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University of Nevada, Reno

The Evolving Role of Newspaper Journalists in Breaking News

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts, Journalism, and the Honors Program

by

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May, 2013

**UNIVERSITY
OF NEVADA
RENO**

THE HONORS PROGRAM

We recommend that the thesis
prepared under our supervision by

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entitled

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May, 2013

Abstract

Social media and online interactivity have transformed how journalists report and write about breaking news. The news cycle now consists of second-by-second updates of breaking news, rather than the day-to-day pattern seen before the emergence of the Internet. Greater competition from citizens and other media sources, along with a crisis in the economics of news, have triggered a debate regarding the future of journalism. To address these issues, I conducted a case study in which I compared newspaper coverage of the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 in Littleton, Colorado to newspaper coverage of “The Dark Knight Rises” theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado in 2012. I interviewed journalists at *The Denver Post* newspaper about their roles in the events and conducted a discourse analysis of their responses. I found that there has been a shift in the role of traditional newspaper journalists in breaking news, but that they have maintained their professional identity by using social media as tools to continue their traditional style of reporting.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Donica Mensing, for her support and guidance during my research and writing processes, and the UNR Honors Program for the opportunity to complete original research. The Honors Thesis 491 class not only answered many questions for me, but also helped me relax when I began to feel overwhelmed. I would also like to thank the Office of Undergraduate and Interdisciplinary Research and the Honors Program for awarding me the Honors Undergraduate Research Award, which provided me the chance to travel to Denver and conduct valuable research.

Furthermore, special thanks go to the Reynolds School of Journalism for giving me a great educational experience in the last four years. I feel at home in the journalism school thanks to the fantastic faculty and the available resources in the building. I am more certain than ever that I want journalism to be my lifelong career.

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Introduction

Since the advent of social media, traditional journalism — in this paper, defined as journalism produced by daily newspapers — has been challenged with redefining its role in the lives of ordinary citizens. The decline of newspaper profitability, circulation, and readership that began in the early 2000s has led to a now-crisis state in the newspaper industry (Siles & Buczkowski, 2012). An out-of-date business model, including over-reliance on advertising revenue, has been blamed for the industry's decline. The Internet provided users with more real-time news via blogs, news aggregators, and more recently social media, which made the news printed in newspapers outdated by comparison.

The widespread use of social media began in the mid-2000s with the launch of MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004 and Twitter in 2006. These media, especially Facebook and Twitter, are now extensively used all around the world. About 13% of online adults in the United States use Twitter, up from 8% in 2010, and 87% of Americans report they are familiar with Twitter (Brown-Smith, 2012). Facebook now has 1 billion worldwide users and is the number one most-visited website in the world; about one in seven people on Earth now have Facebook accounts (Grandoni, 2012).

The popularity and use of social media to report news has drastically altered the news cycle. Because the news cycle used to be based on the newspaper daily pattern, journalists had more time to gather data, do reporting, and make sure facts were accurate. For example, when the shooting in Newtown, Connecticut occurred in December 2012, instantaneous breaking news updates were posted to Twitter and other social media; at the same time, newspapers like *The New York Times* placed information on their websites

(“Sandy Hook school shooting,” 2012). This process is very different from the information-gathering cycle of traditional newspapers. Back then, journalists had time to collect data, analyze information, and conduct in-depth interviews before the breaking news story was published the next day. Now, in the 24-hour news cycle, journalists do not have time to verify all the information they gather in the wake of a breaking news occurrence.

Additionally, this fast-paced cycle leads to inaccuracies in reporting. News media have been in competition before the growth of the Internet and social media, but now they have to compete by the second rather than by the day, which leads to problems with accuracy. Many studies have emphasized accuracy while discussing social media and journalism. Some media professionals see Twitter as a platform that amounts to “unsubstantiated rumors and wild inaccuracies” (Hermida, 2010, p. 301). Such misinformation was observed in the social media coverage of the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting on December 14, 2012. Law enforcement incorrectly identified the shooting suspect and social media rapidly spread this misinformation. This incident prompted officials to threaten prosecution to those disseminating the inaccurate facts on social media platforms (Goh, 2012). However, many note that journalists have to juggle being accurate with delivering news promptly during breaking news events (Brown-Smith, 2012; Harrington & McNair, 2012).

Not only do journalists need to get the facts quickly, they must interpret and explain events instead of just reporting them (Harrington & McNair, 2012). The idea of interpreting and explaining events is what, in theory, make journalists different from

citizen journalists. Citizen journalism occurs when citizens perform some “functions of the professional journalist, often providing the first accounts, images or video of a news event” (Hermida, 2010, p. 301). Although citizen journalism has been present since before social media became popular, social media have contributed to the increased number of citizen journalists and their presence on media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

The citizen journalist may also report on breaking news because of his or her access to tools such as digital cameras and smartphones, which facilitate the process of uploading content to social media. Examples of citizen journalists using Twitter and Facebook to break news include coverage of the London G20 protests in 2009 and the Memphis, Tennessee storms in 2011 (Brown-Smith, 2012). Citizen journalists also covered celebrity deaths such as Whitney Houston’s death in 2012 and significant political announcements such as the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011 (Ives, 2011).

The notion of citizen journalism is important to keep in mind while discussing the role of the journalist and how it has changed. Journalistic practices are challenged by social media platforms that facilitate the dissemination of news so that anyone, not just a journalist, can report on news. What is the difference between a person with a camera documenting a breaking news event and a professional reporter doing the same thing? These issues lead to the question: what is the changing role of the newspaper journalist? Given the advent of social media and the declining popularity of newspapers, how are journalistic practices changing? Have these practices led to changes in breaking news

coverage? To answer these questions, I researched studies of journalism, breaking news, and social media.

Two specific breaking news events were identified for my study: one that occurred before the advent of social media and one after. Both events involved similar types of breaking news and were covered by the same newspaper, *The Denver Post*. Some of the same journalists covered both stories and were ideal candidates for reflecting on the differences in the coverage of both events. The two events studied are the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 in Littleton, Colorado; the other, the Aurora theater shooting in 2012 in Aurora, Colorado.

The Columbine High School shooting took place in Littleton, a suburb of Denver, on April 20, 1999. Students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold entered the school with firearms and explosives and killed 12 students and one teacher and wounded 21 others before killing themselves (“Columbine High School shootings,” n.d.). The Columbine shooting predated widespread use of social media. Therefore, breaking news was covered in a more traditional sense by *The Denver Post*.

The Aurora theater shooting took place on July 21, 2012, in a Century Theaters movie theater in Aurora, another suburb of Denver, during the premiere of the film “The Dark Knight Rises.” Alleged shooter James Holmes entered the theater with firearms and explosives and killed 12 people, injuring 58 others (“2012 Aurora shooting,” n.d.). Many people turned to Twitter for breaking news updates, and 18-year-old Morgan Jones was credited by one website for providing the best breaking news coverage of the shooting

(Herrman, 2012). On the outset, there are evident differences in the ways these two similar events were covered in the same area by some of the same journalists.

To answer my research questions, I chose to do a content analysis comparing coverage of the Columbine shootings in *The Denver Post* in 1999 with the coverage of the Aurora shootings in *The Denver Post* in 2012. In addition, I interviewed five Denver journalists who covered both events about how the presence of social media may have changed their roles, practices or the content of their stories. I used discourse analysis (Wetherell & Taylor, 2001) to examine how the journalists described their jobs in order to glean how they may view themselves and their profession via their word choice and manner of speaking. Their experiences before social media and after provide valuable testimony as to how the role and practices of journalists have changed in a brief amount of time.

These methods were used to answer my principal research questions: how has the traditional role of newspaper journalism changed since social media? What is the role of a newspaper journalist today? With newspapers in a crisis state and citizen journalistic practices, facilitated by technology, challenging newspaper journalists to redefine their traditional roles, many are questioning newspaper journalists' professional identity. Newspapers and newspaper journalists have long been an essential part of the democratic process. The changing role of print journalists will have profound effects on the journalism industry and the profession as a whole.

My study will provide a useful way to document the evolution of breaking news coverage in a time period of intense change. It will be of value to journalism scholars who seek to understand the impacts of the digital revolution, as well as help journalists understand how they can adapt to a burgeoning Internet-based communications environment.

Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine how breaking news coverage of newspapers has altered as well as to determine the changing role of newspaper journalists since the emergence of social media. Given the growth of technology in the last decade, newspaper journalists (and other traditional journalists) are no longer the only reporters responsible for disseminating breaking news.

Breaking news and the decline of newspapers

Reporting on breaking news is the classic act of a journalist. Breaking news events draw the attention of the public and put the journalist in a significant public role at moments of public crisis or triumph. Breaking news is defined as events that are currently developing, such as disasters like shootings or fires (Rogers, n.d.). Before the advent of electronic media, newspapers frequently broke news as few people had alternative sources of news. When the radio developed, announcers soon began covering breaking news as well, and by the time television arrived, newspapers had lost their exclusive franchise for breaking news. However, the demand for television had not lessened the need for newspaper reporters to cover breaking news events and report on them thoroughly. Newspaper organizations have the largest news reporting staffs in most cities and without the newspaper reporters doing much of the work, TV and radio news reports would be much slimmer (Downie & Schudson, 2009).

However, with the advent of the next big evolution in electronic media (the Internet), breaking news stories in print newspapers are now considered outdated by most

of the public (Siles & Buczkowski, 2012). News aggregators, blogs, and social network sites are changing the ways readers consume news, from focusing on the print daily news cycle to a constant 24-hour news cycle. Siles & Buczkowski noted “the role of technological change, most notably the Internet, in the decline of newspapers” (p. 1377). In 2010, The Pew Research Center reported that more Americans are consuming news today than since the mid-1990s, but they are integrating new technologies into their news consumption and combining both traditional sources and online news sources for their daily news intake.

The Internet, however, is not the only cause of print newspapers’ decline. Newspapers have traditionally relied on advertising revenue and circulation numbers to make a profit, becoming increasingly dependent on advertising in the 1980s and 1990s (Downie & Schudson, 2009; Mensing, 2007; Picard, 2010; Siles & Buczkowski, 2012). This reliance on display advertising is a primary factor in the severe difficulties experienced by newspaper organizations. Revenue from classified ads has also declined dramatically, as the classified business has been lost to websites such as Craigslist and eBay (Kinsley, 2006).

