Risks and Opportunities in Automated Newsgathering: First Findings From the Frontline

ICA Annual Conference, Fukuoka, Japan, 14 June 2016

Neil Thurman
Neil.thurman@ifkw.lmu.de
@neilthurman

Steve Schifferes
Steve.Schifferes.1@city.ac.uk
@saschiff
News Detection

News Creation

News Distribution

The New York Times

1. Six New Bridal Trends
2. The Fats You Don’t Need to Fear, and the Carbs That You Do
3. The Lonely Death of George Bell
4. In Canada, Stunning Rout by Justin Trudeau and the Liberal Party
5. Paul Krugman
   Something Not Rotten in Denmark
6. Roger Cohen
   This Color
News Detection

* Discovering/clustering ‘news’ & trends
* Context: e.g. location, sentiment etc
* Verification
  * etc
News Detection

* Discovering/clustering ‘news’ & trends
* Context: e.g. location, sentiment etc
* Verification
  * etc
News Detection

* Discovering/clustering ‘news’ & trends
* Context: e.g. location, sentiment etc
  
* Verification
  
* etc
“[social media is] an incredibly important source”

– Jonathan Rugman, Foreign Affairs Correspondent, Channel 4 News
(pers. comm.)
• Most not news

• How much can you believe

• Volume
“we need algorithms to take more onus off human being, to pick and understand the best elements” – New York Times’ Social Media Team member (pers. Comm.)
Participants (n=81)

- Median age: 23;
- 80% female;
- Nearly all had previous journalism experience.
- 50% from Europe, 15% from the UK, and 10% each from Asia and the Americas.
RQs

- Identify original news on social media?
- Assess the reliability of social media contributors?
- Identify trends?
- Identify sentiment?
Detecting original news

![Diagram showing the detection of original news using Social Sensor, Geofeedia, and Spike. The diagram indicates the distribution of negative, neutral, and positive sentiments.](image-url)
#flood in paris #pont d'arcole

Pauline
@Paulinepooo
6/3/2016, 10:53:57 AM

Zoia Skoropadenko
@zolaskoropadenk
6/3/2016, 2:11:27 AM

La Seine à 5 mètres 📹📷📸 @ Pont d'Arcole https://t.co/PhJ0DkZl0g
Detecting Trends

- Social Sensor
- Geofeedia
- Spike

- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive
Detecting Trends

“Spike helped me decide which stories to pitch on London Fashion Week.”
Detecting Sentiment

![Graph showing sentiment detection for Social Sensor, Geofeedia, and Spike with bars representing negative, neutral, and positive sentiments.](image-url)
Detecting Sentiment

“Sick” or “wicked,” which the “Sentiment” function would presumably categorise as negative, could sometimes mean something positive, for instance.”
Verification

- Social Sensor
- Geofeedia
- Spike

- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive
“Geofeedia helps in verification of information, since it shows social media posts’ location. You won’t be misled by someone ‘pretending’ to tweet from the heart of Egyptian revolution, while in reality drinking his cup of tea somewhere in London”.

Mohamed El Dahshan
@eldahshan
Bespectacled economist (PSD), post-crisis development tech/social media enthusiast, travel addict. Formerly @

INCREIBLE standoff between pro-change and pro-Mubarak demos at Tahrir NOW #Egypt #jan25
“In order to successfully cover events like New York Fashion Week, journalists must use tools like Twitter and Geofeedia.”
Dangers with automated news gathering

• Privacy
• Popularism
• Misplaced trust
• Biases
Privacy

“slightly morally wrong and stalker-esque”.
All in all, I am a bit sceptical about detecting trends through social media. The outlets should be trendsetters themselves.

My biggest reserve is that I become lazy and focus only on what is trending. Journalism should be about writing important stories, no matter how unpopular.

Q: Please indicate how much you worry that tools such as Spike, Geofeedia, Social Sensor, and Twitter could be helping to promote a more popularist news agenda where journalist write more about what the public want rather than what they (the journalists) consider to be important, no matter how unpopular (n=32).
Misplaced trust

Q: Please tell me how much, if at all, the information found on each of these tools has been automatically verified (n = 32).
‘Biases’

- 47% Men
- 25% Women
- (26% institutions)
- 60% metropolitan (London, New York, Washington)
- 40% non-metropolitan/’foreign’
- 65% mainstream media
- 35% ‘other’ (NGO, experts etc)
‘Biases’

Algorithmic transparency “is, at best, insufficient and, at worst, a dangerous misdirection away from sites of press power beyond code”.

-- Mike Ananny and Kate Crawford

*Beyond the Black Box: The Failures of Algorithmic Transparency*
Thank you.

Neil Thurman
Neil.thurman@ifkw.lmu.de
@neilthurman

Steve Schifferes
Steve.Schifferes.1@city.ac.uk
@saschiff