The profession of journalism is changing as microblogs and blogs emerge as crucial sources of news. Twitter has recently become an important addition to the ecology in which journalism is practiced. However, Twitter does not merely replicate the practice of traditional journalism; rather, it opens up new avenues and creates new challenges. Twitter allows for direct interaction with the public, inserting of opinions alongside news and observations, “retweeting,” and linking to audiovisual materials. This study examines the Twitter feeds of reporters Ayman Mohyeldin, Jack Shenker, and Ben Wedeman during the Egyptian Revolution (January-February 2011) and compares them to the transcripts and articles that the reporter formally produced. The results show that a journalist is more likely to use a personal voice in a Twitter feed in comparison to the “professional” product and that journalists on Twitter interact directly with the public to a significant degree.

Headings:

Twitter (Web site)

Content Analysis

Journalism

Use studies--social networks
TWITTER IN JOURNALISM: JOURNALISTS’ PERSONAL VOICE AND THE USE OF TWITTER AS A NEWS-SHARING PLATFORM

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Approved by

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INTRODUCTION

When the Internet came into the hands of the public in the 1990s, it would have been difficult to envision the changes it would make in the world of information. A little over two decades have passed since the first commercial provider of dial-up Internet, a company called “The World,” came online. (Zakon, 2010) We have moved from a world of online websites jostling for attention in their roles as billboards for the interests of their designers (or platforms for selling the products of their inventors) in the ‘90s to today’s Web 2.0. Web 2.0 has come to signify the evolution of the web toward more participatory platforms in which user-generated content within highly-interactive environments becomes the main product. (O’Reilly, 2005) Twitter is a Web 2.0 platform that has become increasingly important for journalism. In this paper, I will analyze the voice of journalists on Twitter as a news-sharing platform and compare their Tweets with their traditional products, such as filed reports or broadcasts.

Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to post short 140 character “tweets” which are shared with anyone who chooses to “follow” them. Its 140-character limit makes each message easy to digest for other readers or “followers,” as well as easy to circulate by Internet or text message, as it stays well within the limits of SMS guidelines. Twitter conventions allow for conversations as well as “retweeting” of messages, which makes it suitable for a variety of information sharing applications. Twitter’s application programming interface (API) also encourages circulation, because it
permits users to access Twitter not only via computer but also through portable electronic devices like mobile phones, tablets, and PSP devices. Twitter posts, or “tweets,” are also findable by Internet search engines.

Once a user name is created, the interface presents the user with a front page. The page displays the latest updates of the groups or individuals the user has elected to follow, as selected during the user registration process. Above the list, or “feed,” is locate a text entry box above which Twitter asks, “What’s happening?” To those who were around and online during the development of Facebook, it is strongly reminiscent of the Facebook status update.

However, Twitter’s real strength comes from the ability of its population to create what Lotan, et. al. (2011) refer to as “information flows.” Information flows are rapid information exchanges that move along a pathway of connected users. Twitter has several tools that facilitate such information exchanges. The most basic is a user’s home screen, which lists in reverse chronological order the tweets of other Twitter users that the user follows. If a user wishes to see older tweets, they need only scroll down. If they wish to view only the tweets of a specific individual or group, they need only select their name or title from the feed. The user can also select a tweet that they wish to share and, with the click of their cursor, can “retweet” it. Retweeting another user’s tweet is sharing it with one’s own followers; the tweet appears on the feed of the user who retweeted it, citing the original Twitterer as the source. The retweeted message is then visible to everyone following the user.

RawyaRageh
Judge separates cases of #Adly & #Mubarak again. #Mubaraktrial #Egypt
5 Aug
Retweeted by AymanM
Another powerful tool for information sharing is the hashtag. A hashtag is a word or phrase (typed without spaces) preceded by the ‘#’ sign. If a hashtag is created for a subject, it is possible for a user to search for that subject, using the word or phrase behind the ‘#’ symbol, and pull up every tweet in which it is used. Selecting the hashtag in a tweet also draws up a reverse chronological list of every tweet that contains the hashtag. Often individuals who want to gather information create a hashtag specifically for the purpose of amalgamating subject-relevant statements from the site. Al Jazeera English, for example, can use the hashtag #WhenMusharrafReturnsToPakistan to collect the tweets of users who have made statements detailing their thoughts of what will happen once Musharraf returned to Pakistan from his exile.

Twitter also provides users with quick access to the most popular subjects on the site. It amalgamates both popular hashtags and popular phrases to create a list of the top ‘Trending’ topics of the moment. It also allows Twitter users focus on global, national or regional trends based on their preference. Users can then use these phrases in their own tweets, adding their opinions or statements to those already in existence and expanding the pool of commentators further. They can also select a topic from the list and view a reverse chronological feed of related tweets, which they can then retweet.
Twitter users can also use one of the many Twitter platforms like Tweetdeck to further organize their lists of followers and hashtags of interest. Along with multi-device accessibility, Twitter’s simple but flexible platform allows for rapid sharing of information as well as conversations among its users.

**Twitter and Journalism**

Twitter provides a platform that journalists can use in multiple ways. Journalists can use the service to publicize their observations and stories, engage in conversations, or to harness news from “citizen-journalists” or experts around the world who are tweeting about newsworthy events. A journalist at the scene of an event can tweet about their own observations, retweet those of people as they decides their comments are relevant to the story, provide links to other news stories, ask questions to their followers and engage them in conversations, or express opinions or make personal remarks.

Two additional tools for journalists are hashtags and trends. Rather than keeping an eye on the stories run by competing news agencies, or trying to ascertain where public interest lies based on editorials and opinion pieces, journalists now have an international pool of constantly contributing informants to draw from. The blogging and microblogging communities have given some individuals and groups that have been
little-heard in the past a louder voice. Those who have been able to benefit from the program have found that their voice is more prevalent and permanent than it might have been in the past, in conversations overheard and points raised at town hall meetings.

Groups that are able to successfully utilize Twitter are able to spotlight issues they view as important, and to share their concerns with larger populations. The more popular and shared the concern, the more visible it becomes in Twitter’s trends and individual tweets.

Journalists on Twitter are also able to pick individuals and groups to follow. They can create a pool of experts with a focus on their own field of reporting, which could include activists, relevant organizations, and subject authorities. This is especially useful in situations that involve developing international news, that are in locations journalists may not be able to immediately access, or in situations where overtly interviewing participants or witnesses is difficult or dangerous.

While Twitter has the ability to enable journalistic improvement, it may compete with journalism’s formal final product, the news story. In a world where print journalism is rapidly losing subscribers and journalists and reporters are fighting to hold public attention in the face of free resources online, Twitter and other blogs and microblogs have the power to act as news sources of their own. An argument for the continued need for journalists in the face of the thousands of on-the-minute updaters online is that information provided by journalists is better, “more factual,” and “more objective” than what can be found on personal information feeds. (Jones, 2009) Journalists also use these tools to share data, which brings into question their role on sites like Twitter. Also, information sources on Twitter can be overwhelming and hard to accurately judge for the casual user; hence, journalists can bring their expertise to their use of the platform.
Twitter in Crisis Situations

Twitter has been used by journalists and citizen journalists as a tool for providing updates during fast-breaking and crises situations several times in the recent past. In 2009, Twitter users were posting updates on the protests that followed the Iranian election. Also in 2009, Twitter was the first platform that reported on U.S. Airways Flight 1549’s landing in the Hudson, as tweeted by ferry passenger Janis Krums.

In 2010, it was used for updates, collaboration and crisis mapping during the Haitian earthquake and its fallout. In 2011, Twitter users followed closely and reported about the Gabrielle Giffords shooting. The weakness that has become apparent in crisis
situations is not Twitter’s character limitations, which keep updates short, but the easy accessibility of the program itself, which makes it simple for anyone to post updates and subsequently results in a flooding of the site with data. It can be difficult for a user who wants to peruse Twitter for news to ascertain what information is the most important.

