Revisiting Impartiality: Social Media and Journalism at The BBC

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This article contributes to the literature of news production studies by providing a powerful example of how processes of deliberation bring change to journalism. It explores the reconstruction of impartiality using the single case-study of social media in the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) international journalism. In this case-study, symbolic interactionism and mesostructure analysis enable us to explore social organizations and social processes, placing them in larger embedded contexts (structural, historical, and mode of action) and extended temporality. Following D. L. Altheide's (1996) ecology of communication framework, this study on BBC impartiality demonstrates that in the newsroom, techies have responded strategically to the logic of their environment. Techies have joined in the process of the new symbolic architecture of impartiality, which has transformed news agenda-setting. This new logic, ushered in by techies, has shaped editorial decisions at the public broadcaster. This article discusses how social media have contributed to the nature, organization, and consequences of communication activities of the BBC.

Keywords: BBC, social media, impartiality, journalism, ecology of communication, media logic, mesostructure

INTRODUCTION

The first wave of ethnographic newsroom studies lasted from the mid-1950s through the early 1980s. These studies examined the impact of news production on journalistic outputs by analyzing journalistic sources (Ericson et al. 1989; Gans 1979; Golding and Elliott 1979; Sigal 1973; Tunstall 1971), organizational structure and newsroom socialization (Burns 1977; Morrison and Tumber 1988; Schlesinger 1978), formats of information technology (Altheide 1976), social control in editorial environments (Breed 1955; Warner 1971; White 1950), news production routines (Fishman 1980; Molotch and Lester 1974; Tuchman 1974), and news policy and budgeting

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(Epstein 1973). These analyses revealed several structural constraints on journalism and described how these constraints affected news outputs. As ethnographic studies, they showed that similar patterns of news production exist in a variety of news organizations. They also shed light on how journalism involves processes of renegotiations that inform our understanding of wider societal renegotiations. Breed (1955) argued that journalists' conformity to new editorial policies can be constrained by ethical norms in journalism, for example. Influenced by the Chicago School participant observation and the functionalist tradition exploring how agents respond to structures, norms, and routines, Herbert J. Gans (1979) explored negotiation processes among journalists and sources in the creation of news.

In recent years, a second wave of ethnography of newsrooms has revealed the ways that the emergence of new technologies transforms social dynamics (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009). These studies have focused on journalism and new media environments (Domingo 2008). But as Usher (2012:2) points out, this scholarship emphasizes the journalistic reproduction of existing patterns of work. For example, Jane B. Singer claims that "journalists are remaining steadfastly at the gate, offering blogs containing no evidence of user input" (Singer 2005:186).

Building on this literature, recent investigations of newsrooms have explored the relationship between the structure of newsrooms and journalists' individual agency (Ryfe 2012; Schmitz Weiss and Domingo 2010; Usher 2012). For example, David M. Ryfe (2012) argues that organizational structures have been more powerful than agents. Usher (2012:2) writes that at the syndicated radio content producer Marketplace, agents can transform structures when they introduce new routines in newsrooms via new technologies.

This article adds to this scholarship in two ways. First, this article explores the reconstruction of impartiality using the single case-study of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) use of social media in its international journalism. At the BBC, impartiality is at the core of the BBC commitment to its audiences. This article adds to existing literature on the BBC, which includes studies on news production (Burns 1977; Schlesinger 1978), the institutionalization of blogging in BBC journalism (Hermida 2009), and journalists' uses of user-generated content and audience material (Harrison 2009; Wardle and Williams 2010). Second, this article contributes to the literature on news production by providing a powerful example of how processes of deliberation bring change to journalism.

This article uses David L. Altheide's (1996) framework of "ecology of communication" to analyze how social media took part in the reconstruction of BBC impartiality. This framework deepens our understanding of news production logics (the nature, process, and consequences of communication) and the role of journalists in appropriating new information technologies in time-space. The emergence of social media has transformed the rules of power relationships and allowed the rise of techies in BBC newsroom. In other words, social media allowed for the generation and reallocation of resources around which journalists interacted. While journalists revise the concept of impartiality, we notice the resurgence of new editorial

practices ushered in by techies in the newsroom. By exploring interactions among journalists, news production and social media in the newsroom, and comparing and contrasting these interactions with the BBC's historical concept of impartiality, this article examines a set of journalistic situations to chart the ways that impartiality has evolved at the BBC. The article shows how the emergence of social media added new questions to impartiality, and reveals how "the foundations of society lie in face to face interaction, the institutions that arise from this and the spontaneous order that results" (Dingwall, DeGloma, and Newmahr 2012:4).