A related explanation for the decline of newspapers is a lack of content diversity in print newspapers, which consequently drives citizens to seek news on the Internet. Fifty-eight percent of Americans reported that they do not get all the local news they need from traditional sources (Pew Research Center, 2011). In 2011, 50% of Americans reported that they received their local news from the newspaper. Most of these respondents were over the age of 40. By contrast, 47% of respondents said they got their

news from the Internet; most of these respondents who used the Internet were under the age of 40 and many were under the age of 30. In her study of online publications and traditional publications, Carpenter (2010) noted that scholars have frequently called for greater content diversity in newspaper coverage. Carpenter recommended that newspapers re-evaluate their “mission” and their model as a whole rather than make unnecessary risks to maintain (or gain) audience (Carpenter, 2010, p. 1066).

Authors Chan and Leung (2005) advised online versions of newspapers to rethink their place in the Internet market due to increased competition from the availability of news on many other websites. Even though the print medium is still in a decline, online newspaper readership is growing. This growth has recently helped to offset the losses print newspapers have suffered (Pew, 2010). The interest in online media can be explained in part by the advent of Web 2.0 and the revolution of social media.

Online interactivity, Web 2.0, and social media

A distinguishing feature of early online media was the ability to open two-way communication between publishers (such as newspapers) and their readers (Greer & Mensing, 2006). In 1997, online newspapers began increasing their use of email to encourage interaction and studies found that about 70% of newspaper provided staff email links (as cited in Peng, et al., 1999). In 1998, many newspapers used forums, customer searches, and electronic mail to facilitate interactivity with readers; however, most online versions of newspapers at that time still did not provide chat rooms or allow users to provide their own content to the website (Greer & Mensing, 2006).

The increase in interactivity led to an evolution of the Internet — the concept of Web 2.0. This term was coined by Tim O’Reilly, founder and CEO of O’Reilly Media, to describe the alterations in the content of the Internet after the dot com crash in 2001 (O’Reilly, 2005). W.F. Birdsall (2007) considered Web 2.0 the second phase of the web, after Web 1.0, which showcased static websites and did not allow for user participation (Strickland, n.d.). Web 2.0 was marked by social media and blogging, which made it stand apart from the pre-2001 Internet, which did not allow for such interactivity (Birdsall, 2007). Birdsall argued that Web 2.0 allowed for the human right to participate in all kinds of media and communication. The main distinguishing aspect of Web 2.0 was that Internet users had the ability to participate much more in the content and development of the Internet. Therefore, social media and increased networking on the Internet came about due to the emergence of Web 2.0. Additionally, Web 2.0 has the potential to allow amateurs to “surpass professionals in content” because of its ease of use (Birdsall, 2007).

Social media on the Internet began circa 1997, when blogging began. One of the earliest social media websites, called SixDegrees.com, allowed users to create their own profiles and have a list of friends. Also in this year, AOL came out with its instant messaging service, which allowed users to “chat” with each other (Curtis, 2013). In 2001, Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, was created. The mid-2000s then saw a spate of social networking sites emerge, such as Friendster in 2002, MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, and Twitter in 2006. In the last couple of years, Facebook and Twitter have become the dominant social networks. Facebook, much like other social media, is a social

network where users can create their own profiles, upload photos and video, find and interact with friends, and read updates on their friend's activities on a personal news feed. Twitter, on the other hand, is considered a "microblogging" service — users post updates of 140 characters or less, called tweets, and tweets converge on Twitter's news feed ("About Twitter," n.d.).

Facebook and Twitter have recently reached groundbreaking numbers in terms of users. Facebook now has 1 billion users as of October 2012, so 1 in 7 people on Earth use Facebook. It is also the number one most-visited site in the world (Grandoni, 2012). Twitter hit 500 million in user count in July 2012, and now has about 554,750,000 users as of April 2013 ("Twitter Statistics," 2013). Many studies have been done on Twitter in particular and its impact on breaking news and newspapers.

The role of Twitter in breaking news

To some, Twitter is seen not as a replacement for traditional journalism, but as a supplement. After the announcement of Osama bin Laden's death in May 2011, many flocked to Twitter, and television and newspaper media were also viewed in greater numbers (Ives, 2011). Twitter averaged about 3,000 posts per second and 56.5 million viewers watched President Barack Obama's speech on television. *The New York Times'* website page views were markedly higher; the viewership was 62% higher than its previous four Sundays of coverage. Twitter was also the first medium to report on the Mumbai bombings in 2008, and traditional news organizations had the most popular and

prominent tweets, which was determined by the amount of re-tweets and the amount of replies to a tweet (Murthy, 2011).

In Twitter's role as a supplement to traditional news, Murthy (2011) argued that the philosophy of Web 2.0 — that Internet users all have the ability to participate — fails in reality. Murthy concluded that Twitter, as a medium, does not allow for all voices on Twitter to be heard equally. Based on his content analysis of tweets during the Mumbai shootings and bombings in 2008, Murthy said the website was “strongly socioeconomically stratified” and citizens in marginalized societies without access to the Internet or digital technology suffer from a digital divide; therefore, these citizens have no representation on social media like Twitter (p. 786).

Although newspapers have had some success using Twitter to break news, Brown-Smith (2012) found that Twitter users desire communication and connections with other users, which is a concept not often utilized by traditional media sources in their social media use. During the Memphis, Tennessee storms in April 2011, only eight of 280 tweets by traditional media outlets with the hashtag #memstorm (“Memphis storm”) asked for audience participation and comments (Brown-Smith, 2012). Furthermore, Brown-Smith indicated the lack of verifiability of much of the news on Twitter. Misinformation on Twitter poses a risk to the dissemination of breaking news to those who rely on Twitter for their news. Many argue that professional journalists should take on the role of verifying the truth of the news being discussed on Twitter in order. By taking on this role, journalists can differentiate themselves from the non-journalist, or citizen, tweeting news (p. 21).

For example, Andy Carvin, senior strategist at National Public Radio, assisted the spread of breaking news during the Arab Spring events in 2011. He used Twitter as a crowdsourcing agent and referred to it as a “newsroom of public editors” (Ingram, 2012). Carvin also verified the truth during a breaking news incident on Twitter in 2011, when a popular lesbian blogger in Syria claimed to have been kidnapped by the authorities. Through questions to his followers and gathering and sharing information, Carvin discovered the incident was a hoax and that the blogger did not exist (“NPR's Andy Carvin uses Twitter to Debunk a Hoax," 2011). Professional journalists such as Carvin are actively seeking to differentiate themselves from citizens reporting news, which is known as citizen journalism. Citizen journalism has grown due to the rise of social media and has further complicated the issue of the role of a journalist.

Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism is defined as the practice of citizens taking on the role of journalists and reporting news (Hermida, 2010) and it has not always been limited to Twitter coverage of an event. Before social media became popular, citizens could submit stories and eyewitness accounts to channels such as CNN's iReport, a page on CNN's website that compiled user-submitted news items such as articles, photos, and video. Citizen journalism and breaking news appeared to come into prominence after the London tube bombings in July 2005 (Chua, Razikin, & Goh, 2011). In their study of iReport, the authors concluded that citizen journalists on iReport showed interest in a breaking news event a few days, or sometimes weeks, after the event happened.

iReport gathered more than 400,000 postings by 2005, which indicated the growth of user-submitted content, but citizen journalists often did not cover breaking news as immediately as they would years later with Twitter. CNN and other traditional media still reported the information on the bombings first, whereas the citizen journalists in this study did not report on the news until later; ergo, Internet viewers did not flock to iReport for breaking news because citizen journalist's accounts were not uploaded to the Internet until days or weeks after the event happened (Chua, Razikin, & Goh, 2011).

Another example of citizen journalism was seen in 2009, when the death of Oakland citizen Oscar Grant at the hands of a Bay Area Rapid Transit officer was widely recorded by witnesses, most of whom used their phones to film the event. The videos were disseminated rapidly on the video-sharing website YouTube. This example demonstrates that technologies such as the cell phone and the Internet allowed the public to participate in production of their own media, rather than passively consuming the news by reading a newspaper or online story (Antony & Thomas, 2010). The authors noted that YouTube is considered a medium for voices that may be typically oppressed and not given attention by the traditional news media (p. 1290).

The emergence of citizen journalism has led to scholarly studies that seek to distinguish the difference between the professional journalist and the citizen journalist. (Brown-Smith, 2012; Joyce, 2007). The word "professional" indicates training and special knowledge that others (amateurs) do not have; part of the journalist's professional training is the "question-and-answer," or interviewing, that they engage in, though some citizens feel they can perform the same task without a journalism degree (Ostertag &

Tuchman, 2012). The authors stated the profession was “vulnerable” because of the inability of journalists to distinguish themselves from citizen journalists, and that journalists were largely unwilling to reinvent themselves (p. 910).

Is it true that professional journalists are not willing to change, even as they are faced with the Internet’s prominence and popularity? The relationship between traditional journalism (notably that of newspapers) and social media is frequently discussed and researched (Brown-Smith, 2012; Carpenter, 2010; Murthy, 2011). Though citizen journalism itself is not examined in this study, it is important to understand its relationship with professional journalism and how it has complicated the definition of a journalist’s role.

It is important to examine what professional journalists say about their own roles in this ever-changing environment and what changes they may perceive in their jobs due to social media. Documenting the concrete differences and similarities between print newspapers today and print newspapers of the recent past, before online interactivity and social media became prominent, is critical to understanding the changes in journalism and our information environment. It is also important to research the newspaper coverage of breaking news before the advent of social media and after to determine how the journalist’s role has (or has not) changed.

Using a case study of the Columbine and Aurora shootings for comparative purposes, the following specific research questions were identified:

1. Is there a difference in the type and content of the Columbine breaking news stories with the type and content of the Aurora breaking news stories? If there are differences, what are they?
2. Do professional journalists perceive a difference in the way they covered the breaking news of the Columbine shootings in 1999, and the way they covered the Aurora shooting in 2012?
3. If they do perceive differences, what are the differences in the way they collect information and organize it in breaking news situations?
4. What differences, if any, has social media made in the routines and practices of the professional journalists interviewed for this project?
5. How do professional journalists incorporate social media into their reporting practices, and have social media changed journalists' views on the field of journalism?

I anticipate that the results of my case study will help journalists to formulate ideas of their roles and help them to use social media more effectively for breaking news coverage. The results will assist print journalists in redefining how newspapers fit in the journalism field with social media and the Internet, and how to potentially use new media to grow newspaper journalism as a whole.