Again, this brings into question the role of the blogs and microblogs that are maintained and written by journalists. While both journalists and news organizations have access to the information pool of Twitter, information feeds posted by news organizations are often links to or abstracts of articles or reports on their main website. (Holcomb, Gross and Mitchell, 2011) Journalists who tweet in first person are more likely to conduct conversation through their profiles, respond to comments, elicit information and answer questions. This overlap of journalistic sharing of data and individualized social interaction does not fit easily into journalism’s ascribed formats and raises new questions about standards of impersonality and the lack of “authorial” personal-voice which dominates traditional journalism.

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution can be considered a watershed movement for the use of Twitter for journalism. In many ways, the Egyptian uprising was well-suited to Twitter’s strengths. It was fast-developing, and in a non-US location where it was difficult or dangerous to personally attend and/or interview participants. When protesters took to the streets on January 25th, many of the journalists that would later arrive on the scene were still in Tunisia, reporting on the fallout of its revolution. Twitter gave them access to events on the ground as reported by citizens with cell phones and laptops before the journalists had even bought plane tickets to Cairo.
This paper aims to qualitatively compare a reporter’s tweets and his or her formal journalistic “finished” product through three separate case studies, involving Ayman Mohyeldin of Al Jazeera English, Jack Shenker of The Guardian and Ben Wedeman of CNN. Each reporter’s tweets between the beginning of the protests on January 25, 2011 to former President Mubarak’s resignation on February 11, 2011 have been examined, categorized and compared to the official reports the journalists produced for their news organizations to broadcast or print during the same period.
LITERATURE REVIEW

While the changing field and future of journalism has been debated since the 90s (Cross, 2009; Sicha, 2009), Twitter has only recently come into the spotlight, because it is a recent platform. Because of this, many of the works discussed here involve not so much definitive statements and empirical studies of the network, but instead the perspectives represented in the debate. In this section I review articles about the role of journalism as related to Twitter, what role journalists play as actors on the Twitter platform and the steps that journalistic organizations are taking to regulate the use of Twitter by journalists.

Twitter and Journalism

While there have yet to be any studies on the effect of Twitter on trends in journalism, there has been an plenty written debating the potential benefits and detriments of online social networks (OSNs). Cizek (2009) argues that technological advances, including OSNs like Twitter, are enforcers of better and more accurate journalism. He claims that they advance the voice of the people in the face of the desires of wealthy organizations or oppressive governments. The Egyptian Revolution provides one example where the use of Twitter by activists and protestors enabled them to organize and facilitate knowledge sharing about what was happening in Cairo. (Naughton, 2011)

In The Twitter Revolution (2009), Farhi warns against the hazards of journalists tweeting unconfirmed “scoops,” using Washington Post book critic Ron Charles as an example. In March 2009, Charles tweeted that a source had informed him of a change in the publishing schedule or the New Yorker: “Frequent contributor tells me the New
Yorker is considering switch biweekly or monthly. Recession pains.” Minutes later, when Charles was reliably informed via email that no such consideration was in the works, it was too late. He states that “within 10 minutes … ‘it seemed like the whole Internet went crazy. It was terrifying.’” (31) Because Charles’ followers believed him to be a reliable source, they treated his tweet as though it were fact, and the Chicago City Paper and the New York Observer both reported on the story. Ultimately, the New Yorker had to make an official statement to put an end to the rumor.

Twitter’s own structure and design contribute to the risk of spread of inaccurate information. While there are ways to identify “good” sources online, particularly those which provide users with a bibliography of sources referenced, the tactics which can be used on tweets are still emerging and are not necessarily standardized or available to the wider public in an accessible manner. Clemmitt (2008) discusses the ways in which Internet users can assess websites in his article on Internet accuracy. Bibliographies and extensive source citations are impossible with the tweets’ 140-character limit. Evaluating the professionalism of the site’s design, another way in which Internet users assess content, is not reliable when page formatting on Twitter is frequently based entirely on the site’s defaults. There are also ways for users to gauge source accuracy that simply don’t apply to Twitter. The “.com” URL is not indicative of informational accuracy in the way in which a message posted on a “.gov” or “.org” site would be. Checking for typos is an exercise in futility because of the necessary use of text-speak. The flood of information makes it more difficult to filter through in order to find relevant and accurate tweets.
The issue is, as Clemmitt states, not that Internet users are intentionally spreading falsehoods, but instead that they make statements that contain small errors that escape notice. If an individual is using a source they trust (following either a favored organization or an individual they respect and view as knowledgeable) they are unlikely to cross-check the statements that their source makes.

Because of fear of repeat situations like Charles’, some have suggested that Twitter should be used like a microphone, with organizations tweeting only confirmed information. Briggs discusses the new word of mouth (“word of link”) that is developing on OSNs like Twitter. (2011) He suggests that this tendency to share links to articles and resources can be better for news organizations in the long run because it makes them think long-term about how to build a loyal audience. In so doing, the organizations are more likely to produce dependable, interesting resources, particularly with studies indicating that users who follow links posted by their network tend to linger on the web page longer than those who are browsing news sources of their own inclination.

The detriment of using Twitter solely as a source for link sharing is that by limiting tweets to links to edited and approved articles, the advantages provided by its speed, interactivity and currency are hobbled. Farhi (2009) points out that Twitter is excellent for publishing breaking news or “scoops” because of the speed and brevity with which posts can be made. Quoting Stoltz, he states that Twitter

… works best in situations where the story is changing so fast that mainstream media can’t assemble all the facts at once … the kinds of stories where time is important and facts are scattered. (27)

Multiple voices (Craighenry, 2011; Hermida, 2010; Ludtke, 2010; Sylvester, 2011) support this argument, and emphasis is placed on the idea that Twitter provides an
arena for a progression of “snapshots” of events that change quickly over time or develop with great rapidity. While court cases and political debates are both discussed examples where Twitter can be useful, revolutions are another situation where the site, which Hermida describes as lightweight, real time, and asynchronous, can be useful. Ludtke even goes so far as to note that journalists can feel as though even reporting moment-to-moment via Twitter can be too slow for the public’s vociferous appetite for up-to-the-minute updates on subjects of their interest.

Overholser (2009) approaches the debate from a different angle, arguing that viewing social media as a “tool” is an incorrect assessment of its role in journalism. Instead she describes it as part of the environment in which journalism exists, in which journalism is participating in it because it must. Her assertions provide a lense through which to consider the opinions of other debaters, because it does appear that increased engagement with OSNs is an unavoidable decision for news organizations.

**Journalists and Twitter**

While news organizations tend to use Twitter as a microphone for their products, posting news without any real conversation with their followers, journalists play a different role on Twitter. (Holcomb et al., 2011) They are more likely to have individuals and organizations that they follow, from which they can pull news. Farhi (2009) asserts that Twitter can be used as a type of information network, one which journalists can use for inquiries or as a real time tip sheet. If a feed is “pruned” to include experts, field leaders and peers, the OSN can act as a pool of information.

Crawford (2011) discusses the use of Twitter by news professionals in her *News to me: Twitter and the personal networking of news*. She addresses the issues of using
Twitter as a one-way street for information dissemination by referring to the 2009 Iranian elections and the riots it incited. Despite a strong shift of attention to these events by their Twitter audience, CNN failed to sufficiently cover the story. There was such an obvious discrepancy between audience interests and CNN’s reporting that a new hashtag, ‘#CNNfail,’ was created to refer to the lack of coverage. If CNN had followed some of its followers, it might have been quicker to recognize the interests of the populous.

Journalists, unlike the organizations that employ them, are more likely to maintain a two-way information pathway between themselves and their followers. Crawford asserts that there are even benefits to conversational exchanges on Twitter in addition to news-specific exchanges, in that they cement the social bonds on the OSN between journalists and their followers. Quoting Shirky,

[The model of] a group of accredited professionals deciding what becomes news and what doesn’t … has now been set aside in favor of a much more soft-focus, kind of permeable membrane-oriented way of handling or thinking about the news. (Juskalian, ‘Interview with Clay Shirky, part II’, 2009)

The implication is that news itself is changing to include the audience in the conversation as to what qualifies for media attention.