DATA AND METHODS

I conducted my study in 2011, spending approximately 80 hours undertaking direct observation of the BBC Television Centre multimedia newsroom in London, interviewing more than fifty journalists and senior managers, and analyzing BBC reports, studies, and the BBC News and BBC Academy websites. My approach to this research was inductive. I began by observing international news production processes. Because of the size and scope of the BBC, I narrowed my research focus to a single aspect of BBC journalism: social media in international news production. International news production provides a compelling opportunity to assess the potential of social media in a global journalistic context. Social media are global and have had a special significance in recent international events such as the Arab Spring and the death of Osama Bin Laden in 2011.

Although my field work on journalism and social media was conducted in 2011, this article reaches back to the origins of social media during the watershed moment of the July 7, 2005 London bombing attacks, commonly called "7/7." On 7/7, pictures, videos, and eyewitness accounts traveled on the Internet, through social media and by e-mail, and landed on the BBC news desk, helping journalists put the story together. After 7/7, the BBC had crossed the Rubicon (Allan 2006; Sambrook 2005). Since audience material in news production was accelerated by the availability of new information technologies, this moment signaled a turning point in BBC journalism.

I analyzed interactions and negotiations in the mesostructure, looking at how media logics, and actors within that logic, contribute to shape journalists' daily activities. The mesostructure refers to the social process located between the micro and macro levels in social organizations or "realms of human conduct through which social structures are processed and social processes become structures. The negotiated order thus require[s] a mesostructural analysis in which structures and process are tightly and complexly joined" (Maines 1982:278). This grounded approach led me to Altheide's (1996) "ecology of communication" and the recognition that "social processes are temporally structured" (Couch 1996:118). As Altheide writes, "social rules informed by conventional temporal and spatial considerations can be transformed through electronic content and formats" (Altheide 1987:129).

CONTEXT: THE ORIGINS OF BBC IMPARTIALITY AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In their interaction and social environment, over time, BBC journalists have acquired a shared understanding of impartiality. This section briefly describes significant moments in the history of BBC impartiality and situates the emergence of social media in this history. It demonstrates how social media have shaped and been shaped by actors in the reconstruction of impartiality. Since the publication of the Sykes Committee in 1923, the BBC has claimed independence from the government, but it has periodically attracted government scrutiny. Over time, unique logics have created situations to symbolically reconstruct impartiality. One early instance was the General Strike called by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) on May 4, 1926 to force the UK government to alleviate the worsening conditions faced by coal miners. John Reith, the first General-Manager of the BBC, was in tune with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin's belief that the Strike could defeat the government and therefore should be stopped. But Reith also saw the Strike as an opportunity to demonstrate what the BBC could do in times of crises. During the Strike, Reith appealed for BBC independence to Winston Churchill, who wanted the BBC to support the government. In a series of exchanges with Baldwin, Reith said that having the government tell the BBC what to do would weaken the Corporation's reputation of independence and impartiality. Baldwin responded favorably to Reith's request, which made Churchill furious. Yet, the Cabinet decided not to commandeer the BBC during the Strike (Briggs 1995:332–33). Although Reith claimed that the BBC reported the events with a sense of impartiality, he allowed reporting from TUC and refused to air comments from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who insisted for an end to the strike. More controversially, Reith helped Prime Minister Baldwin write a speech to the nation that he delivered from Reith's home in Westminster. During the Strike, the BBC interpreted impartiality through a particular moral and political lens, leading Reith to support the government (Curran and Seaton 2003:114). In his diary, Reith noted: "[t]hey want to be able to say that they did not commandeer us, but they know they can trust us not to be really impartial" (Stuart 1975:96). Immediately after the Strike, Reith wrote a letter to the Head of Department, Station Directors, and Superintendent Engineers. In this confidential letter, Reith discussed his dilemma during the Strike. He demonstrated the desire of the BBC to produce "authentic impartial news" and be "an organization within the constitution" (Briggs 1995:334). The BBC emerged from the strike with an ethic of political neutrality, eventually forcing the Corporation to claim that a government intervention was the Corporation's decision (Curran and Seaton 2003:119). While the name of impartiality had taken hold, in practice impartiality remained only partly developed.