Methodology

To investigate how breaking news has changed since the advent of social media, I chose to conduct a case study, comparing breaking news in the first 48 hours of the Columbine school shooting in 1999 to the first 48 hours of news coverage after the Aurora theatre shooting in 2012. I used two methods of data collection: personal interviews with journalists who covered one or both of these events, and a content analysis of the coverage of both events in *The Denver Post*, the primary newspaper in central Colorado, where both of these events took place. These methods, guided by grounded theory (O'Connor, 2008) and discourse research (Wetherell & Taylor, 2001), have helped me to answer my research questions.

I conducted five in-depth interviews with newspaper journalists who contributed to the production of breaking news about these shootings. I received permission to conduct the interviews from the Institutional Review Board's Office of Human Research Protection in December 2012. The journalists were chosen based on their coverage of the Columbine and Aurora events; three covered both, but all five were involved in breaking news coverage of at least one of the shootings. I retrieved the journalists' contact information from *The Denver Post*'s "contact us" sections on their websites. I wrote

down the bylines (author attributions) listed on the breaking news stories, and decided to reach out to the journalists who had worked or currently worked at *The Denver Post*. Ultimately, I interviewed those who assented to the interview at the time requested and who were in Denver when I traveled there in January 2013. Therefore, the journalists used in this study were identified first by fitting the necessary criteria based on the study and second, by their availability during the data collection period.

I conducted two in-person interviews with journalists in the Denver area and one phone interview with a journalist now living in the San Francisco area; the two interviewed in Denver were staff writers from *The Denver Post* and one was an editor at a major San Francisco newspaper, who had worked at *The Denver Post* when the Columbine event occurred. I also interviewed, by phone, a faculty member in the journalism department of a public university in Denver, who had been an editor at *The Denver Post* in 1999, and a third staff writer at *The Denver Post*. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes and each was recorded on an audio recorder. Fig. 1, the list of questions, was designed to encourage the journalists to talk about the experience in general terms at the beginning of the interview and then move to questions about more specific routines. The wording of the questions was slightly altered depending on which event the journalist covered, but the content of the questions did not vary. Therefore, this basic list of questions is an accurate representation of what I asked the journalists.

Fig. 1: Interview questions posed to selected journalists

1. Can we talk a little about your experience covering the Columbine/Aurora shooting? What was your role on the team as The Denver Post staff covered the shooting?
2. Whose job was it to post the stories of the breaking news events? Do you remember if there was a specific online editor at the time?
3. What was the routine for publishing breaking news, print and online, at the time? What was the editing schedule? Did you have to turn anything in before the last print deadline?
4. How quickly was news expected to be posted on the web?
5. How important do you think social media's role is in the breaking news environment today? How is the online work organized, edited and posted?
6. How do you incorporate social media in your work? What exactly do the reporters consume, when and how? How do they contribute via social media, when and over what channels? How has their use of social media evolved over the past couple of years?
7. Has the advent of social media made any difference in your particular reporting/editing practices? Do you think journalism is more "authentic" now because of social media?

I then transcribed each interview in its entirety. I will transfer the audio files to a flash drive upon thesis publication and lock it in a safe. The files will then be destroyed five years after publication, per IRB policy. The full transcripts of the interviews are attached in Appendix B.

Furthermore, I conducted a content analysis of *The Denver Post* coverage of the Columbine and Aurora shootings. I used LexisNexis Academic database to access the breaking news stories. LexisNexis listed the stories (or news articles, which is an interchangeable term) and included the writer of the story, the date, the section of the newspaper in which the story was published, and variables such as word count. I chose to examine only *The Denver Post* because that newspaper is the only citywide newspaper that covered both events in depth. *The Rocky Mountain News* was another Denver daily newspaper, but closed in 2009 and therefore did not cover the Aurora shooting in 2012.

Additionally, looking at print coverage of the events provides a tangible contrast between the years 1999 and 2012 and was a simpler way to collect quantitative data than attempting to compare and contrast different types of media with each other. Examining only *The Denver Post* presented clear similarities and differences between breaking news coverage of events pre- and post-social media.

I compared and contrasted the news stories published in the first 48 hours after the events' occurrence, locating the stories on LexisNexis by searching keywords. For the Columbine High School shooting, I searched "columbine" and limited the results to only *The Denver Post* coverage. I navigated through the results to find coverage beginning on April 21st, 1999. I stopped searching after I coded the stories through April 22nd. I then searched "theater" and again selected only *The Denver Post's* coverage, and navigated to find the date July 21st, 2012, when newspaper coverage of the Aurora shooting began. I stopped coding stories after the date of July 22nd. I identified the variables that I personally determined the most important to compare and created a coding sheet, comparing variables such as word count, number of bylines, number of contributors, and lede type (the lede is the opening paragraph in a news story). The coding sheet and a description of the variables is included in Appendix A. I analyzed the data from the content analysis by inputting all the variables in an Excel spreadsheet, and then used the data to identify differences and similarities in the print coverage.

For the personal interviews, I transcribed all the interviews carefully, and then analyzed the texts using grounded theory and discourse theory. Both of these methods require a researcher to read texts closely, identify common themes, and consider what is

said as well as what is not said. The themes from the personal interviews, along with the quantitative data from the content analysis, have enabled me to draw conclusions about my research questions based on the collected data.

Findings

These results are based on my two methods of research: content analysis and in-depth interviews. First, I conducted a content analysis in which I compared newspaper coverage of the first 48 hours after the Columbine High School shooting in 1999 to the Aurora theater shooting in 2012. I used *The Denver Post* and LexisNexis database to retrieve the stories, searching on only the stories that were published in print in the first 48 hours after the event occurred. The coding sheet is attached in Appendix A. I coded a total of 71 stories; 59 were stories published after the Aurora event and 12 were stories about the Columbine shooting. The headlines of the 71 stories are also attached in Appendix A.

Second, I conducted in-depth interviews with five journalists who either currently work or formerly worked at *The Denver Post* during one or both of the events. I transcribed the five interviews, and the full transcripts are attached in Appendix B. I used discourse analysis to examine the themes of the interviews, to identify points the journalists found most important, and to discern how journalists felt about the changes in their own jobs and how they have changed due to the popularity of social media. I interviewed three current workers at *The Denver Post* and two former workers. The five journalists interviewed will be identified as Journalist #1, Journalist #2 and so on:

Journalist #1 is an editor at a major paper in San Francisco and worked at *The Denver Post* during the Columbine shooting in 1999.

Journalist #2 is a current worker at *The Denver Post* and covered breaking news of the Aurora event in 2012.

Journalist #3 is a current worker at *The Denver Post* and covered both the Columbine and Aurora events in some breaking news capacity.

Journalist #4 works at a local university in Denver, but was an editor at *The Denver Post* during the Columbine shooting.

Journalist #5 is a current worker at *The Denver Post* and covered both the Columbine and Aurora events as well, but focused more on Columbine coverage.

The first research question primarily involved results from the content analysis; the second one involved results from the interviews and discourse analysis. The third and fourth research questions cover both aspects, and are answered first with the content analysis and secondly with the discourse analysis. The fifth question simply asked journalists to describe their experience with social media unrelated to the Columbine and Aurora shootings, so the fifth question does not include data from the content analysis.

Table 1 shows results of the content analysis that will be used to answer the research questions. The headlines, number of words per story and the section in which the story appeared (such as news or opinion) was listed in LexisNexis and used as results. The average number of words per story and mean number of sources were not listed in LexisNexis. Those numbers were calculated after adding up both variables and dividing them by the total number of words and sources.

Table 1: Content analysis results

	Columbine	Aurora
Number of stories found on LexisNexis Database in the first 48 hours of <i>The Denver Post</i> coverage	12	59
Average number of words per story	887	528
Story with the most bylines/contributors	Headline: “Firms respond to tragedy” 1 byline, 10 contributors	Headline: “Midnight Massacre: Aurora theater shooting” 0 byline, 37 contributors
Percentage of news stories	66%	81%
Percentage of commentary (editorials)	16%	15%
Mean number of sources per story	5.5	2.6

RQ1: Is there a difference in the type and content of news coverage of the Columbine breaking news stories and the type and content of the Aurora breaking news stories? If there are differences, what are they?

The content analysis of the news stories in the first 48 hours of the shootings showed a stark contrast in the newspaper’s breaking news coverage. In the 48 hours after the Aurora shooting, 59 stories were published in the newspaper, versus 12 stories after Columbine. Nine of the Aurora stories were opinion columns that did not involve breaking news updates, and three of those columns were editorials republished from other newspapers. Table 2 below shows the differences in the categories of stories observed

after the events. A category here is defined as the section in which the story appears in, which was indicated on LexisNexis. Although there were much fewer Columbine stories than Aurora stories, the Columbine stories had more variety in story category than the Aurora ones.

Table 2: The categories of stories observed in the aftermath of the Aurora and Columbine shootings

Columbine		Aurora	
N = 12			
N = 59			
News	9	News	49
Opinion	1	Opinion	9
Sports	1	Sports	1
Business	1	Business	0

The data indicate a substantial shift in breaking news coverage from 1999 to 2012. Though there were many more stories published in the aftermath of the Aurora event, the stories were shorter and had fewer sources than at Columbine. The average word count for each of the Aurora stories was 528 words, and the average word count for the Columbine stories was 887 words. The number of sources quoted in each story also decreased — the number for the Aurora stories was 2.6, whereas the mean number of people interviewed for the stories after Columbine was 5.5. Half of the 12 Columbine

stories were more than 1,000 words long, but only three of the 59 (5%) Aurora stories were of that length.

The results from the content analysis show that the quantity of stories in breaking news coverage in newspapers has become more important in the last decade. Because the newspaper cycle was daily in 1999, journalists had an entire day to gather information on their stories and write more detailed articles. Today's cycle emphasizes the importance of posting breaking news online as quickly as the journalists receive it. This practice allows journalists less time to research and do reporting on the stories that will be published in the next day's paper. The journalists who were interviewed attested to the difference in the news cycle's time crunch of 2012 versus that of 1999.

RQ2: Do professional journalists perceive a difference in the way they covered the breaking news of the Columbine shootings, in 1999, and the way they covered the Aurora shooting in 2012?