Lewis (2011) takes a closer look at the changing role of journalists. Because Twitter users can skim tweets to gain something of a birds-eye view of the occurrences of the day, it is no longer necessary to be on the site of an event to grasp what is happening. This can be particularly useful when dealing with breaking or international news. He asserts that we should consider new identities for the journalists who absorb, process, and disseminate information that they find online, condensing and simplifying the muddle of Twitter into quick, concise tweets. He also suggests the idea of “grey news,” or news
which the public has found online but has yet to be confirmed as factual by mainstream media. Lewis’s post raises but does not answer the question as to whether or not this means that news, which we have so long depended on to be trustworthy, is no longer as dependable a source as once it was.

In *Bloggerati, Twitterati*, Cross (2011) outlines the line that journalists walk when competing with and participating in Twitter news announcements. She states that Twitter is better than mainstream media for following “breaking news and fast-moving, up-to-the-minute content,” while they draw an “active, interested audience” with more intimate, subjective perspectives on the news. (83) At the same time, Twitter-based journalism can’t necessarily match the in-depth coverage and longer-term investigative reporting provided by mainstream media.

The broader range of information shared on Twitter, along with the existence of conversational flows between the journalists and other users and the addition of personal updates creates new questions in terms of journalists and Twitter. As Ron Charles posed the question the most concisely: “Am I reporter [when tweeting]? Am I an editor? Am I a critic? Or am I just talking among friends?” (Farhi, 31, 2009) Overholser believes that “being there and being accurate” are keys to professional journalism that journalists are no longer achieving. She asserts that the duty of a journalist who uses social media is to bring the journalistic features of accuracy, proportionality, fairness, and emphasis on a broad range of voices to a conversation where “everybody in the debate sounds like a 19-year-old privileged male.” She suggests that in the face of “everybody,” journalism students must be better educated to confront these new challenges:

Integrating the questions and issues and tools into everyday classroom discussion is critical. When the focus is on journalistic ethics, the
geopolitical implications of social networks’ role belong in that
discussion. In lessons revolving around entrepreneurial journalism, there
needs to be woven into the conversation the issue of how journalists
handle their personal engagement in social networks. Along with this
would come the discussion of how to ‘brand’ themselves for a future that
is likely to include a lot of independent activity. (6)

Changes in the education of journalism students seem an increasingly likely scenario,
with the development of more classes like DePaul University’s course, ‘Digital editing:
From breaking news to tweets.’ (Tweet U, 2009)

Overholser’s assertions highlight the necessity of considering the traditional role
of the ‘impersonal’ voice of journalists in light of Twitter. When one has followers that
may agree with one’s personal leanings, it is arguably easier to promote news that is well-
received by one’s followers. Jones (2009) discusses the need for impartiality, stating that
a journalist must act as “an honest broker of the news.” He outlines the existing debate
over the origin of the ideal of objectivity, and touches on the question of its definition
inside the field. “As a group,” he argues, “journalists probably have more opinions than
most.” This argument is necessary to consider when assessing the risk of publishing
inaccurate or biased information under a trusted name, and the damage to the reputation
of the journalist and their employer that might result. However, Jones argues “objectivity
does not require that journalists be blank slates free of bias. In fact, objectivity is
necessary precisely because [sic] they are biased.” (87) He acknowledges that his
argument opposes those who believe that journalists must be without bias in order to be
objective, and takes a stand against those like Jeff Jarvis, who believes objectivity to be
“a false high standard that we could not help but fail,” (83) or who argue that people no
longer want objective journalism, but instead journalism with an individual voice.
A recent work on a journalist’s role in news making on Twitter during the Egyptian revolution is the study ‘The revolutions were tweeted.’ (Lotan et. al., 2011) The study involved an examination of data flows on Twitter during one week each of the Tunisian and the Egyptian revolution. Twitter is examined “as a key source for real-time logistical coordination, information and discussion among people both within the Middle East and North Africa … and across the globe.” (1377) The study asserts that mainstream journalists tend to cater toward an audience of “friendly critics” rather than the public as a whole, while networked news or news extracted from or posted on OSNs like Twitter tends to draw from a networked set of actors.

The article discusses some of the issues faced by actors using Twitter for news. Journalists on Twitter do not segregate personal tweets and news-related, making the microblogging stream more complex for the casual reader. It can also be difficult for the online population to discern authority figures or professionals in the microblog’s environment. At the same time, Twitter enables “information cascades,” or shared information without contribution by the user, via retweets. The Trending Topics section of a user’s homepage also makes it easier for information cascades to occur by drawing the attention of a user to the top stories of the moment. It is these information cascades that the study focused on, in an attempt to ascertain the role that Twitter played in sharing information during the revolutions.

Of the information cascade samples taken from the Egyptian revolution in Lotan et. al. (2011), journalists made up 14% of the contributing actors, and were one of the top three groupings of actor-types to contribute to information flows. They also had a large participant group following them and retweeting the information they produced. In other
words, journalists were active participants in spreading information during the Egyptian revolution. They showed a higher tendency to retweet data from other journalists than from other actors, perhaps indicating implied trust in individuals that they viewed as professional peers. Finally, the data showed that journalists, along with other individual actives, were more likely to be information disseminators than organizations (including mainstream media organizations).

What this indicates is that not only are journalists acting as information disseminators on Twitter, but they may play a greater role in information flows during crises than mainstream media organizations that also use Twitter to share news. This may be because they tend to follow field experts and activists, while organizations are less likely to attend to or retweet the tweets of their followers. (Holcomb et al., 2011) It may be because journalists are able to cultivate relationships with their followers on an individual basis, making their followers more inclined to share information which they have tweeted.

**Social Media Guidelines in Journalism**

Issues of objectivity, already debated in the world of journalism, are complex when dealing with journalism on Twitter. The OSN creates an environment where there is a constant feed of information from users, and the identity of the journalist on an OSN is, as Ron Charles noted, can be unclear as to whether it is that of an individual or a professional. The differentiating opinions on the matter became clear in the backlash over the Associated Press’s recent change in their Social Media Policy (2011, November 3). The policy already included a section requesting that staff members:

… be mindful that the opinions he or she expresses may damage the AP’s reputation as an unbiased source of news. [E]mployees must refrain from
declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum and must not take part in demonstrations in support of causes or movements. (2)

In the update, it had been expanded to include a section dealing with retweets:

Retweets, like tweets, should not be written in a way that looks like you’re expressing a personal opinion on the issues of the day … we can judiciously retweet opinionated material if we make clear we’re simply reporting it, much as we would quote it in a story. … These cautions apply even if you say on your Twitter profile that retweets do not constitute endorsements. (2-3)

While journalists reacted with a mixture of criticism and acceptance (Sonderman, 2011), Ingram (2011) and Watling (2011) spoke out from the opposing schools of thought about the need for such restrictions. Watling argues that the policy should be helpful, because “[i]t’s offering advice to avoid the appearance of bias, [sic] which (hopefully) all journalists can tell you is nearly as important as actually avoiding bias to begin with.” Ingram, however, argues that journalists have opinions and should not be expected to pretend otherwise, and that implying that it is necessary to deliver news without bias is insulting to the intelligence of an audience that is capable of perceiving what contains an opinion and what does not. “Given that kind of treatment,” he states, “many of those looking for news are likely to migrate to sources that admit they have views on events.” These different lines of thought emphasize the need to understand how journalists use their Twitter accounts in contrast to their professional products.
METHODOLOGY

For this study, the Twitter feeds of Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman, between the dates of January 24, 2011 and February 11, 2011 were downloaded from Twitter’s website. Each tweet was categorized based on its origin (a direct tweet to followers, retweet, or reply), its content, and the type of content that any links included in the tweet led to. While every tweet was categorized for origin and content, a tweet was only marked for links if a link was included in the text of the message.