It took almost two decades before the BBC formally defined in its policy notes what it meant to be impartial as an organization. In 1936, two years after the Vernon Bartlett affair (which involved the resignation of a presenter because he took a stand on Hitler), the Ullwater Report on broadcasting called for a greater range of

viewpoints on the BBC, freedom to report anti-government views, no funding from advertising, and decentralization and expansion of the organization (Briggs 1995). The report claimed that freedom from commercial and political interests would foster BBC impartiality. Commissioned in 1949, the Beveridge Report called for more balance, with an increase in minority views and regional devolution. It was not until the Policy Notes for Programme Staff of 1949 that the BBC characterized impartiality as an obligation to present a range of sources and claims, get a hold of the best advocates available, offer fair reporting, and maintain balance in discussions (Hampton 2008:418). In this context, the concept of impartiality emerged within the public service ideals of political fairness, public concern, and regional balance (Ibid).

Since then, other committees have shaped the UK broadcasting landscape and raised questions about BBC impartiality. For example, the Pilkington Committee (1962) and the Annan Committee (1977) advocated for continued license fees and independence of the BBC from political and commercial control. The 1980s were a tumultuous decade for the BBC, with particular challenges for impartiality. During the Falkland conflict, Prime Minister Thatcher criticized the BBC for not supporting “our boys” (McNair 2003). Similar to Churchill’s request during the General Strike, Thatcher asked the Corporation to provide more responsible coverage in Northern Ireland because it was a moment of national crisis. The BBC defined impartiality as a virtue of public broadcasting, a way to remain independent from governmental influences and maintain the trust of the license fee paying public.

Over time, impartiality became a corporate norm ingrained in the BBC’s evolving features and practices. It was not until the 1996 Royal Charter that the BBC enshrined due impartiality in its Editorial Guidelines. “Due” means that there is no absolute test of accuracy or impartiality. Less than a decade later, the BBC reported about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction during the lead-up to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The BBC journalist Andrew Gillian named a source (Dr David Kelly) on the air after which Kelly committed suicide. These events prompted the British government to ask Lord Hutton to conduct an investigation into the circumstances of Kelly’s suicide (Hutton 2004:2). The government accused the BBC of taking a side in the debate and breaching impartiality. The inquiry resulted in the resignation of both General Manager Greg Dyke and Chairman of the Board of Governors Gavyn Davies; subsequently affecting the culture of the organization by encouraging a more risk-averse approach to journalism.

Shaken by the inquiry, the BBC commissioned an internal study, the Neil Report. The report built on lessons learned from the Hutton Report, and suggested initiatives the BBC should undertake to protect its impartiality and independence. As in 1949, the report defined BBC journalism as balanced, un-opinionated and fair. It also defined BBC journalism as accurate, robust, independent, and impartial. The report described six journalistic values at the BBC: truth and accuracy, serving the public interest, impartiality, diversity of opinion, independence, and accountability. Neil claimed that the BBC’s commitment to impartiality is one of the core reasons why the BBC is a trusted source of information (Neil et al. 2004:5). The report

inspired several changes at the BBC. First, the BBC encouraged more accurate and reliable note-taking. Second, it promoted improved training and standards by creating the BBC College of journalism, which offers social media courses. Third, the report recommended that the BBC reform how it manages audience complaints. In response to Hutton, Neil inspired the BBC to reaffirm impartiality based on certain features (e.g., balance, neutrality, objectivity, accuracy, and due impartiality) and practices (e.g., reliable note-taking). Shortly after the release of Neil, the emergence of social media added a new dimension to BBC's conception of impartiality.