The journalists themselves perceived differences in the ways the stories of both events were covered. The journalists who covered breaking news for the Columbine shooting said that technology was rudimentary in 1999 compared to 2012, and that uploading breaking news online was unimportant compared to the news that would be printed in the next day's newspaper. Journalist #5, who had been an editor at *The Denver Post* at the time of the shooting, told of an encounter with the online editor:

Journalist #5: "I remember the guy who was in charge of (the website) coming to my desk in the middle of the afternoon and

saying, "do you have anything I can use?" And I honestly don't know if we even took time to get him anything. It was just so unimportant at that point. It wasn't at the top of our minds because we weren't used to it..."

Journalist #5 also referred to the technology of 1999 as "primitive" and said that the cell phone network around the high school quickly jammed up, and journalists could not make phone calls. Journalist #1, who also covered breaking news that day, said most reporters at *The Denver Post* did not even have their own cell phones or laptops.

Journalist #1: "It also wasn't a time when every single kid had a cell phone to call and say "here's where I am, we heard shots fired here, shots fired there." It just was, you know, it really was more of a vacuum...the Internet was probably the last thing people cared about at the time."

In 2012, social media and online updates were the first priority for the reporters who covered the Aurora shooting. Journalist #2, who was in high school during the Columbine events and covered only the Aurora shooting for *The Denver Post*, emphasized the immediacy of updating the website with breaking news:

Journalist #2: "Anybody who is involved in something like that wants information immediately. It used to be, 'we know this stuff' and you find out who got it tomorrow. Now it's 'we know this stuff' and you find out about it this afternoon once we have time to write something up. Now it's 'we know and you know immediately.'"

The idea of social media facilitating the search for people to interview was discussed by the journalists as well. Journalist #3, who covered both events, said Columbine was more difficult to cover than Aurora due to the inability of technology in 1999 to make it easy for reporters to search for people:

Journalist #3: “There was a lot to do. I was not on (the) scene. I was working it from the office. This speaks to the absence of social media at the time. We wanted to find people. Nowadays, you could go on Facebook or Twitter and find people in 30 seconds or less.”

Some of the reporters referred to the old technology of 1999 in a humorous tone, as though they thought the technology they used to cover the Columbine event was silly and old compared to the advanced technology of 2012. The journalists did not seem nostalgic while discussing the older technology. Instead, they described the “absence” or the “vacuum” caused by the lack of technology that they became accustomed to in the modern day. Therefore, the differences between, and perceptions of, the technologies available in 1999 and 2012 had a significant impact on the way the journalists reported breaking news in the two events.

RQ3: What are the differences in the way (the journalists) collect information and organize it in breaking news situations?

As mentioned before, the number of Columbine stories published in the 48 hours after the shooting was much smaller than the number of Aurora stories, but the Columbine articles were much longer and included more sources (people interviewed)

than the Aurora stories. This change indicates that the way the journalists collected information in 1999 was distinct from the way they collected information in 2012. Not only were the number of sources coded, but also the types of sources (such as police, government figures, etc.). Only one story of the 12 Columbine stories gave any insight as to the lives of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, who were the shooters that died on the scene. The stories about Klebold and Harris were longer, but also more judgmental about the shooters' personalities. In contrast, eight of the 59 Aurora stories involved details about James Holmes, the Aurora shooter. Though Holmes may have been discussed more because he lived through the Aurora shooting, the stories about him were still more quickly published than any involving Klebold and Harris, according to the dates of the stories posted on LexisNexis. These stories discussed Holmes more objectively, compared to the stories about Klebold and Harris. The shift in technology and the importance of the Internet made it so reporters could publish more information in a faster way after Aurora, though the stories were less detailed than those published in print after Columbine.

Another variable not seen in the Columbine stories was discussion about the political ramifications of the event, such as the effects on gun control. Six of the Aurora stories directly addressed that issue by discussing how the Aurora shooting would impact gun legislation. The lack of stories on gun control in 1999 may be due to the fact that the Columbine High School shooting was one of the first major shootings to earn national attention in the U.S., and according to "PBS News Hour," the event was what renewed the gun control debate (2009).

Additionally, none of the Columbine stories covered details about the deceased. These stories were published after the first 48 hours following the shooting. After the Aurora shooting, however, 11 feature stories about the deceased were published within 48 hours (a total of 12 were killed during the shooting). These numbers imply that information was easier and faster to find during the 2012 shootings than in 1999, before the Internet or social media were considered important in the journalistic field. Table 3 shows the percentages of these story types observed during the breaking news coverage of the Aurora shooting.

Table 3: Select types of breaking news stories seen in Aurora shooting coverage

N = 59

Stories about shooter	8
Profiles of deceased	11
Political ramifications	6
Other stories	34

There was also a difference in the organization of attribution between the events. One traditional way newspaper journalists have organized attribution is under bylines (for example, “By John Doe”). It is not uncommon for multiple bylines to be listed in the aftermath of a major breaking news event, when journalists collaborate to collect the information. Generally, one or more journalists are credited with writing an article, and at times there may be a few contributors to the article. Contributors are staff members who help write stories, and they are listed at the end of the story, usually as “John Doe contributed to this story.” In the aftermath of Columbine, 5 of the 12 stories had two

bylines; the remaining 7 had one. The highest number of contributors listed on any Columbine story was 4 reporters. In contrast, the main story of the Aurora shooting — the principal article on the front page that had all the basic information about the shooting — had no bylines, but 37 contributors.

In fact, 13 of the Aurora stories had no byline attribution at all. The majority of these stories were the 11 features of the deceased. The features — non-news stories about the lives of those who died at the Aurora event — were gathered from online sources, such as Facebook or posts by the family of the deceased on the Web. This practice differed from the past, when reporters called the families and spoke to them directly to obtain information about the deceased. Therefore, little traditional reporting on the lives of the deceased was provided by the journalist. In the Columbine stories, however, there was a great deal of reporting, indicated by the story length and the number of sources; the sources were also directly interviewed and named, and no information whatsoever was reported to be found on the fledgling Internet of 1999.

The newspaper journalists as a whole agreed on one crucial difference in the way information was collected in breaking news between the two events: accuracy and verification. Although reporters with *The Denver Post* used Twitter for many of their real-time updates, Journalist #2 said the number of people posting breaking news on Twitter sometimes did not assist in the distribution of information:

Journalist #2: “It has also added a level of noise to reporting that is sometimes not beneficial. [Pause.] At this point, we have to tweet and maybe post a short online story, then write through that story and then

we have to write the full-on recast print story for tomorrow's paper...Sometimes those requirements work against the story. You could have more time to fully report something than if you didn't have to do that kind of stuff."

Journalist #2 also said the competitive nature of the journalism industry exacerbated the speed of breaking news reporting and that journalists attempt to "one-up" each other. Journalist #5, who did not participate in Aurora coverage, said inaccuracies were huge problems while collecting information about breaking news due to the Internet, and that these mistakes were not as prevalent after the Columbine event:

Journalist #5: "When (information) proved not to be true, we all had the same defined period of time (after Columbine) and people were getting their news from our sources, so we were able to reach (out) to the same audiences with the correct information. Now, millions and millions of people are getting this information and they're not all getting the correction."

Journalist #5 also said that anyone who can tweet can put any information out on the Web and that the journalist's job is to verify the information and distribute it to his or her sources as credible information. All of the journalists commented on this idea and most agreed with Journalist #5. However, Journalist #3 said while the idea of accuracy is important, it breaks down in practice:

Journalist #3: "There's a lot of lip service given to the idea that accuracy is the most important. When push comes to shove, certainly

faster is better. Everyone wants to be first and accurate, but that doesn't always happen, as we've seen in (the Newtown, Connecticut shooting).”

Journalist #4, who, like Journalist #3, covered both events for *The Denver Post*, echoed this sentiment and said an editor at *The Los Angeles Times* had claimed that the newspaper was most proud of what the Los Angeles journalists didn't report, not what they did report, because the newspaper did not print as many inaccuracies:

Journalist #4: “In the lust to be first, some people make grievous mistakes...I would say accuracy is very important. It's not all-important.”

Though the journalists at times differed in their opinion of whether accuracy was the most vital part of the journalist's job, they did say accuracy was a notion that had to be juggled with the competitive nature of being “first.” Journalist #1 said that news organizations could not realistically “laze around waiting” to publish breaking news, but they also could not afford to be so fast that they were wrong:

Journalist #1: “...We'd like to be first, but we also want to be right. Just because we see tweets from other news organizations either calling elections or putting up information that is breaking news, we are not going to do that until we have it confirmed by our own valid sources. We will not re-tweet a breaking news feed from somebody else unless we know it to be true.”

The journalists felt that accuracy — whether it could be realistically achieved or not — and verification were two principles that separated them from citizen journalists.

Additionally, the journalists did not speak as though their jobs were in jeopardy or were threatened by citizen journalists. Citizen journalists could tweet or report whatever they wanted, but professional journalists had the responsibility of working at a higher standard.

RQ4: What differences, if any, have social media made in the routines and practices of professional journalists?

The content analysis showed that the 11 features of the deceased in Aurora had neither bylines nor any sources listed, and most information regarding the dead came from the Internet. For example, one profile used information from Twitter to discuss a young journalist who had tweeted up until the time the movie began playing in the theater. This fact was used as part of the story.

One variable coded in the stories was “use of social media.” No use of social media or any Internet reference was made in the Columbine stories following the shooting. As the journalists said, the Internet was the last priority for breaking news updates in 1999. Internet use and social media’s use as sources clearly changed in the 13 years between the two shootings. Eleven of the 59 Aurora stories (18%) specifically named social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, or a blog, usually as a source of information, and one other story mentioned the Internet in general (specifically dating sites that James Holmes, the Aurora shooter, visited prior to the shooting).

Three of the stories mentioned more than one type of social media; four cited Twitter as a social media source and did not mention any other types. One story was

dedicated entirely to the use of social media in reporting breaking news updates about the event. The story did not use any sources, but instead took data from the Internet to compile the article. The following table shows the types of social media mentioned in the selected Aurora stories. Twitter was the medium mentioned the most, followed by Facebook. The umbrella term “social media” was mentioned in two stories as well. Table 4 shows the types of social media used as sources in the 11 Aurora stories. Twitter was used in the majority of the 11 stories. Facebook was used 4 times and blogs were cited twice. Storify, a social media website that aggregates tweets and presents them on one page, was used once.