The three categories for which tweets were marked for origin were: ‘Statement,’ ‘Retweet,’ and ‘@’. ‘Statements’ were tweets posted by the reporter and addressed to the Twitter public rather than one particular recipient. ‘Retweets’ were messages in the feed that originated from another user. ‘@’ tweets were public tweets posted by the reporter and directed at another Twitterer, as indicated by ‘@username’ typed in the front of the tweet.

The second categorization set, ‘Content,’ was used to designate the nature of each tweet. There were eight separate labels used: ‘News,’ ‘News and Opinion,’ ‘Opinion,’ ‘Personal,’ ‘Factual Question,’ ‘Opinionated Question,’ ‘Address to Populous’ and ‘Response.’ ‘News’ was the label used to encompass factual updates: changes in the situation the journalist was reporting, news that the journalist had become aware of, and observations about their surroundings or the events occurring.

The ‘News and Opinion’ category was used for tweets that contained news, but also involved an expression of the Twitterer’s opinion about the news in question.
A tweet labeled ‘Opinion’ expressed only the opinion of the user.

‘Personal’ tweets were statements that were not news or event related.

‘Factual Question’ and ‘Opinionated Question’ were used to categorize tweets that addressed the journalist’s followers, either in an open-question format that invited response, or in a closed-question format that invited agreement or implied a point.

Tweets categorized as ‘Address to the Populous’ were tweets meant to inspire the reporter’s followers to react in a certain way.
Finally, ‘Response’ tweets were labeled to indicate tweets either written by the journalist or to the journalist, with a message that did not relate to the news in any ascertainable way but were clearly responses to statements or questions made by the user to whom they were addressed.

The third set of categories dealt with the destinations of links posted in tweets. The three divisions were ‘Article,’ ‘Audio/Video,’ and ‘Photo.’ These categories were applied regardless of the origin or content of the tweet.

Before any assessment was done, two tweets were removed from consideration because they appeared to have been posted in error. One tweet was dated January 27 from Mohyeldin’s feed, and the other was dated February 6 from Wedeman’s feed. Screengrabs of the tweets are visible in Appendix F.

After the tweets were categorized, samples were taken from the final professional reports produced by each journalist between January 24, 2011 and February 11, 2011. Transcripts of news broadcasts were used for Wedeman and Mohyeldin, while articles authored by Shenker were used for his part in the study. Because there were no published transcripts available from Al Jazeera English, broadcasts by Mohyeldin were harvested from the web and transcribed. The transcriptions can be found in Appendix E.

Of the thirty articles Shenker authored and co-authored in the given time period, twenty were randomly selected for testing by numbering them one through thirty and selecting using a random number generator. Wedeman had twenty transcriptions available, and they were all assessed. Searches for recordings of Mohyeldin’s broadcasts during the revolution resulted in only five available recordings, and they were all transcribed for assessment. Once articles and transcriptions had been selected, each was
divided by sentence, and each sentence was assessed using the same categories of content that were used for the tweets. There were two additional categories considered in this portion of the assessment. The category for ‘Conversation and Inaudible’ was added in order to handle sentences in transcriptions that were marked as partially inaudible and therefore not possible to accurately assess, or which were a conversational exchange between reporter and news anchor. The second category added was ‘Quotes,’ used to enable tallying of the direct quotes that each journalist used in his reports.
RESULTS

**Tweets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>67.92%</td>
<td>72.22%</td>
<td>62.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retweet</td>
<td>14.72%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>35.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘@’</td>
<td>17.36%</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
<td>1.96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Distribution of Tweet Origins

As is visible in Figure 1, the majority of tweets for each journalist were statements, with Shenker, Mohyeldin, and then Wedeman with the highest to lowest percentages. Mohyeldin was the only journalist of the three to address other users more than he retweeted, and Wedeman was the most likely to retweet another user’s message, a full 13.69% more of his tweets made up of retweets than Shenker, the runner-up. Graphic representations of these values can be found in Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>68.30%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>70.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Opinion</td>
<td>4.91%</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>10.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>4.91%</td>
<td>18.25%</td>
<td>10.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>4.53%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual Question</td>
<td>1.13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinionated Question</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address to Populous</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>12.08%</td>
<td>2.38%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Distribution of Tweet Content

Figure 2 represents the divisions of content in each journalist’s feed. ‘News’ tweets, which contain news, direct observations or statements made about ongoing events, made up the majority of each feed, with both Mohyeldin and Wedeman tweeting more direct observations than Shenker. More than a quarter of Shenker’s feed was made up of ‘Opinion,’ and he also led with the most tweets dedicated to ‘News and Opinion.’
Wedeman was second most likely of the three to use his feed to tweet or retweet ‘Opinion’ and ‘News and Opinion.’ None of the journalists had strong showings in asking questions of their audience, though Wedeman was more inclined to ask opinionated questions than his cohorts. Shenker asked no factual questions at all. Mohyeldin was almost twice as likely to tweet ‘Personal’ messages as either Shenker or Wedeman. He was by far the most active journalist to use his feed to respond to his audience, with a full 12.08% of tweets dedicated to that purpose. Graphic representations of these values can be found in Appendix B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>4.53%</td>
<td>20.63%</td>
<td>4.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/Video</td>
<td>3.77%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>1.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>1.51%</td>
<td>0.79%</td>
<td>0.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.81%</td>
<td>22.21%</td>
<td>5.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3. Distribution of Links in Tweets**

Figure 3 represents the percentage of tweets in each journalists’ feed that contains links. While all Shenker and Wedeman have low percentages of links to audio and video, Mohyeldin linked to audio/video almost as much as he did articles. Wedeman linked to articles more frequently than any other media. Shenker, on the other hand, tended to link to articles twenty times more than either ‘Audio/Video’ or ‘Photos.’ He has the highest ratio of links to tweets of the three journalists, with 22.21% of his tweets containing links. This is more than double Mohyeldin’s ratio, and just less than four times as high as Wedeman’s ratio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
<td>72.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/Video</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>4.55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4. Distribution of Tweet Link Destinations**
Figure 4 represents ratio of link destinations to the number of links for each journalist. While links to articles make up the majority of link destinations for each of them, Mohyeldin linked to audio and video nearly as frequently. Wedeman linked to articles more frequently than audio and video, but still has a strong showing in that category. Alternately, Shenker’s use of links shows clear tendencies to linking to articles more than any other type of media. Of the categories, photos are least linked to for each journalist. Graphic representations of the distribution of link destinations for each journalist can be found in Appendix C.

**Tweets: Anomalies**

While categorizing the feeds, it became apparent that there were tweets in each feed (11 tweets out of 265 for Mohyeldin, 2 tweets of 126 for Shenker and 12 of 765 for Wedeman) that were closely related to more than one category of Content. In these situations, close scrutiny was awarded each of the tweets in question and they were subsequently marked as belonging to the group that they seemed to be more related to.

**Transcripts and Articles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>87.2%</td>
<td>97.82%</td>
<td>86.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News and Opinion</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.64%</td>
<td>2.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0.55%</td>
<td>3.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation or Inaudible</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5. Distribution of Transcript and Article Content**

The work of all three journalists consisted mainly of News, though Shenker had the highest ratio of sentence which were coded as news, with less than 3% of the sentences in his reports categorized as ‘Opinion’ or ‘News and Opinion.’ Mohyeldin and
Wedeman’s results were similar to one another, with small portions of their work used for ‘News and Opinion,’ (respectively 3.2% and 2.45%) ‘Opinion,’ (4.8% and 3.26%) or ‘Conversational or Inaudible’ (4.8% and 7.46%) exchanges with other anchors.