In 2005, Michael Grade, Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors, delivered the Goodman Media Lecture at the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. In his speech, Grade discussed the future of impartiality and the challenges the norm faced with the emergence of new technologies. Following this speech, the BBC Trust, the Corporation's governing body, published a significant report, *From See-saw to Wagon Wheel: Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century* (BBC Trust 2007). Grade's speech and the report's publication were embedded in a wider political, cultural, and economic context: General Manager Mark Thompson responded to the publication of the 2006 White Paper by unveiling Creative Future¹ and the "martini media" approach, which makes audio-visual available on-demand so that BBC content is available anywhere, anytime via iPlayer. According to Kevin Marsh² (2012), former BBC Editor of the College of Journalism, *From See-saw to Wagon Wheel* was an indication for BBC journalists that impartiality as bipolar idea (see-saw) had been replaced with a new impartiality represented by multiple axes (wagon wheel). The report became the foundation of teaching at the College of Journalism for the Corporation's 7500 journalists. The report argued that the BBC should take more serious action to protect impartiality in a new media environment. The report targeted the Internet as a potential disruptor of BBC impartiality. It predicted that audience material and user-generated content would become sources, and that this information would be processed and centralized in the UGC Hub operations (BBC Trust 2007:80). It defined BBC impartiality as a mix of accuracy, balance, context, distance, even-handedness, fairness, objectivity, open-mindedness, rigor, self-awareness, transparency, and truth. To use the wording of Altheide and Snow (1992), social media have contributed to the transformation of the time, place, and symbolic architecture of impartiality. Importantly, this has not been "technology-driven" but instead has been an outcome of techies' agency at the BBC. Techies—as tech-savvy journalists involved in social media-related projects including the UGC Hub or the BBC College of Journalism—have had an important role in shaping impartiality in a social media context.

Social media at the BBC and breaking news events provided opportunities for techies to take a strategic role in redefining impartiality. At the BBC, since the London bombing attacks, social media have been centralized in the UGC Hub. But it was during the Mumbai attacks news coverage of November 2008 that impartiality took a central stage. The Mumbai events show how agents at the BBC have contributed to the reconstruction of their world (see Strauss 1978). When the story

first broke, mainstream media sought material from social media. For example, journalists used Twitter and Flickr to share eyewitness accounts of the events. The BBC set up new pages on Wikipedia and Google Maps, showing the locations of the attacks. Vinukumar Ranganathan, CTO at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, took more than 100 pictures of the events and posted them on Flickr, the picture sharing website. Bloggers used Metroblog, a blog about the city of Mumbai, as a collective newswire and monitoring tool (Beaumont 2008). Since many of the sources of information used to discuss the events were available to anyone with access to social media sites, mainstream news organizations took advantage by monitoring these sources. As recommended in *From Seesaw to Wagon-wheel*, the BBC social media team monitored Twitter feeds, blogs, e-mails sent by viewers, media and official reports, news agencies, and other sources of information. They added new information from these sources to the BBC live update page, As it happens, which gave the BBC its first experience with a formal live update webpage. On the second day of the attacks, a thread of tweets claimed that the Indian government was trying to silence journalists and Twitter by blocking social media or asking Twitter to block tweets related to Mumbai, out of fear that the coverage might help the gunmen. Lloyd Shepperd, an Australian blogger, added the unconfirmed report to his blog; the BBC sourced the information from his blog and posted it on its live-page at 11:08 a.m.:

Indian government asks for live Twitter updates from Mumbai to cease immediately. ‘ALL LIVE UPDATES — PLEASE STOP TWEETING about #Mumbai police and military operations’, a tweet says.

Later that same day, the Indian government confirmed that this claim was false. By publishing that tweet on its website, the BBC circulated unverified and inaccurate information.

This action prompted a series of audience reactions. On December 2, Tom Sutcliffe (2008), a journalist for The Independent, wrote that the BBC was playing a risky game with impartiality by using social media during live coverage of the attacks. On Steve Herrmann’s (2008), Editor of BBC News Online, The Editors blog post, viewers’ comments were similar to those of Sutcliffe. Members of the audience pointed out the risk of the BBC running unverified material and the impact it could have on the BBC’s reputation. Facing this criticism, Herrmann (2008) reiterated that it was up to the readers to decide how much credence they gave to sources. But later on, Herrmann pulled back from that assertion:

[s]hould we have tried to check it and then reported back later, if only to say that we hadn’t found any confirmation? I think in this case we should have, and we’ve learned our lesson. (Herrmann 2008)

The Mumbai attacks news coverage provided the BBC with a situation to reflect on impartiality; the attacks also provided techies with an opportunity to engage in the renegotiation of meanings and social processes. Impartiality at the BBC is the

result of an intricate negotiation involving the BBC, its journalists, the government, the governors, and what it believes the public wants. But impartiality is more than that: the emergence of social media posed new challenges for impartiality and the coverage of the Mumbai attacks illustrates the challenge. What we see emerging following these events is the reconstruction of impartiality in social media contexts. This time, techies became architects of impartiality for the Corporation. The advent of new information technologies and the resulting logic of communication have allowed techies to play a strategic role in the reconstruction of impartiality, a role they did not have before.