Table 4: Types of social media used as sources in 11 Aurora stories

Twitter	7 times
Facebook	4 times
Blogs	2 times
Storify	1 time
General mention of term “social media”	1 time

N =

These statistics show that journalists are now using social media as a part of their process of reporting breaking news. In 1999, the journalists interviewed said social

media did not factor into breaking news because the widespread use of the Internet was not quite underway and because social media on the web had not yet come into being. In 2012, the 11 profiles of the deceased in Aurora used social media and the Internet as sources, instead of interviewing people. Therefore, journalists relied more heavily on social media and the Internet as sources in stories for the Aurora coverage, whereas after the Columbine coverage, the Internet was not used as a source at all.

RQ5: How do professional journalists incorporate social media into their reporting practices, and have social media changed journalists' views on the field of journalism?

All of the Denver journalists agreed that large changes in their reporting practices and in reporting practices in general are due to the Internet and social media. Journalist #5 said that, for a story about legalized marijuana in Colorado, he reached out to contacts via email and Facebook and said social media have made reporting “a lot faster...it doesn't make stories better.” Journalist #1 mentioned the idea of speed as well:

Journalist #1: “You have to be part of social media and use it and view it and understand how it works. I think to a certain extent it has made, especially reporting breaking news, more fast-paced than what it used to be.”

Journalist #2, who covered courts for *The Denver Post*, compared using Twitter to having to dictate updates to editors over the phone, saying Twitter was much faster than dictation and that journalists have “evolved.” Journalist #2 also cited the breaking

news coverage of the massive wildfires in Colorado in the summer of 2012:

Journalist #2: “Finding people on Twitter and getting photos so we can visualize what's happening...was key. It was a hugely useful tool. “

Even though Journalist #4 no longer worked with *The Denver Post*, Journalist #4 said his/her personal consumption of news was changed by social media. When another school shooting happened in the Denver area in 2005, Journalist #4 immediately looked at updates online and continued to use social media to read about breaking news:

Journalist #4: “I went online and read about (the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting). And that was pre-Twitter ... that was when it started to come home how important that was....I followed the Aurora shooting on Twitter and online. I think it's huge, it's...really important what's happening, and more interesting.”

Because many journalists have found Twitter an appropriate tool to use for breaking news reporting, the journalists said that newspaper editors are beginning to require reporters to have social media accounts. For example, journalists have to have Twitter at the paper in the San Francisco Bay Area where Journalist #1 works and at *The Denver Post*. The reporters who work for Journalist #1 are responsible for using Twitter to disseminate breaking news stories they write. This editor said applications like TweetDeck, an interface that organizes Twitter news feeds into customized columns, allows for reporters to check on their subject areas quickly. At *The Denver Post*, Journalist #2 said everyone was required to have a Twitter account, though they are used to “varying degrees.” Journalist #3 said Twitter use at the newspaper was “all over the

map”:

Journalist #3: “We've also been encouraged to use (Twitter) not just for tweeting our own stuff, but if we see stuff from a colleague or a publication that we think our followers and readers would be interested in. You have a lot of re-tweeting to other people's links, whether it's *The New York Times* or something we think would be of interest to our readers.”

Although Twitter is a requirement for some newsrooms, other social media may be neglected or useless to breaking news. A few of the journalists commented that Facebook was not conducive to the dissemination of breaking news. Journalist #3 said that Facebook fan pages with many followers did well, such as *The Denver Post's* page, but that the individual accounts of the journalists were difficult to use for professional purposes:

Journalist #3: “In terms of Facebook, I almost never post a status. I originally started it as a personal thing and you reach that point where you say, ‘I have this personal Facebook page. How much do I want to use this for work?’ It can become a little uncomfortable.”

Journalist #2 made a similar statement, saying that it is easier to build a community around a Twitter account than a Facebook one, for “professional purposes.” Journalist #3 said the newspaper had a blog that didn't receive much attention, but said it should be used as a platform for short videos so they could be tweeted out to the audience.

The journalists were also asked if they believed the field of journalism was still authentic, considering the rise of social media and citizen journalism. In this case, “authentic” was the term used to describe the roles of journalists as an informer and as a watchdog, keeping institutions and people accountable for their actions. These roles are considered the traditional roles of a journalist. Therefore, the “authenticity” of a journalist may, in some points of view, be jeopardized by social media and citizen journalism. However, the reporters saw a difference in their duties versus those of a citizen journalist, and not all of them agreed on the changes social media have enacted on the journalistic field. Journalist #5 said that journalism, as a whole, is less authentic in the present day than before the decline of newspapers:

Journalist #5: “...The number and the [pause] quality and experience of journalists has been devastated in the last six or eight years. The trained and experienced journalists who would have reported stories like Newtown and the shooting is down so much that journalism isn't as authentic and isn't as well-reported...When it comes to the investigative stuff, that's where I wish there was more.”

However, the other journalists disagreed with Journalist #5's view. Journalist #4 also addressed the changes in the quality of reporting, but said the reporters that remain are “the cream of the crop.” Other journalists said social media, citizen journalism, and the decline of newspapers had not altered the authenticity of journalism. Journalist #2 stated that, while breaking news may be diluted by tweets that are not “worthwhile,” the field of journalism was not inherently less authentic:

Journalist #2: “If you were only going to look at Twitter for your news on the theater shooting, it would be almost pointless. But it's a great snapshot of what's going on out there. I think it's valuable for journalists to see what other people are talking about. It's sort of like getting to eavesdrop on a giant conversation on what you are writing about. I think that better informs the news and makes it more authentic.”

Journalist #3 agreed that solely relying on Twitter for breaking news would reduce authenticity, but that using social media as tools in tandem with traditional ways of reporting would improve journalism as a whole:

Journalist #3: “I don't think the technology defines the authenticity. I think the individual journalist defines the authenticity...I think there's a right way and wrong way to do it...In the hands of a competent, principled journalist, I think all those tools can only make us better or more authentic as journalists, if we not only use those electronic or digital tools, but also verify in more traditional ways as well. It's that melding of the two, the traditional journalism ethics and practices with the digital tools that makes or can make for great journalists and journalism. Again, I think the technology is neutral. It's how we use it to make us more or less authentic.”

All of the journalists said social media made some sort of change in their reporting practices; they did not indicate that they were victims to the growth of social media. Instead, the journalists referred to social media as useful tools for reporting breaking news, though those tools were not without potentially negative consequences.

Certainly social media and the Internet have changed how news stories are composed even in the print medium; the journalists did not say that social media have made them feel any less professional, but rather social media can be used to the journalists' advantage in order to improve their reporting.

Most agreed that the journalistic field was not negatively affected by social media, but that bad reporting came from individuals, not from the technology. The journalists also concurred that, if used correctly, social media benefit journalism. Journalist #5 was a notable exception and did not believe journalism was as authentic. However, it is important to note that Journalist #5 no longer worked in the newsroom at the time of the interview. Journalist #5, as an academic official, may be relaying the views of those who do not currently work in the field or those who are observers.

Since Journalist #5 did not work directly with social media in reporting as the others did, it makes some logical sense why this person may have a different opinion than those who are directly involved in the changes social media and the Internet have brought to the field. In contrast, working journalists had a more optimistic view of the way journalism was changing. Only one journalist, Journalist #4, remarked on the decline of newspapers in relation to the authenticity of journalism. The others spoke about the field of journalism in a positive manner and believed that journalists had a place in the social media sphere. Journalists still work at finding news, gathering data, organizing stories, and publishing them to public as they have before, now with the assistance of social media in reporting breaking news.

Conclusion

The analysis of *The Denver Post* and the interviews with journalists indicate that newspaper breaking news coverage has changed significantly in the previous 10 years. The data show more recent stories are shorter and use fewer sources overall. The data also show that newspapers print more stories more quickly than they did in the pre-social media era.

These numbers indicate a shift in the ways journalists report, collect, and organize their news. Most of the Aurora stories were short breaking news updates, more reminiscent of short Internet posts than long-form journalism as seen in the Columbine coverage. Additionally, the Aurora stories published updates on the deceased much faster than *The Denver Post* writers did during Columbine. The profiles of the deceased included details and family statements from the Internet and shows how quickly and easily information can be found on the Web.

The journalists' view of their roles did not change as much as the practice of breaking news coverage. The reporters mostly agreed that their role to accurately report news had not been affected by social media; rather their jobs became more important. The journalists also did not feel their specific roles were in jeopardy due to the decline of newspapers and the rise of citizen journalism. The reporters saw social media as tools to further improve traditional journalistic practices of storytelling and reporting accurately. To them, the differences were mostly seen in the now-faster news cycle. Rather than sticking to the daily circulation of newspapers, journalists had to adapt to the speed of the Internet and social media like Twitter updating every second.

Despite the adjustment, the journalists did not feel the foundation of their roles had significantly changed due to the evolution in technology such as the Internet, smartphones, and digital cameras. At its base, the traditional role remained the same. Some journalists even felt the field as a whole had potential for improvement since technology made certain aspects of the job – such as updating breaking news directly to social media – easier. However, other factors, such as being both accurate and fast, were complicated by the Internet. Although some parts of the traditional job of the journalist have changed, the journalists' principles have not.

The five journalists interviewed did not think their jobs were in jeopardy, but, in future studies, more journalists should be interviewed. With a larger sample size, there will be more accurate indications of how professional journalists truly feel about their jobs in relation to social media. Additionally, only newspaper journalism was studied for this project. Broadcast journalism is another large segment of traditional journalism and it is necessary to study the effects of social media and citizen journalism on those outlets as well.

Another variable that would be compelling to study is the content of online stories compared to the content of print stories. Online stories may differ considerably from print stories, or they may be the same. Do newspaper journalists now focus mainly on online content or do they still dedicate most of their time to print journalism? Is the amount of time spent on those platforms equal? A study addressing such questions would be useful to the field.