Wedeman was the only journalist to use any ‘Personal’ information in his reports.

Graphic representations of these values can be found in Appendix D.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mohyeldin</th>
<th>Shenker</th>
<th>Wedeman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quotes</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>44.98%</td>
<td>10.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Quotes</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>55.02%</td>
<td>89.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6. Distribution of Quotes in Transcripts and Articles**

The final aspect of the reports that was examined was the presence of direct quotations, which needed closer inspection mainly due to the different parameters Shenker’s medium of print journalism and Mohyeldin and Wedeman’s medium of broadcasts. Figure 6 displays the results. There are distinct differences between the journalists in this section, with Mohyeldin using no quotes, and Shenker using quotes for nearly half of his material. Wedeman used quotes in a portion of his reports, as the transcripts included pre-recorded statements from citizens.
DISCUSSION

Results

Using Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman as case studies, we are provided with a glimpse of how journalists use their Twitter feeds. While all three feeds were made up of a majority of news-related tweets and retweets, each had a strong presence of personal opinion. Mohyeldin expressed his opinion the least of the three, with 10.57% of his tweets involving his personal feelings, while this portion for Shenker and Wedeman’s feeds 30.94% and 22.23%, respectively. This is despite the higher tendency that Mohyeldin displayed for responding to his audience, with a slightly higher propensity for addressing his audience, and a significantly higher use of tweets for responding to questions. Interestingly, this is also despite Mohyeldin’s employment by Al Jazeera, a media producer which is recognized as having a more opinionated voice and a more visible point-of-view than The Guardian or CNN, which both subscribe more closely to the traditional model of journalism with no explicit point-of-view.

Alternately, both Shenker and Wedeman were more inclined to retweet, and therefore share, the tweets of other users. Wedeman displayed the strongest tendency to retweet, with more than a third of his feed consisting of such posts. Despite retweeting less than Wedeman, Shenker was still more than twice as likely to retweet as Mohyeldin. While Mohyeldin appears to be more communicative in the Twitter community, Shenker and Wedeman seem more inclined to use the community as a pool of sources.

When comparing the journalists’ feeds to their professional work, the results become more complex. Shenker, by far the most likely journalist to express opinion in his feed, is the least likely to do so in his articles. Mohyeldin and Wedeman both express
their opinion in their transcripts. The difference between the Shenker’s articles and the other two journalists’ broadcast transcripts may be caused mainly by the medium in which they are reporting. While Shenker is a print journalist with the ability to draft and edit what he produces before it is published, Mohyeldin and Wedeman were reporting, often live, on events that were taking place around them. They were also asked by the anchors with whom they were communicating to express their impressions and understanding of the situation on which they were reporting.

The percentage of quotes used by Shenker in comparison to the amount he retweets is also worth consideration. While nearly half of his articles consist of quotes, Wedeman retweets considerably more in his Twitter feed. It is possible that this indicates that Shenker filters retweets closely, sharing tweets only of those he depends on as being reliable sources, as he cannot cite identities in the same manner he does in his articles. Mohyeldin and Wedeman, on the other hand, often reporting in live, contentious situations, are either disinclined or less able to quote individuals in the same way that they retweet on their Twitter feeds. Wedeman’s higher tendency to use quotes in his transcript arises from two uses of pre-recorded reports, which were taped and then discussed live, rather than quotes made while broadcasting live.

**Implications**

While significant portions of the journalists’ feeds were dedicated to reporting the news, none of them came close to the percentages of news related in their professional reports, and there were significant contributions of opinion in each feed. It is clear that on Twitter, journalists do not identify themselves solely as impersonal professionals, but
instead identify as a combination of citizen and professional with their own voice as part of the mix.

Concerns have been expressed about how personal tweets will be received by the journalist’s audience as well as the possibility of inaccurate tweets, retweeting contentious opinions and interacting with broad sections of the population about the content of a particular news story. If the audience expects the journalist have only an impersonal voice, then it is clear that they will not find this on Twitter. More complicated, perhaps, are the tweets that included a combination of factual news reports and the opinions of the journalist on the event, as these do not have a correspondence in traditional journalism where news desks and editorial/op-ed pages are more strictly divided. It is possible that a reader might find it difficult to separate what is the opinion of the reporter and what is the actual report. If an audience feels misled or that its expectations have been violated, it is possible that the employer of the journalist in question might suffer from the reactions thereof.

There is also an issue of with the effect of the strength of the opinions expressed. While we could not go into details in this study, Shenker, who was most likely to insert his opinions in his feed, was often commenting on what he thought of a news article he was linking while Wedeman was more inclined to express his thoughts and emotions regarding how the protest and the government’s reactions were being handled, and tended to use stronger wording than did Shenker.

There does not seem to be a direct correlation between a journalists’ communication with his audience and the increase of non-impersonal tweets. Mohyeldin communicated most closely with his followers, requesting information and sharing news
with individual users more frequently than did Shenker or Wedeman, but he was also the least likely to express his opinion in his posts. Conversational tendencies do not, therefore, by necessity decrease the ‘impersonal voice’ of reporting. Neither does it imply that the journalist is ignoring the thoughts of users on Twitter: Wedeman, the least likely to address other users on his feed, was the most likely to retweet the updates of other Twitter users.

**Limitations**

This study contained several limitations. Only three journalists were selected for study out of the hundreds that use Twitter’s platform. Only one journalist of the three was a print journalist, and no journalists who specialized in radio broadcast were examined. While all of the articles and transcripts by Shenker and Wedeman were available for assessment, only a portion of Mohyeldin’s recordings could be accessed. For Mohyeldin and Wedeman, the use of transcripts makes it difficult to ascertain if their opinions were expressed in their professional reports through tonal quality or facial expressions. It is also difficult to examine whether or not the choice of wording in the journalists’ professional reports and their Twitter feeds indicated a personal bias. Neither does this study indicate whether the articles, audio and video, and photographs which each journalist linked had a bias. While Shenker was the most likely of the three journalists to insert opinion into his message, it was noted earlier that Wedeman’s opinions were stronger. This could represent a stronger non-impersonal voice, or it could mean that it is easier for Wedeman’s followers to separate his opinion from news. In depth examination of these gaps would provide increased understanding of the non-impersonal voices presented in each Twitter feed.
Opportunities for Further Study

It would be beneficial to look into the strength of the opinions expressed in the tweets. A study of the perception of the feed by its followers would better indicate how many of the tweets that they perceived as being impersonal versus non-impersonal. A survey of the journalists as to how they perceive their own identities on Twitter in comparison to their identities as professionals would provide further insight into the role of Twitter as a communications tool. Further studies dealing with the nature of the opinions expressed in journalists’ feeds, comparison of more nuanced expressions of non-impersonal voice in both feeds and professional reports, the perception of journalists of Twitter as a tool for news and the perception of Twitter followers of journalists’ Twitter feeds would all provide a better understanding of the platform as a tool for sharing news.

Conclusion

Twitter provides journalists with a new platform for sharing information. As a tool for communication, the amount of information available can be overwhelming during breaking news and emergencies. It can also provide interested users with a front-row seat to events like the Egyptian Revolution, which to many Twitter users was a personally unreachable event, foreign and fast-paced. For those following journalists like Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman, updates were easier to access. The nature of Twitter also allowed those followers to communicate with the journalists, and the journalists to communicate with the public.

However, as the study of their Twitter feeds shows, it is necessary for those followers to acclimatize to a new environment in which journalists have a personal voice in contrast with the traditional mainstream reporting where the “impersonal” or “view
from nowhere” is encouraged. (Rosen, 2011) While many of the tweets posted by the journalists were factual updates, a significant portion of them were personal or opinionated.
NOTES

1 At the time this paper was written, Ayman Mohyeldin was a foreign correspondent for NBC. However, at the time he made the tweets and reports discussed in this article, he was a correspondent for Al Jazeera English, and will be referred to as such throughout the work.