THE NEW SYMBOLIC ARCHITECTURE OF IMPARTIALITY: THE ROLE OF TECHIES AND THE IMPACT ON EDITORIAL DECISIONS

Although structures are part of journalism, processes of interactions among individual agents have played a central role in the reconstruction of impartiality. Social media and techies have contributed to the new enhanced features of impartiality: verification, contextualization, and openness. By exploring those renewed features, we notice that at the BBC, techies have become more central to journalism as they understand and work with new formats of social media. Their temporal and spatial symbolism and unique media logic have become joined in the new architecture of impartiality and editorial decisions.

Techies have appropriated verification processes through the BBC structure, the creation of editorial guidelines and new journalistic practices. First, the structure of the BBC has allowed the UGC Hub to verify social media information prior to publishing it on BBC outlets. After verifying sources, the Hub communicates information via an Intranet to BBC departments. UGC Hub journalists also analyze social media material through the news-gathering expertise of the BBC at the BBC World Service, BBC Monitoring and BBC UGC Hub. For instance, journalists work “with our colleagues in BBC Arabic and BBC Monitoring to ascertain that accents and language are correct for the location” (Murray 2011). Journalists’ expertise and local knowledge generated by the BBC news-gathering structure also enable them to understand accents and nuances in language (Journalist, interview). The College of Journalism has also been a powerful entity to teach journalists how to use social media. Its courses discuss social media-specific challenges from editorial concerns to technical processes (Journalist, interview).

Second, techies have contributed to the creation of editorial guidelines to deal with social media. Since 2012, BBC editors instructed their journalists not to break news stories on Twitter before talking to their newsroom colleagues first, for example. The guideline insisted that journalists seek a second pair of eyes before updating messages on Twitter or Facebook (Journalist, interview).

Third, the Hub’s journalists have also generated renewed journalistic practices such as rigorous verification processes including accuracy over speed and forensic verification practices. For accuracy over speed, the Editorial Guidelines ask

journalists to apply due accuracy in their reporting before publishing content. For instance, in contrast with the way journalists handled social media during the Mumbai attacks coverage, BBC UGC Hub's Matthew Eltringham (2010)³ (quoted in McAthy 2010) argued that journalists should always verify social media material first by checking every image, video, or source before broadcasting. Reflecting Eltringham's vision, a journalist said that:

you have to be very careful with any kind of social media and check the veracity of it before publishing the information through BBC outlets. (Journalist interview)

Here we see a practice ushered in principally by techies, and the BBC Editorial Guidelines (1996) being rearticulated in a set of editorial decisions. The Hub and BBC journalists have also used forensic verification practices. These have been developed over time by journalists in the UGC Hub, and illustrate the risk-averse attitude of the BBC post-Hutton. UGC journalists use a comparative strategy by contrasting newly-received material with existing material. This process includes lateral and technical checks. Lateral checks include "Referencing locations against maps and existing images from, in particular, geo-located ones"; "Maintaining lists of previously verified material to act as reference for colleagues covering the stories"; "Does the story match up with what everybody else is saying?"; "Is this a repost?" Technical checks include image verification, and raise several questions: "Who owns the copyright?"; "Are there signs of editing?"; "What is the video quality?" and "Is this too good to be true?" (Murray 2011; Fieldwork 2011; Journalist interview 2011). These questions are specific to social media uses and have been developed mainly by techies with an acute understanding of social media tools. But journalists also use traditional journalistic practices, such as speaking to the source directly to ask the 5W questions "who what, where, why, when, how," and conducting background checks to verify individuals. UGC journalists consult experts on date verification to search for the original source of upload/sequences (Murray 2011).

When a journalist creates a story, he/she asks the 5W questions to contextualize and analyze news stories. As a story evolves, these questions become more specific. In a social media context, journalists also claim to add value to social media through contextualization and analysis, which reflect the wagon-wheel approach. For instance, a journalist can call a social media source to ask a question and add context to the social media information with information retrieved from that traditional journalistic practice (picking up the phone).