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Appendix A

Gianna Cruet

List of headlines in content analysis

Content analysis coding sheet

Description of variables

Date/Story	Event
4/21/99: Carnage puts spotlight on Trench Coat Mafia	Columbine
4/21/99: Panic yields to relief for lucky; Parents agonize to find children	Columbine
4/21/99: The day the flowers died at Columbine	Columbine
4/22/99: No link to handgun theft seen	Columbine
4/22/99: World of Darkness: Comfortable suburbs harbor troubled teens	Columbine
4/22/99: Plans for high school and students unclear	Columbine
4/22/99: Sons of Columbine as different as good and evil	Columbine
4/22/99: Firms respond to tragedy: An outpouring of financial, logistical support from state businesses	Columbine
4/22/99: What you can do to help	Columbine
4/22/99: School next door eyed: Sources cite Kennedy-Columbine links	Columbine
4/22/99: Teens struggle to understand	Columbine
4/22/99: Rifle found in student's car at Kiowa High: 17-year-old arrested, expelled from school	Columbine
7/21/12: Big names tweet, post condolences	Aurora
7/21/12: Rapid response	Aurora
7/21/12: Midnight Massacre: Aurora Theater Shooting: "Our hearts are broken"	Aurora
7/21/12: Anguish among family, friends of the dead, missing runs deep	Aurora
7/21/12: Rockies Briefs: Rockies honor victims of Aurora tragedy	Aurora
7/21/12: Memorials not enough for victims	Aurora
7/21/12: What they are saying	Aurora
7/21/12: What they are saying	Aurora
7/21/12: The OpenForum readers respond to shootings at Aurora movie theater	Aurora
7/21/12: We've seen this movie before	Aurora
7/21/12: Grieving another senseless tragedy	Aurora
7/21/12: The gag rule on guns	Aurora
7/21/12: Experts envision stricter measures	Aurora
7/21/12: "It's tragic...but it's isolated"	Aurora
7/21/12: List of worst shootings in U.S.	Aurora
7/21/12: Gunman came to theater with four weapons	Aurora
7/21/12: Several hundred gather to mourn	Aurora
7/21/12: Panicked families search for familiar faces after tragedy, Where to find help	Aurora
7/21/12: Suspect to make first appearance Monday	Aurora
7/21/12: Issue is far out of sight	Aurora
7/21/12: A quiet man who authorities say harbored a deadly plan	Aurora
7/21/12: Immortal? No, but alleged gunman is tragic reminder of problem	Aurora
7/21/12: What first seemed part of show turned to horrific, chaotic scene	Aurora

7/21/12: Heroic efforts to save lives	Aurora
7/21/12: Disbelief, horror, worry and then, finally, relief	Aurora
7/21/12: Booby-trapped apartment "vexing" bomb technicians	Aurora
7/21/12: Statements on the Aurora theater shooting	Aurora
7/21/12: DeAngelis: Tragedy has parallels to Columbine	Aurora
7/21/12: Villain in comic that inspired movie brings gun to theater	Aurora
7/21/12: Outlets compete for speed, accuracy	Aurora
7/22/12: Swimmer thinks of victims	Aurora
7/22/12: Tragedy on Rockies' minds as Padres hand them 9-5 defeat	Aurora
7/22/12: After another gun rampage: Why Colorado?	Aurora
7/22/12: "She wanted to help"	Aurora
7/22/12: Slain father "loved life"	Aurora
7/22/12: Midnight Massacre: Aurora Theater Shooting: "Everybody is hurting"	Aurora
7/22/12: Music, comedy provide relief during dark days	Aurora
7/22/12: Muddy facets of his life emerge	Aurora
7/22/12: Five friends fortunate to still be together	Aurora
7/22/12: Holmes held in segregation in county jail	Aurora
7/22/12: College program exclusive	Aurora
7/22/12: Excitement turns to grief for workers at Red Robin	Aurora
7/22/12: A day to grieve for those who were lost	Aurora
7/22/12: 6-year-old just learned to swim, "loved to dress up and read"	Aurora
7/22/12: Ohio native protected his girlfriend	Aurora
7/22/12: Sailor was an "outstanding shipmate"	Aurora
7/22/12: "A great man" to his Air Force colleagues	Aurora
7/22/12: "A warm and loving heart"	Aurora
7/22/12: Shielded girlfriend, saved her life	Aurora
7/22/12: First wedding anniversary would have been Sunday	Aurora
7/22/12: A calculated plan: apartment rigged with deadly traps	Aurora
7/22/12: Colorado gives back with flow of blood	Aurora
7/22/12: Police defuse booby-traps	Aurora
7/22/12: How the shooting saga unfolded	Aurora
7/22/12: Ammunition cache not unusual, say gun experts	Aurora
7/22/12: "So scared right now"	Aurora
7/22/12: Hickenlooper's train stop raises money for victims	Aurora
7/22/12: Mom of two "lost...to a mad man"	Aurora
7/22/12: Recent master's graduate a fan of Arizona, Spider-Man	Aurora
7/22/12: Social sites put stamp on real-time reporting	Aurora

Content analysis coding sheet:

Columbine and Aurora coverage by *The Denver Post*

Event:

Headline:

Date:

Byline(s):

Contributors:

1. Which section of the newspaper is the story in?
 - a. News
 - b. Opinion/Column
 - c. Reader submission (i.e. letter to the editor)
2. What is the main subject of the story?
 - a. Breaking news update
 - b. Profile of deceased
 - c. "How to help" article
 - d. Political ramifications of event (explain:
 - e. Information about killer(s)
 - f. Feature
 - g. N/A (If not news story)
3. Who are the sources in the story?
 - a. Police
 - b. Parent
 - c. Friend
 - d. Bystander
 - e. Governmental
 - f. Subject of story
 - g. Teacher
 - h. Student
 - i. Academic official
 - j. Medical
 - k. Other:
4. What kind of lede is in the story?
 - a. Breaking news lede
 - b. Feature lede
 - c. Hard news lede
 - d. Other:

Description of terms:

Byline: A byline is a journalism term for the author attribution of a story.

Contributor: A contributor is another staff member of the newspaper who helps to write the story, but is not included in the byline. Contributors are normally included at the end of the story. For example, a contribution line may read: “Reporter John Doe contributed to this story.”

Source: A person specifically interviewed for the story. This category does not include Internet stories or informational sources that do not involve interaction with people.

Lede: The lede (or lead) is the opening paragraph in a news story.

Hard news lede: A hard news lede consists of facts about the story that answer “who, what, when, where,” and “why.” A hard news lede may only consist of one sentence and functions simply to inform the reader of the story.

Feature lede: A newspaper “feature” lede is a more narrative lede that may not follow the “who, what, when, where, why” form. The feature lede is generally written more narratively or creatively.

Appendix B

Gianna Cruet

Interview Transcripts

Journalist #1 Interview: page 54

Journalist #2 Interview: page 60

Journalist #3 Interview: page 69

Journalist #4 Interview: page 79

Journalist #5 interview: page 86

Journalist #1 Interview

Gianna Cruet: Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. And Donica says hi.

Journalist #1: I apologize if I need to cut out for a couple of seconds . . .

If I need to cut out, that is the reason why. I can make sure we are able to answer all your questions.

Gianna Cruet: What was your experience like covering the shooting? What was your role on that team?

Journalist #1: My role, there was a, very, seriously, every person on staff was involved in covering that story. My role I feel was relatively minor. I happened to be in the newsroom when the cops reporter got the first call about it and we first thought it was a hoax. They were saying, "shots fired at the school, multiple people were down," she got a subsequent call with more details. We thought, "it's April, senior pranks, calling it into the police."

The details she got in the next call were much more, you know, made us think, no, this is the real deal, something is happening. I was immediately sent, without knowing, whether it was a hoax or not, I was immediately sent to the, um, level one trauma hospital.

They take the most serious patients.

Gianna Cruet: Wow.

Journalist #1: My goal was to go try to find parents showing up at the hospital, trying to talk to them, try to get patient information. I didn't know anything at that point. This happened at a time where we didn't have our own PCs. I didn't have a laptop and not even all the reporters had their own cell phone. I happened to have my own cell phone at the time so I could call to the desk and tell them what was going on.

When I arrived, I had never been to the hospital. I went to the hospital and was trying to look around to see if I could figure out who was a parent and who wasn't and immediately got ushered out. And they started putting all the media in a kind of, what you call like, an ambulance bay, where you really couldn't see anything and they weren't going to bring in the patients who needed, you know, who were coming from the shooting anyway.

They just needed a place to keep us where we wouldn't see things. That was where I got stuck. I had no idea what was going on for a long time because the editors were busy

coordinating, I couldn't look at Twitter updates on my cell phone, and it was just very hard to get any kind of information.

I knew it was a big deal when I saw a reporter from network news, NBC network news, show up with his news crew and stay out there. It wasn't until they did a livestream of the press conference of the Jefferson County sheriff, saying, we think, the initial estimate was there could be up to 20 people dead, that I knew the seriousness of what it was. And that was hours after the shooting.

Gianna Cruet: Oh. Wow. That's definitely interesting.

Journalist #1: Part of the reason is why that, at the time, they have since changed, since modified, how my respond to school shootings because of what happened at Columbine. Part of the problem at Columbine is that they waited for hours before they sent in SWAT teams. They could not assess the full damage of what had been done until hours later.

Gianna Cruet: Ok.

Journalist #1: Now they move in, I'm pretty sure this was the case, now they move in a lot quicker in terms of being able to try and close down and secure buildings. I think you can go back and look at some of the, um, stories. There were people, there was somebody that jumped out a window, I think, at Columbine, and there were also people holding up signs saying "please come help," you know.

You know, it also wasn't a time when every single kid had a cell phone to call and say "here's where I am, we heard shots fired here, shots fired there." It just was, you know, it really was more of a vacuum.

Gianna Cruet: I did look up *The Denver Post* with the Wayback Machine website. I saw a short story posted there. I didn't know if you know, maybe you know how it happened in 1999, was it someone's job to post the story? After the fact? Was the Internet the last thing people cared about at the time?

Journalist #1: The Internet was probably the last thing people cared about at the time. When I started at the Post, which was in 1998, I was the night cops reporter. I was not told "hurry up and write something for the Web." Like I said, not everyone had their own PCs. There were three, maybe two or three PCs for the newsroom where you could go onto the Internet.

Gianna Cruet: That sounds amazing to me. So there wasn't a specific online editor? It was just whoever got around to it?

Journalist #1: I think there was, we did have a web team, but they weren't integrated with the newsroom like how they are now.

Gianna Cruet: Right. I was going to ask that too. Okay. That's interesting. Basically, your focus was to get what you got in print.

Journalist #1: Mm-hmm.

Gianna Cruet: So what was the routine for publishing breaking news for print and online at the time, if you remember like, the editing schedule?

Journalist #1: Yeah, I can't speak to the online. I can't speak to the print. You know, print, because there was a night cops reporter, I worked until midnight. I think the latest was maybe 11:30 until we could get something in but I'm not positive. You know, it wasn't uncommon to have to go to a shooting scene and call something in and just dictate so it could make the print edition.

Gianna Cruet: Was news expected to be posted to the Internet quickly? We kind of already went over it, like the last priority?

