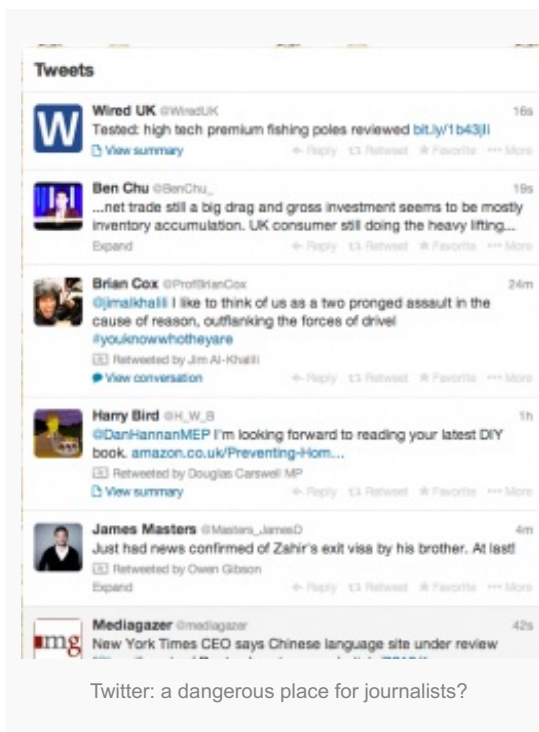


Twitter: 5 Dangers For Journalists

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2013/11/27/twitter-5-dangers-for-journalists/

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Twitter is a good example of a social media network tool that [can make journalism much more efficient and also more open](#). It improves journalists' connective potential, to gather news, opinion and attention but also to disseminate their own content and improve the profile of their brand. But like any new technology or media innovation, it has dangers as well as delights.

I usually write a lot about the [opportunities of networked journalism](#), but here are some of the possible negatives when using Twitter.

1. Conformity

Do you only retweet material you agree with? Do you only follow people who share your professional or personal viewpoints or points of reference? Do you reply to people from outside those groups? Do you review who you follow or who follows you? Have you used any techniques for diversifying or refreshing your twitter circles/lists?

It is empirically true that Twitter allows us potentially to reach an extraordinary number of people. You do the maths. If you have 100 followers with 100 followers each it soon reaches football match attendance scale. But in practice how many people do you interact with? And what are they like? It may be a good thing to limit your range. For example, it might not help to swamp your feed with Twitter traffic related to your personal hobbies or family life. You might want to achieve niche status in a journalism specialism. Fair enough. But even within that narrow range it's worth checking on your serendipity quotient. Diversity will keep you fresh and improve your journalism.

2. Disproportion

Only a minority of people are on Twitter, and only a fraction of them are active. The people you follow (your Twitter stream) is only a partial version of Twitter overall. And the people on Twitter do not represent the wider population (they tend to be younger, richer, more liberal). We have the potential to pick up on interesting trends and reach a vast and even diverse audience through Twitter, but never assume that it reflects the wider real world. 'Twitter' never 'says' something. Let alone, 'People think' via Twitter. It is always 'someone [or 'some people'] on Twitter says something'.

3. Short-term attention seeking

This is a version of the [Kony2012 syndrome](#). It's fairly easy to build followers and make a name for yourself. If you tweet incessantly, for example, you will generally build followers. If you are funny, fast, famous, or furious that tends to generate attention, too. But the statistics suggests that a lot of easily acquired followers (let alone those achieved through buying followers) will be of little use journalistically. Easy come, easy go. From an efficiency point of view ask yourself what your sustainable journalism business model is. What kind of audience or network are you trying to build and to what purpose?

4. Bad Manners

Generally news journalism thrives on conflict, but this is supposed to be in the content not the carrier. The on-screen row at the last UK election between Adam Boulton and Alastair Campbell made great TV at the time for those who like watching grown men turn childish, but they have both made up and moved on and are unlikely to repeat what was an unedifying spectacle. It made a small dent in the big reputations of two men who are not models of politesse, but who realise that manners maketh media. The same on Twitter. Picking fights with everyone can generate short-term attention and some people like Guido Fawkes and Owen Jones (who are both honourable and sincere journalists) can make it a career option, but it's a very rare calling. Most mainstream journalists will want to work with all sides and be flexible enough to connect beyond their tribe. Doing so requires listening as well as lecturing. Disagree, but make a point, not poison.

On Twitter, getting messages under 140 characters can mean cutting corners. Always think how that Tweet might look to someone who doesn't know you well. Avoid irony. Be clear. And if you are angry, do it with dignity. This is supposed to be 'social' media, after all.

5. Distraction

If all you do is Twitter then you are doing a quite limited form of journalism. Twitter inspires me to talk to people and read/view lots of other stuff off Twitter itself. But better journalism still tends to spring from going outside, researching stories, talking to people, asking extra questions and knowing stuff that isn't on Twitter. Google and email are alternatives to Twitter along with a whole range of other wonderful online platforms and networks.

Give yourself a digital distraction audit – where does your clicking lead? Does it simply fill the hours or does it develop distinctive narratives and original content? Are you adding value to your aggregation and curation? When did you last leave the building or pick up a phone?

Of course, these aren't rules and if they were, they are there to be broken. I wish I practiced everything I preached. Your thoughts welcome...

Click here to download a [Polis report on why Twitter and social media is good for journalism](#)

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