In this context, techies have developed editorial tactics such as labeling and linking to an online source. In a blog post, Herrmann cements the validity of the practice of labeling by suggesting not using Twitter or informational sources, but instead relying on facts as well as labeling, signposting, and keeping social media information separate from journalistic material (Herrmann in Newman 2009:9). Labeling involves stating the source of the information, such as a social media source or a website, radio, TV, Twitter, or Facebook. When journalists tweet, they can also add value by contextualizing their tweets. For example, @JonWilliams, World Newsgathering

Editor, tweeted about an Afghan couple stoning in 2011: “[a]fter 1st public stoning in Afghanistan since 2001 we revisit story couple executed for adultery by Taliban <http://bbc.in/cLL6he>” (January 2011). Williams added multimedia value and context to his tweet. Traditional structures, such as the BBC Trust, have encouraged contextualization in social media contexts. For example, the Trust published findings on impartiality and accuracy in the BBC’s coverage of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. The report on the Arab Spring said that BBC coverage of the events lacked authenticity and representativeness. The report concluded that the BBC was “generally impartial,” but needed more “breadth and context,” and authentication of social media material (BBC Trust 2012). Here, we notice the emergence of new journalistic practices defining impartiality ushered in by techies.

The use of social media has also prompted a new philosophy of editorial openness. For example, techies and managers have developed an editorial policy requiring journalists to acknowledge their mistakes by following a series of steps. When a journalist posts a tweet containing erroneous information, the tweet will remain on the thread. Instead of deleting the tweet, the guidelines for Twitter states that journalists generate a new tweet to supplement the original (erroneous) information, acknowledging the mistake or adding new information to the tweet. For instance, Sophie Brendel (@sophiebr), Head of Digital Communications, did not delete an erroneous tweet she had earlier posted; instead, she tweeted: “[a]pologies, previous tweet on BBC Online outage contained the wrong link. Correcting now” (July 13, 2012). The BBC also runs online platforms to discuss news production transparently. For example, launched on June 26, 2006 via a blog post by Helen Boaden, The Editors blog enables BBC editors to discuss issues arising in relation to news production (Boaden 2006). In May 2012, for approximately 90 minutes, the BBC News website showcased a picture purportedly of the Syrian massacre in Houla, but in reality taken a decade earlier in Iraq by Marco Di Lauro, a professional photographer working for Getty Images. Activists in Syria had sourced this picture and posted it on Twitter; the BBC published the picture with a disclaimer indicating that the image could not be verified. When it became clear that the photo was tagged incorrectly, Hamilton published an account of the process leading up to posting the picture on The Editors blog (Hamilton 2012). If the source of information cannot be confirmed, journalists could label and describe the source because the news retains public service value. Social Media Editor Hamilton writes that in some instances journalists still use the material and make their doubts clear. If journalists get something wrong, they will need to acknowledge and correct it.

By analyzing the mesostructure (Maines 1982), we notice that verification, contextualization, and transparency have become key practices of the new architecture of impartiality. This study shows that social media allowed journalists to reimagine impartiality. Social media has allowed techies to join in the negotiation of impartiality at the BBC. By generating new journalistic practices, techies have become architects of this norm. Although institutions are partly responsible for changes in journalism,

interactions in the media logic, particularly with the increasing importance of techies in those discussions and their ability to influence the structure and practices in the newsroom, have brought new features to impartiality.

DISCUSSION: CHANGES IN THE NATURE, PROCESS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF JOURNALISM

Looking back on the development of impartiality at the BBC, we notice a shift in BBC impartiality. The emergence of social media has contributed to the shape of impartiality and led to changes in power relations within the BBC. As techies gained knowledge of the media, they gained definitional powers within the organization. To come back to Altheide's (1996:666) framework, social media have given a space for techies to participate in the new architecture of the central norm of the Corporation: the nature, process, and consequences of impartiality. For example, Eltringham verified a tweet by Andy Carvin, NPR Social Media Editor, on whether the staff at TV7 in Tunisia had turned against President Ben Ali. Eltringham used the BBC Monitoring team's news-gathering expertise to verify the information. He practiced public service broadcasting, and found that the claim was false. Eltringham then tweeted the information to Carvin (Carvin e-mail exchange 2012; Journalist interview 2011). This example also reflects what Morrison and Tumber (1988) referred to as formats (in this case Twitter) structuring dialogue, temporality, and meaning. Journalists have responded to the logic of their bureaucratic environment, media technologies, and communication format, but there are people operating strategically in that ecology (Altheide 1996). Eltringham's interaction with Carvin on Twitter during the Arab Spring was possible because of the arrangement of new information technologies, formats, and the activity taking place. Similarly, the BBC's coverage of the Arab Spring involved an arrangement of elements: information technologies (social media), format (Twitter), and the activity taking place (the Arab Spring). The combination of those key elements affects the temporality and place of events. For example, journalists are able to practice journalism on social media platforms at the same time that a news story appears on the Ten O'clock News and online, and events can be covered worldwide 24/7. This practice also reflects BBC's Creative Future initiative and the "martini media" approach.