Journalist #1: It wasn't a thought when I was the cops reporter in '98. It wasn't like, oh, we need to put something to the web. I don't think there was that much of a web presence then. There was, but it wasn't worth getting up breaking news right away. It wasn't until I moved to Arizona that we, but you know, really not just that paper, but the industry as a whole began recognizing breaking news a little more.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. So today, it is very different. I did an internship at the RGJ, the *Reno Gazette-Journal*, and of course when you are on crime, everything gets posted. Sometimes I'd have to go in in the morning and listen to the scanner and write a little update and send it to somebody to post it online.

This also lends to social media. Everything with the RGJ gets posted on Facebook. They post like a million times a day. So, how important do you think the role of social media is in the breaking news environment today? Especially since you are an editor at the [San Francisco newspaper] and the [San Francisco newspaper] is pretty well-known. I mean, you have breaking news right now.

Journalist #1: Right. You know, I would say it is still incredibly important. I think that there is a new generation, clearly, that isn't going to look at the newspaper and expect to see - I mean, we're still seen as a valid source for information, and my thing, what we emphasize, is that we'd like to be first, but we also want to be right.

Just because we see tweets from other news organizations either calling elections or putting up information that is breaking news, we are not going to do that until we have it confirmed by our own valid sources. We will not re-tweet a breaking news feed from somebody else unless we know it to be true.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. So it's less being the first and more being right. I personally think that is a good thing because of what happened in Newtown, when the suspect's brother -

Journalist #1: You have the wrong name. That didn't happen at Columbine. That didn't happen at Columbine because we had, you know, we had time on our side, so to speak. At the time, it sure didn't feel like it, but we had time to say, "ok, do we have the right name of the shooters?" Once we did, then let's go get information on them so that we're not putting out a wrong name because that's one of the worst things you can do is put out a wrong name of someone who has committed or allegedly committed a major crime.

Gianna Cruet: Right. So, in your opinion, is it even more important for journalists to be accurate, but you need to be accurate fast? Because we don't really have that time anymore.

Journalist #1: You do. But you also really lose credibility if you are fast and wrong. I think, yes, you want to be accurate, but you can't laze around waiting. You know, I think you really need to work your sources so you are able to get as much information as possible to confirm whatever it is, breaking news, that is happening.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. I don't know if you were there that day, but the Aurora theater shooting, I am sure the Chronicle ran something on that. I'm not sure if it was an AP story. I didn't report on it specifically but I reported on one of the victims because he was from Sparks.

What was the role of social media when that news broke? If you were there, or maybe if you weren't there, can you tell me what the process is in general with breaking news?

Journalist #1: I was working - What day was that?

Gianna Cruet: It was July 21st. Yeah. Maybe it was the night of July 20th. It was midnight.

Journalist #1: I wasn't working. It was midnight on a Saturday so I wasn't in the newsroom. I fortunately don't have to work too many weekends. I can't say what the role was here other than whatever I read about. So I don't know that you really want me to weigh in on that.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. Well when you are there and breaking news is coming in, what happens with social media? By that I mean, who posts the story? Do you have a separate web team? How does the online work, organized, edited?

Journalist #1: We have a specific breaking news team and they are responsible for trying to get the very basic information to story form. Then the line editor, like myself, will feed

the story and post it. Then we have an online team that will have computers and write an online head for the webpage.

When I send the story over, it has the web head. There is a web head where if you click on the story, there is a different headline. The online editors are responsible for doing the packaging portion. Then we have a home page editor who can send out, who can do the big breaking across the top. Then we determine if it's big enough to be a breaking news story. Then we recently hired a social media editor who can send something out.

But our reporters are also responsible for going using Twitter to send out breaking news stories that they write.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. Well that must all be new for the last couple of years, anyway. It sounds pretty different than what your experience was covering Columbine.

Journalist #1: Yeah. Prior to coming here, I was the breaking news editor in Arizona. Let's see. I did that from probably 2007 to 2008. That is when I was breaking news editor. At that time, Twitter wasn't really part of the equation.

But there was the idea that we would post each breaking thing online. We'd have discussions. If you had a breaking news story, at least that is how I did it with my reporters, what do you put online and what do you save for the paper?

I do have those discussions with my reporters. My feeling is, if we're going to put something in the paper, I don't want someone saying, "yeah, I looked at that online for free yesterday."

Gianna Cruet: Right. Yeah, I understand that. I think the RGJ may have avoided that a little bit because everyone has to pay to read it, which has caused problems, but that's how it is with Gannett lately.

Maybe this is a big umbrellas question but I'll ask it anyway, how have you observed the use of social media and how it's evolved over the last couple of years? You worked before it, you worked during when it was just becoming popular, and you're working now. So what is your overall experience with it, I guess is the question?

Journalist #1: My overall experience is that it's just another tool, so to speak. I use it to send out the stories that I think people might be interested in. I use it to monitor what's going on when other people are writing about what people are saying.

I view it as another means of um, kind of doing what you call beat checks, which is seeing what's going on with what you cover. With something like TweetDeck, I can monitor what people are saying about the mayor and the board of supervisors, which is what I am overseeing now.

If I see a story, it is still going to be the same process. If I want the reporter to follow, they are going to need to check it out themselves before we know anything on it instead of me repeating whatever the tweet was.

Gianna Cruet: So that leads into, how do you think journalism as a whole has been effected by social media? That's like my ultimate question in my thesis. Do you think its authenticity has been affected because some old school, I don't mean it in a derogatory way, but journalists before social media may have a certain opinion on it and people now, it seems like you love it or hate it in some cases, which I know is a very black and white way of looking at it, but I was wondering, did you want to weigh in on that?

Journalist #1: I think, in order to look at the way people are consuming news, you have to be part of social media and use it and view it and understand how it works. I think to a certain extent it has made, especially reporting breaking news, more fast-paced than what it used to be.

Because you, on your Twitter feed, your boss or whoever can say channel 7 is reporting death or one blog is reporting this, why don't we have it? I think that is a matter of, "we need to make sure it's accurate before we send a tweet about it or write a story about it." I think it is more pressure to get things done faster in a sound bite way. You have 140 characters and you are limited to the amount of text on the Facebook feed.

I don't think that necessarily changes the basic tenets of what we do. We are here to inform and tell stories and we just have a new way of doing it with social media.

Gianna Cruet: So you think we need to become masters of social media instead of rejecting it?

Journalist #1: I wouldn't say masters of, because the thing is, I think that social media will continue to evolve. I think you'll need to understand the premise of it and how it's used and be able to incorporate it in your job, but that doesn't mean that you, you know, that you need to take a whole bunch of classes on how to master it. I think you need to definitely take some time to understand it.

For example, we are doing staff training because we hired a new social media director and he is going to lead staff training for everybody, all the reporters and the editors, on Twitter so they understand a basic sense of how to use it. For other folks who have been using it, what is involved with it?

[End.]

Journalist #2 Interview

Gianna Cruet: So how did that kind of, how did you end up covering Aurora? You were on the byline of the huge mainbar story. I'm sorry, I looked through other ones but don't remember the other stories.

Journalist #2: There were a couple of other stories. But that's okay. Well, so the way that people got onto the aurora theater shooting was pretty haphazard at first. It was basically whoever the editors could reach.

When the call originally came in, it was a shooting at a movie theater, so, whatever. Not that that thing always happens, but it didn't seem like a big deal, like, "oh, maybe it's just some people in the parking lot fighting and someone pulled a gun." We didn't have a good indication it'd be this huge thing.

So there was like a photo intern who had been shooting the music festival who got sent out. A couple of other people who they assumed they'd still be awake at 1 in the morning were sent out. I had taken the next day off, the Friday off, and so I'd stayed up really late and they called me at 3 in the morning. I'd been sleeping for an hour.

It was basically all hands on deck for an event like that. Once we got into the office, the editors decided who should go where.

Gianna Cruet: What did you end up covering?

Journalist #2: I ended up out at Holmes' apartment and working also at the university campus, the Anschutz Medical Campus, rather, and that was just sort of, we already had one person out there. But it was such a big perimeter, we didn't know what impact the guy had made on the community, so it was knocking doors and asking questions.

I ended up finding one of the students who lived in the building who was able to give me some information and hook me up with somebody else who lived in the building who could give me some information. It ended up being kind of helpful.

Gianna Cruet: Did you end up not having your Friday off, then?

Journalist #2: I did not have my Friday off. I was very upset.

Also, that day, I think I got into the office by 3:30 or 4. I feel like that was an 18 hour day. It was ridiculously long for everybody involved.

Gianna Cruet: That's kind of amazing. So, I know I sent you a giant email so I'll go over it again. [Describing thesis.]

A lot of my questions will be based on social media and getting stuff online. How urgent was it to get something online?

Journalist #2: Yeah, that was immediate. I mean, just think. Anybody who is involved in something like that wants information immediately. It used to be, "we know this stuff" and you find out who got it tomorrow. Now it's "we know this stuff" and you find out about it this afternoon once we have time to write something up.

Now it's we know and you know immediately. This wasn't formally our system, but it ended up working out that way - I was finding stuff out at the scene and tweeting it off my droid. They were picking it up and putting it into the story, or calling if they needed clarification.

We didn't break any major news that way, but we broke little tidbits. We got things first that, because we had this sort of chain of information or, I don't know what you call it. [Pause.] We just had a system in place where people knew, "okay, we're going to look here and put this in here." Everyone had a role.

Gianna Cruet: That is really interesting, because I talked to, [Journalist #1] is now an editor at [the San Francisco newspaper]. At *The Denver Post* during Columbine, there were a couple of PCs in the office and the online story was the last thing.

Journalist #2: Was this [names Journalist #1]?

Gianna Cruet: Yeah.

Journalist #2: I've talked to [Journalist #1] before.

Gianna Cruet: That's what [Journalist #1] said. That's never how it was in my life.

Journalist #2: I'm 30 and that was rarely how it's been for my life either, except for when I worked for a newspaper in Baton Rouge which was a little slower to catch on to technology.

Gianna Cruet: Do you have an online editor, or does everyone do what they can? Back in the day, they had somebody who did online stuff every once in a while.

Journalist #2: We have an online team. One member of our online team is an editor and she is tasked with making sure we have the latest updates and we're refreshing stories. That is her entire focus, just what are the latest details and how fast we can get them online.

We have another member of the online team who was formerly a producer for one of the

TV stations who also managed some of that online stuff for them. Another guy is a former librarian who now helps manage and makes sure stuff is where it needs to be and we've got like maybe 4 tech people who handle the stuff that I don't understand.