2 This calculation was made by combining the percentages of in each feed of the categories ‘Opinion,’ ‘News and Opinion,’ and ‘Opinionated Question.’
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Distribution of Tweet Origins for Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman

Mohyeldin Tweets: Origin

Shenker Tweets: Origins

Wedeman Tweets: Origins
Appendix B: Distribution of Tweet Content for Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman

Mohyeldin Tweets: Content
- News: 68.30%
- News and Opinion: 4.91%
- Opinion: 4.53%
- Personal: 1.13%
- Opinionated Question: 0.75%
- Factual Question: 3.40%
- Address to Populus: 12.08%
- Response: 2.38%

Shenker Tweets: Content
- News: 61.90%
- News and Opinion: 11.90%
- Opinion: 18.25%
- Personal: 2.38%
- Opinionated Question: 0.79%
- Factual Question: 2.38%
- Address to Populus: 2.38%
- Response: 2.38%

Wedeman Tweets: Content
- News: 70.46%
- News and Opinion: 10.85%
- Opinion: 10.33%
- Personal: 2.22%
- Opinionated Question: 1.05%
- Factual Question: 1.18%
- Address to Populus: 2.22%
- Response: 1.70%
Appendix C: Distribution of Link Destinations for Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman

Mohyeldin Tweets: Links

- Article: 46.15%
- Audio/Video: 38.46%
- Photo: 15.38%

Shenker Tweets: Links

- Article: 92.86%
- Audio/Video: 3.57%
- Photo: 3.57%

Wedeman Tweets: Links

- Article: 72.73%
- Audio/Video: 22.73%
- Photo: 4.55%
Appendix D: Distribution of Transcript and Article Content for Mohyeldin, Shenker and Wedeman

Mohyeldin Transcripts: Content
- News: 87.20%
- News and Opinion: 4.80%
- Opinion: 3.20%

Shenker Articles: Content
- News: 97.82%
- News and Opinion: 1.64%
- Opinion: 0.55%

Wedeman Transcripts: Content
- News: 86.60%
- Personal: 0.23%
- Conversation or Inaudible: 7.46%
- News and Opinion: 3.26%
- Opinion: 2.45%
Appendix E: Transcripts for Mohyeldin’s Reports

Transcript: January 28, 2011, Update from Ayman Mohyeldin.

Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iSgFADXXcM

MOHYELDIN: …Seems to be, we’re just trying to make sense, Laura, just one second, because it seems that they have been able to push the pro- the riot police back … it seems, it seems right now that some of the protestors are ordering other protestors, they’re telling other protestors to halt throwing rocks. I can’t see from the vantage point of where I’m standing right now I’m just gonna stick my head out the window, one second.

Ok, there’s, there’s one – Can you hear me?

ANCHOR (unnamed): Yes we can, Ayman, we’re watching.

A now. I don’t’ know if our camera’s are capturing that. But what we are told is that it’s prayer time and that the protestors are trying to organize another prayer like they were earlier this afternoon. Ok – ok. Also, I just wanted to give you some news that’s happening in our building right now. We are told that state security, state security has entered the building from which we are broadcasting a live signal. They’re probably making their way, we are, making their way through the floors. This is a building that is concentrated with a lot of news agencies and media organizations, we’re one of them, but we are told that state security is now in our building here in the heart of Cairo. So it is an attempt, obviously, by the government to try and restrict these images that are being broadcast around the world from getting out. What we do know is right outside the building you can see the protestors trying to assemble for what we understand is evening prayer time.

ANCHOR: Ayman, stay with us while you can.

MOHYELDIN: I will, I will, I’m here.

You can see, you can see one of the protestors there standing, he’s giving his back, he’s now turned, he’s giving his back to the riot police, he’s trying to organize the protestors in prayer in front of the riot police. From some very historic images that you’re seeing there. We saw this earlier when it was just afternoon prayers, after Friday prayers there was a impromptu prayer, and you can the protestors once again lining up to perform the sunset prayers. Just a few dozen feet away from them are the riot police watching. Just really unprecedented images. I can’t see if you can see the riot police from our angle, but just a few feet away from them, it seems that the riot police right now have stopped firing at them, allowing them, giving them a chance at least to perform the prayer just in front of them.

ANCHOR: Ayman we can indeed see these pictures, you’re giving us a fantastic view there of protestors one side lining up for evening prayers, the riot police facing off just a couple of yards away, a couple of meters away. And as you say, giving them the space to
pray, giving everyone, indeed, a much-needed breather in these clashes that have been going on for well over four hours now on the streets of Cairo. Really, astonishing scenes there, from downtown of the capital, Cairo, in Egypt.

Ayman, update us on-on what’s happening, you told us before that security forces you understood had entered the Al Jazeera Bureau. Tell us what you know there.

MOHYELDIN: All right, Laura, let me just be very - give you the latest up to date, be very careful here. Yes, we can confirm that state security has entered the building. There are they, there are rumors going around that there may have been activists or protestors who also entered the building, and it’s very possible that the state security chased them into the building trying to actually arrest them or detain them. We don’t know yet if state security is attempting to shut down any of the other news organizations, no one has come to our office just yet, but we do know that at one point a short while ago they did enter, the state security forces did enter the Al Jazeera building with shields and batons.

ANCHOR: Astonishing scenes, Ayman. We’re gonna leave you there just for the moment, come back to you very shortly indeed. Leaving Friday prayers happening there in Cairo. A small break in clashes between police and protestors …
Transcript: February 7, 2011, Ayman Mohyeldin on his Detention, with Folly Bah Thiabault.

Retrieved from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBNLYet_NEQ

THIABAULT: Let us now speak to our correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin who joins us live from Cairo. Ayman, we were watching pictures earlier of the protest today in Tarhir Square and the symbolic funeral of this journalist who was killed in this (INDESCIPHERABLE). I know that you more than anyone else know the pressure that journalists have been in under – under – in these last two weeks. You were detained for several hours yesterday, on Sunday. Tell us about your experience, Ayman.

MOHYELDIN: Well you know, as we have been for the past several weeks, we’ve been reporting daily from Liberation Square, and yesterday as I was making my way into Liberation Square I was essentially stopped by the Egyptian military, and there was a young recruit there, I guess, who asked me for my identification, and when I presented him with my identification he asked me ‘What you are coming to do?’ And I simply said that I was a journalist. I didn’t really have any, you know, major equipment on me, just a small camera and my cell phones, and immediately it seemed like he was taken aback, a little bit surprised by it, perhaps because of my identity.

At that time they didn’t know who I was working for and they didn’t ask me, really, it was just the mere fact that I was a journalist who was trying to go into Liberation Square seemed to be enough for them to take me for further questioning, so they immediately removed me from the entrance to Liberation Square and took me to a holding area not too far away from the National Museum, which is where they’ve kind of set up, the military at least has set up their operational command. And when we were there I had everything really taken off of me. I was, handcuffed, with, you know, plastic wire, I was blindfolded, and I was made to sit on the pavement for about five hours or so with several other people including other journalists who were there, as well as people who, you know, were simply being taken by the military for various reasons or sorts. And you know, over the course of the nine hours that I was essentially in custody I was interrogated a few times, I was asked by people, you know, who I worked for, what I did. And then they started asking me slightly more, you know, intimidating questions like what did I think of the protest, what do I think the military’s doing, who was I with, and you know, they were ultimately saying to me what I was doing in Egypt, why didn’t I just go back to the United States where I came from, and why I was trying to project a negative image of Egypt to the outside world. And, so it was a bit of a long ordeal, and certainly you know, what I saw that was a bit difficult, compared to what, you know, the other people that were going through was a lot worse.

THIABAULT: So again, just to reiterate, Ayman, this was the military interrogating you yesterday.