As techies gained definitional powers in the newsroom, they acquired sufficient capital to start affecting editorial practices and decisions about what to publish. Techies have developed structures (e.g. the UGC Hub, the BBC College of Journalism), editorial guidelines (Social Networking Guidelines, Twitter Guidelines, etc.) and journalistic practices (verification, contextualization, and openness) to manage social media. They have become central to social media activities at the BBC.⁴ These new developments are joined in the philosophy and changes behind BBC Creative Future. The daily practices of journalists as a lens and field of analysis enables researchers to show how social orders are produced and how people select

actions (Fine 2010:355). The pervasive use of social media has contributed to the nature; organization, and consequence of communication activities at the BBC (see Altheide 1996:666). This discussion shows that while social media and journalistic structures are important in shaping BBC impartiality, they are permeable boxes that journalists shape in time-space.

CONCLUSION: THE NEW LOGIC OF COMMUNICATION

This article has shown how journalists have responded strategically to the logic of the ecology of communication in time and space. One of the major discoveries of this article is that techies who gained understanding of social media have become more important in journalism. Their temporal and spatial place in social processes has become joined in the process leading to the reimagination of impartiality at the BBC. This change ushered in by techies has affected agenda-setting and editorial practices including verification, contextualization, and openness.

This case study confirms Altheide's (1996) ecology of communication framework. The emergence of new information technologies, in this case social media, have contributed to the nature, organization, and consequences of communication processes of the public broadcaster. New formats have given place to new practices such as covering the news across platforms; practicing journalism on social media platform; giving events like the Arab Spring great importance in time and space; and generating new beats and new understandings of what it means to be a public broadcaster. Technologies at the BBC are part of a media logic involving multiple elements, including public policy, market logic, journalists as agents, newsroom structure, and social media as a new format.

The study of mesostructure gives us a better understanding of how a process of negotiation leads to transformations in journalism. Structures are important in journalism but individual agents have the ability to act strategically within the logic of communication. The ecology of communication as framework enables researchers to understand processes of deliberation that have contributed to changes in meanings of public broadcasting. This framework has highlighted the role of actors as agents in shaping the future of journalism. The study of symbolic interactions and the emergence of social media in the newsroom enable us to form a set of new questions about public broadcasting and impartiality in British society. Far from imposing a completely new idea of what the BBC is or should be the negotiation of social media in the newsroom also reaffirms the BBC's original impartial identity: an impartial broadcaster independent of external political and commercial influences, providing quality journalism. The BBC's public broadcasting is defined by traditional words such as quality of content, independence, and publics. Here, the key words verification, contextualization, and openness take on important significance in defining the BBC's impartial role in social media contexts.

NOTES

1. *Creative Future* was a response to the 2006 White Paper and an editorial endeavor designed to deliver more value to its audiences. In this White Paper, the BBC's purposes included playing a leading role in technological development. *Creative Future* confirmed a set of five characteristics that should be displayed in all BBC content: high quality, challenging, original, innovative, and engaging. It recommended relaunching the BBC website and suggested that the website should incorporate more personalization, richer audio-visual, and user-generated content. The website set up was facilitated by a shift toward the Internet Protocol television (IPTV), starting in 1995, allowing video-on-demand (VOD), catch-up television, and live television online. Following the White Paper, the BBC put together a set of principles comprising an organisational shift in energies and resources into continuous news on TV, radio, broadband, and mobile by promoting a new pan-platform journalism strategy, consisting of mobile devices, putting 24/7 news on the web, broadband, TV, and radio.
2. Kevin Marsh divides impartiality at the BBC as follows: (1) look for the facts and opinions relevant to a particular story without any trace of bias or preconceptions; (2) gather the facts and opinions; (3) "consider and weigh those facts and opinions to come to a judgment, without bias or preconception, as to where the axis of debate lies and which are the important arguments on that axis."
3. At the time, Eltringham was Assistant Editor at Interactivity and Social Media Development at BBC News. He is now Executive Editor at BBC College of Journalism.
4. Foreign correspondents and regional offices still seek and receive social media material. But at the time of my research, the vast majority of social media activities in international news were centralized in London. Regions, such as Wales, were only starting to hire their own social media editors (Editor interview 2011).

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