MOHYELDIN: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, when I first arrived at the Liberation Square, it was just the regular military that was, ah, there screening the people, then we were handed over to the military police which essentially took everything off of me, detained
me, blindfolded me, and tied my hands and you know, I guess sat me down on the pavement. And throughout the course of the day I was interrogated on more than one occasion, in fact, I was told I was going to be transferred over to military intelligence by the end of the evening. That didn’t happen because of the intervention that helped, you know, get me released, but no doubt that even throughout the course of the day I was interrogated by plain clothed police officers, or at least members of the military in plain clothes, in civilian clothes.

THIABAULT: Tell us more, Ayman, about what you saw there. Who were some of the people who had been arrested with you? Were they just foreign journalists, were they Egyptians? And, and, under what conditions were they? Were they treated, being mistreated by the military there?

MOHYELDIN: Well, you know, when I actually was taken to the location, there was a cameraman from Reuters who happened to be from Gaza, ah, from the Gaza Strip, who was also on assignment, he had also been taken. There was a reporter who I believe worked for the New York Times, and he was there, but he was immediately released, he was not of Arab descent, he was clearly a foreign national, but he was immediately questioned and turned around and let go. So there were at least at one point by my count three journalists.

The other people that were there were individuals mostly from inside the protestors, from inside Liberation Square, and as I understood it from their interrogations, ‘cause this was happening in an open area, many of these people were either people who had lost some form of identification, people that the military was not happy with the way they were behaving. Supposedly one guy arrived to Liberation Square and had with him a small pocket knife so he became a person of suspicion for them and he was detained.

I can tell you from what I saw and from what I heard, a lot of these people were beaten up. They were very, the military was dealing with them in a very aggressive manner, they were slapped, they were kicked. The military was trying to essentially subdue them. I don’t think it was a matter of trying to coerce them for information, but in essence the military was dealing with these people as prisoners of war. These were individuals who were trying to plead for their safety, for their innocence. Many of them were crying, saying that they were just simply caught up in the wrong moment, but the military showed no mercy, and in a few occasions, they really roughed them up pretty badly. They kicked them in the back of their heads. One of the soldiers that was there had with him a small taser gun. He was instantly, you know, instigating that taser to try to scare the prisoners, or the detainees, really, into submission and behaving. Many of them had their shirts taken off of them. And many of them were also, you know, severely whipped and slapped and essentially pushed around in a way to kind of control them, even though they weren’t doing anything that was very disobedient but merely just trying to plead to the military that they had been caught up and they had taken by mistake, and they wanted to be released.

THIABAULT: Just, once again, the people who were there, you mentioned that there were a lot of people of Arab descent. Those who were being beaten, as you said, by the
military, were they Egyptians, and did you get a sense of whether or not they were pro- or anti-Mubarak?

MOHYELDIN: Well these individuals definitely were Egyptian. The only two people that, you know, technically were not were myself and a colleague who worked for Reuters who was a Palestinian cameraman. We were the only two that were not carrying any Egyptian passports or Egyptian identification. The others all were.

The problem that the military felt with some of these individuals is for example, you know, on the way in and around Liberation Square there are these popular committees, these neighborhood watch committees. Some of these individuals were people, for example, who were saying that they had lost their ID, and so when they came to this committee, the committee was, you know, suspicious of them, why they were coming to Liberation Square, and then they were essentially taken by these committees and handed to the military.

Once they were in the custody of the military, the military brought them to this holding area where we were. Other individuals that were there were supposedly, again according to the military that was interrogating them, accusing them of, you know, being pickpockets or being mischievous, or trying to disrupt the peace. So you don’t get really a sense of their political ideology in all of this, but that they were somehow just, you know, a nuance if you will to the situation.

Now the military was really aggressive in the way it dealt with them, and so what it ended up doing was creating this sense of fear that people started saying, ‘I have nothing to do with these protests, I want out of here, I don’t want anything.’ One of the individuals that was next to me said that he had come to participate in the protests because he was an anti-government protestor, a pro-democracy protestor. He was held for 24 hours and the government, or he was saying that the military was detaining him because he was active with inside Liberation Square, organizing the committees and stuff, but by the end of the evening he had completely broken down, he was essentially crying and saying that he wanted to leave, that he had been, you know, he had a really good salary, he got caught up in this mistake, and he promised the military that if he were to leave he would never return again to Liberation Square, and not participate in this. And all of us, actually, when we were released, were asked to sign papers saying that we would not return to Liberation Square unless we got some type permission from the military. They were helpful enough to tell us how we can get that permission, but they made it very clear that we couldn’t just simply return to Liberation Square without letting them know in advance that we were gonna be coming or having some kind of proper, you know, authentication or verification to let us in.

THIABAULT: Certainly, Ayman, we’re really glad to see you out of there and to see that you were not harmed, but of course our thoughts are with all the people who are still there. Do tell us, because we’ve heard of the pressure in which journalists have been in the last two weeks, we’ve heard of a French journalist being beaten as well, and arrested as well, some of them even have left Egypt. Give us a sense of the pressure, you know, in
which these journalists have to work every day, and do you get a sense that it’s easing at all, after the international, the widespread international reaction?

MOHYELDIN: Well you know, what’s emerged really now is two different realities for journalists here. When you’re out in the streets and you carry with you some identification that you are a foreign journalist and that perhaps you’re just walking through the streets trying to do this story or tell this story about the people, you’re subject to the kind of chaos or lawlessness that existed on the streets for some days after these protests began. And so many journalists took these cautions of hiding their press identifications, hiding sometimes their foreign identifications so that if they are stopped or if they were stopped, they wouldn’t be harassed and they wouldn’t be intimidated. Because as we’ve seen, sometimes, particularly last week during the pro-Mubarak protests, there was a very aggressive campaign to try to, you know, reach foreign journalists and tell them, you know, show us, show Egypt, show the pro-Mubarak supporters, and all this, which many journalists, you know, wanted to show originally but were just simply hampered from doing so. That is one reality, and so many journalists have been a little bit cautious to go out and take that extra measure by concealing their identity when they’re dealing with the people.

When you’re dealing with the government, the government says, well no, we’re allowing foreign journalists to work and they’re allowed to operate, and so they then show the journalists their identification and their (INDESCIPHERABLE) the pressures of the government restricting their access, and as we’re reporting, there was a reporter, there was a Reuters cameraman, some of the names you mentioned as well. So there now are really two different realities emerging for journalists, and that’s what is making it so difficult. Personal safety and just the challenges of dealing with the government against this backdrop of trying to tell the story for the people here.

THIABAULT: Certainly we appreciate your work. Ayman Mohyeldin in Cairo. Thank you, Ayman, for sharing your experience there with us. Thank you very much.
Transcript: February 9, 2011, Update from Ayman Mohyeldin.

Retrieved from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=na_xn1Yp5SA

MOHYELDIN: While the political standoff between President Hosni Mubarak’s government and the so-called Committee of the Wiseman continues without any progress, really. The so-called Committee of the Wiseman has put forth their demands which are also representative of some of the protestor’s demands that President Hosni Mubarak step down and transfer power to Vice President Omar Suleiman, to begin implementing constitutional reforms.

But the president seems to be very much entrenched into holding onto power at least until the end of his term in September. Many feel that is an attempt by the regime to consolidate its grip on power, and many simply feel they are just empty and false promises. They have seen promises about reform made in the past without being substantiated and they fear this could possibly happen now.

For his part, though, the belief is that if the president were to step down for any reason, he would transfer power to the speaker of the Egyptian parliament, and in that case he would be forced, the speaker of the parliament would be forced to carry out elections in 60 days under the current constitution, and by many people’s assessment, the current constitution is rigged in a way that it would favor the ruling National Democratic Party because they would be the only ones allowed to nominate a candidate, and therefore the opposition parties would not be allowed to nominate any presidential candidate. So, many are describing that really the ace in the president’s back pocket which is not allowing him to step down and it’s certainly something that is being used to back or push back the demands of the protestors and the opposition, saying it would lead to a bit of a political vacuum and chaos without bringing the much-needed reforms that the protestors and other members of Egypt’s opposition are demanding.

Now, all of this is happening as the protestors continue in Liberation Square, with some of them moving closer to the symbolic heart of Cairo at the Parliament Building. There is a sit-in taking place there that is lasting throughout the course of the evening.

And all of this against the background of some very Interesting developments with Egypt’s labor force. Thousands of workers representing different sectors and industry have gone on strike, and it’s a momentum that many of the protestors say will add to their cause for President, President Hosni Mubarak to step down. Whether or not these labor strikes continue to grow in the coming days, we’ll be watching very closely because they represent a very important element of Egyptian society and could widen and increase perhaps the pressure against Hosni Mubarak to step down.

Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXDz0XnXp8g&feature=related

MADDOW: Half an hour before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak gave his ‘I’m not resigning, I’m just delegating some of my duties to my new vice president.’ Half an hour before he gave that, that, that, that speech, our next guest could hear protestors singing the Egyptian national anthem from Tarhir square a mile away. The protestors at that point had been told by the military that their demands would be met. And then came President Mubarak’s speech. And since the protestors main demand was that Mr. Mubarak step down, when it became clear that he wasn’t actually going to, this is what happened: Watch.

(VIDEO REPLAY OF REACTIONS)

MADDOW: Joining us now from Cairo is Al Jazeera reporter Ayman Mohyeldin, who has joined us a couple of times in our coverage. Ayman, thank you for join us, I appreciate you staying up ‘til this holy-ho-horrible hour.

MOHYELDIN: My pleasure.

MADDOW: Did it make sense that the protestors and a lot of other people around the world were expecting President Mubarak to step down? In retrospect now, the reasons that that was the expectation, are they reasons that make sense?

MOHYELDIN: Yes, absolutely, when you look at the public mounting pressure both domestically and internationally, when you look at some of the key indications that became apparent throughout the course of the day from the military, that communiqué; and one of the most overlooked things so far has been the statement that came out from the secretary general of the ruling national democratic party.

Now he was quoted by various media outlets, including the state-owned Al-Ahram newspaper as saying that the president had been asked to step down or transfer his powers, and that in fact, he was going to answer the demands of the people before Friday. Now when you look at what that means, the demands of the people have been very clear from the very beginning and that is that President Hosni Mubarak must step down. There was a lot of evidence to suggest that is exactly what was being prepared to happen. That communiqué from the military suggesting that the supreme council of the armed forces was going to convene regularly, also a very important indicator.

Unfortunately though, in the eyes of the protestors, it certainly did not materialize, based on all the evidence that was coming out earlier in the day.

MADDOW: Ayman, do you have any reporting, any indication of what might have happened between all of those things that you’re just describing there, which we were reporting on here as well, and the evening when Mr. Mubarak actually did not step down.
Is there any indication yet of what might have changed between, between those two events?

MOHYE LDIN: Well at this particular stage, it’s very difficult. We’re getting a lot of analysis from different people close to the military, you know, and the military in Egypt is a very close-knit society, it is a very closed group of officers, very difficult to gauge their reaction, but I can assure you one thing, for many of the people that I have been speaking to, is that the military, just like the rest of Egypt, is very much divided on what to do. Some of the senior leadership of the military very loyal to President Mubarak. Some of the younger officer core, most of them trained in the West, spent a lot of time in the US, have very different opinions, but because the military is so closed knit, it’s very difficult to gauge the initial response.

But some of the analysis suggests that in fact President Mubarak was playing both sides of the military and the vice president, without giving a clear indication as to who would emerge with that authority. Well by the end of the day we certainly learned that the vice president had been given the authority, or at least some of the responsibility, and there’s some indication that really caught the military by surprise.

The military had essentially gone on the footing that it was prepared to assume more responsibility, perhaps play a bigger role. The fact that it was not, and somewhat shunned aside, is going to be a very interesting development to see what happens in the next 24 to 48 hours in terms of how they respond on the street.

MADDOW: Ayman, the Egyptian ambassador to the United States told me tonight this hour that not only is Mr. Suleiman in charge of the military, there is no split between the government and the military. He told me that any statements from the military today that were interpreted as being more supportive of the protestors than the statements had been in the past was just a misunderstanding, that the army’s messaging has been consistent all along, they’re just saying the same sort of things they’ve been saying, since the start of the uprising. Is that how you see it from Cairo?

MOHYE LDIN: No, certainly not. The reality on the ground is very different than what the ambassador described. Now there’s no doubt that the ambassador perhaps is in touch with more regular elements of the military, and perhaps the chain of command itself. But all you have to do, really, is spend time out with the soldiers on the ground. Some of the mid- to senior-level officers that are in charge of some of these tank battalions that are out in the streets and you get really a sense of the general mood for the military.

Now, one of the events that happened today that was of great interest was that a senior army officer who was in Tarhîr Square, Liberation Square, put down his weapons according to eyewitnesses and joined the protests. He was certainly showered and embraced by the protestors around him.

There’s a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the military is in of itself somewhat divided about what role it should play. We’ve seen that time and time again over the past several days, and the comments that are coming out of the military have suggested that it
has come on the side of the protestors on more than one occasion. The initial statements that came out that suggested that the military was not going to use force, and more importantly, expressed explicitly that the protestors had legitimate grievances. Those are strong indicators into the mindset of the military in terms of who it was supporting early on. That could have changed, but the indication and the evidence so far does not support the statements made by the ambassador so far.

MADDOW: Al Jazeera reporter Ayman Moyheldin. Thank you so much for your time tonight, really appreciate it, Ayman.
FINIGHAN: Ayman, you’re the first Egyptian I’ve spoken to since this happened. A personal question for you, a moment. You’ve been there throughout this, all of the 18 days. I-I want you to stop being impartial for a moment, because your, your reporting has been exemplary all the way through. Give me the, an, your personal feeling as to, to what you’re seeing there, now, in Cairo tonight.

AYMAN: Well you know, Adrian, as somebody who spent a lot of time growing up here in Egypt, and you’ve seen the sacrifices that have been made by so many people over the years, ordinary Egyptians who have been complaining for a better quality of life, for those who, you know, for decades, indeed tried to make that dream a reality, the sacrifices that so many people have made, particularly in the last years. For years the Egyptian people have been criticized for being somewhat apathetic, for being somewhat disenfranchised, not taking care or not taking their own destiny in their hands.

I think today, you know, as an Egyptian, someone born here, there’s no doubt there’s a great deal of emotion that runs through every Egyptian, whether they’re in the country or abroad.

And I think we’ve seen that emotion come out from people all around the world, really.

So today you can probably hear the sounds of celebration, we’ve been hearing some celebratory gunfire. I can assure you that every Egyptian, whether they’re stepping in Egyptian soil right now or if they’re abroad, they’re feeling a great sense of pride, because for the first time in a long time, perhaps even in the modern history of this country, Egyptians’ voice has been heard by their government.

And this is what is so unique about this. It has changed the dynamic for every Egyptian who have felt a sense of empowerment. They have now for the first time, really, at least in my generation and I can speak at least even in my parents’ generation, their voices have been heard, and for the first time they’re going to take at least some kind of control in paving the way forward for their future.

The questions really are going to be very challenging, but tonight it’s taking a sense of pride in that the people that have been dormant for so long have indeed risen, and demanded a better future for themselves.

So it is a very emotional night, I can tell you that as an Egyptian who was born here. There’s no doubt that I never thought that I would actually live to see a day like this because you hear about Egypt in the past from your parents and grandparents, the sacrifices that so many Egyptians have made to live abroad and immigrate, seeing that better future. Tonight they’re realizing that the people here in this country have gotten one step closer to making that future better.
FINIGHAN: Ayman, many thanks indeed. Ayman Mohyeldin there, live in Cairo.
Appendix F: Discarded Tweets

I.

Screengrab 10

II.

Screengrab 11