Not the news functions, necessarily, but monitoring what's getting hits or if we have a great breaking news story and it's not getting attention online. They do steps like putting in a photo or something so it draws attention to that story.

Gianna Cruet: That makes sense. That's sort of how it is at the *Reno Gazette-Journal*. I interned there. They had social media and online people. I sent updates to them. It was complicated getting it online.

Journalist #2: We went through that phase too. We're to the point that it's a little easier. We've got our social media editor and he basically deals with our profile online.

Gianna Cruet: Interesting. So, we already talked about Twitter being a huge factor and you already talked a little about tweeting a lot. Do you think that's important for every breaking news event nowadays? Twitter used to be something people barely used but now it's this huge thing. When I looked at news of Aurora stuff, I went to CNN and I went to Twitter.

That's what I did when I first found out about it. So what are your thoughts on that? Do you think it's a huge deal?

Journalist #2: The premise of your question is totally legit. For me as a reporter, Twitter has two basic functions. One, it's a way for me to communicate immediately with, um, readers and also with people back in the office if I'm out in the field. It is also a way to gather information and leads to do additional reporting.

Obviously, there is a social media guy who uses Twitter to promote our stories, but I don't worry too much about that. Twitter, in the last maybe 4 years, I think I started using it about 4 years ago for reporting purposes. It really seems to be a great vehicle for breaking news and for drawing attention to the work I am doing personally for the newspaper.

I re-tweet other stuff too, but if I worked on something I really like, of course I will put it out there. Also, it's a great tool for building rapport with sources and for cultivating sources. I used to cover politics and that was a great way to joke back and forth or pass on information and get to know a community in a different way. I think it's become a much bigger deal recently and for the most part it's a good thing.

It can also lead to some fractious stories, like you don't get a complete story obviously and it also leads to the pressure for people to tweet things that aren't 100% confirmed. We saw that a lot in Newtown, obviously. Not that it was only Twitter, but that mentality

contributed a lot to those types of errors.

Gianna Cruet: The research I've done on Twitter alone - I'm surprised how many scholars have written papers on Twitter - they all say that exact same thing. They say the biggest thing about Twitter during breaking news events is separating who is being legit and who is not.

If you are a random person tweeting, you could be wrong. I also read it's the job of a professional journalist to be the accurate ones, to say "this part is true and this part isn't."

Journalist #2: That is such a huge responsibility, especially when there's so much pressure to be out there and be first.

The other thing about Twitter is, not related to Aurora, we had a spate of terrible wildfires. Twitter was just essential for finding people who are affected. It's a diaspora of people going everywhere out of this area. You might be able to find them at a Red Cross center, but they are protective of people who are there. A lot of times, we couldn't get access to the communities.

So, finding people on Twitter and getting photos so we can visualize what's happening - do we need to send someone to that portion to get photos or whatever - it was key. It was a hugely useful tool.

Gianna Cruet: I remember those fires. We even reported on it, kind of, at the RGJ. We took the AP story.

Journalist #2: Waldo Canyon was insane.

Gianna Cruet: Reno has had bad fires lately. Nothing like that, of course.

Anyway, how do reporters at the Denver Post contribute to social media? Do you think most reporters have their own Twitter?

Journalist #2: At this point, pretty much everyone at the Denver Post is basically required to have a handle. I would say those handles are used to varying degrees. I would caution against the age thing. I think for the most part, that's true, but some of our more prolific tweeters, people with huge followings, are in their 50s.

They are normally social, well-sourced people. On Twitter, they are the same way. For the most part, younger reporters take to it more naturally and work it into their daily routine. For others it took more work. But some of our senior reporters are more active than even I am on Twitter.

Gianna Cruet: All of you have it. Is it mostly the social media editor's job on that? Did

you all have to tweet for Aurora or was it his or hers job?

Journalist #2: His. Out in the field, we didn't have to. I did because it was the fastest way to get information out and it was the fastest way to communicate with the reporter back in the newsroom putting the story together.

The phones were ringing off the hook and she was frantically making phone calls. If I tweeted, it was up there and she could see it. It's a lot faster. The social media editor's job is to train people on how to use these platforms, but also when we've got a story, to make sure it's out there and people see.

We have Denver Post breaking news and Denver Post Broncos. He is making sure our stuff is out there and we are using key words in stories and blogs and all that stuff. Did I answer your questions? I'm normally asking the questions.

Gianna Cruet: Someone was doing a project at school on the opinion section. I'm the opinion editor. [Chit chat about *The Nevada Sagebrush*.]

You sort of answered this, but how do you incorporate it into your work? You do courts. How have you done that? Now you are again focusing on Holmes.

Journalist #2: Great timing. Here's the interesting thing. We are six months out from the theater shooting. That incident was probably, if not the first time, one of the first times I used Twitter to communicate most quickly to the office.

It is way faster than dictation. We've evolved. I've worked through this with court cases of lesser prominence in the last six months to the point where, now that we are in court, we have two reporters. One is [names journalist.] He is tasked with being there for every bit of testimony. I am tasked with being there with every bit of testimony that could make a new lede.

I've been ducking out in the middle of these court proceedings to go tweet like a maniac. Someone back in the office crafts that to a new lede. I try to help them by crafting a lede first. Putting a new online story together and updating it. Once you leave the proceedings, you can't go in until after a break, so you have to gauge when's a good time to duck out. At least for the Holmes stuff.

But yeah, I tweet regularly, from cases where I think people are interested enough to follow along. That's just tweeting. Are we just supposed to be talking about Twitter? I had a professional Facebook page but it was kind of blah.

Gianna Cruet: I was going to ask about Facebook.

Journalist #2: It doesn't work very well, I have found, but if other people had star power -

if I was some kind of columnist or my picture was in the paper, maybe it would work out better, but I have found it is way easier to build community on Twitter than on Facebook for my professional purposes.

The other thing is, I am lax about who I friend on my Facebook page, so I am friends with about two-thirds of the people I would try to get to be friends with me on my professional page. So it really took off. I may be an aberration. It may be great for other people.

Gianna Cruet: That is the experience I had at the RGJ. They never said to post something on Facebook. My personal Facebook? People will see it and not care.

Journalist #2: Right. I have some unruly friends.

Gianna Cruet: When I'm talking about social media and breaking news, most of it has come down to Twitter. I even studied iReport, which was pre-social media and that was interesting back in the day. It's CNN, when people used to do their own stuff and send it in. They get verified if they are good writers or trustworthy.

It's pre-Twitter, but not microblogging. It's just a story.

Journalist #2: I worked at a paper in Tennessee, in Nashville, and they did that. They tried to get user-generated content. It was a headache.

We have a branch of blogs and we do things like Storify for the State of the State or election night. We pull things together and make a narrative about everyone's tweets. With a colleague of mine, we started a blog dedicated to craft beer.

We had a beer festival and we asked prominent bloggers or people in the craft-brewing industry to tweet for us. We had a running list of those folk's tweets and pictures as this was going on.

Gianna Cruet: That is cool. [Chit chat about user-generated content unrelated to thesis topic.]

Has social media, I guess Twitter but we can talk about Facebook too, made a difference in your reporting practices?

Journalist #2: My reporting practices?

Gianna Cruet: Facebook has been around since 2004 but nobody really cared about it.

Journalist #2: I graduated in 2004 so I never got to be on Facebook. I got on MySpace in 2006 and I finally ditched it and got on Facebook a couple of years later. I think it's

changed a lot. I think I straddle the line of when this came into being.

For news-gathering purposes, it does. It's a lot easier to keep tabs on breaking news events or at least what people are saying about them. Obviously, you have to do your own reporting. If there's enough public interest. I cover a lot of stuff where nobody is tweeting on it. But the theater shooting, certainly.

It has also added a level of noise to reporting that is sometimes not beneficial. [Pause.] At this point, we have to tweet and maybe post a short online story, then write through that story and then we have to write the full-on recast print story for tomorrow's paper.

I don't want to say it's harder, but sometimes those requirements work against the story. You could have more time to fully report something than if you didn't have to do that kind of stuff. Not that that's always the case or it is incompatible, but I think that's the danger, and it also can be a huge distraction. I am sure there is plenty of research written on that.

Gianna Cruet: A lot of it's work-related in non-journalism related jobs, like how much they use Facebook at work.

Journalist #2: If you are scrolling through just reams of a specific hashtag instead of making a call on that story, I don't know if that's beneficial. Maybe it's better to find out your own information instead of worrying about what everyone else is saying. There has to be a balance. That's what I mean by a level of noise.

Gianna Cruet: Like Newtown. A media outlet went on Facebook and found "Ryan Lanza" and it wasn't even him and he got sent death threats or something.

Journalist #2: We got the wrong James Holmes. It's awful. It was TMZ maybe. The wrong James Holmes was identified as a Tea Party member. TMZ found a James Holmes in Denver and outed him as a user of prostitutes. He was posting on these chat boards.

It turns out there was a James Holmes that was using prostitutes, but it wasn't the guy that shot up the theater. Think about that when you have to correct that story. They did, to their credit, but they never should have ran with it. It was completely unverified and was guesswork in the quest to constantly outdo every other outlet.

It happens probably more with online publications and TV, especially. One-up all the time. It's a little different. We are sometimes overly cautious, but I'd rather be that than to be out there and literally ruin a guy's life by making national headlines about him patronizing prostitutes.

Gianna Cruet: It's completely unrelated and no one would have ever known if his name wasn't James Holmes.

I guess there's a little one-upping in newspapers too. At the RGJ, I think a couple days after the shooting, I was the intern working when an editor told me one of the guys killed was from Sparks. I had to go out and report on that and it was kind of amazing. I think he did that because he said, "we have this connection so we don't want to just run the AP story."

Journalist #2: That was Jonathan Blunk. I talked to Jansen Young, the girlfriend, yesterday.

[Chit chat about Blunk story.]

After the initial breaking news frenzy, I was sent to San Diego and got doors slammed in my face a dozen times a day.

Gianna Cruet: Why San Diego?

Journalist #2: That's where he is from. I did no tweeting while I was there.

Gianna Cruet: I guess you've seen him in person.

Journalist #2: [Chit chat about seeing Holmes in court.]

That's an interesting factor about covering court cases. For safety reasons, you can't transmit from the courtroom. If it's a gang case and you say "so and so taking the stand now," someone can show up outside and shoot them. Clearly that's not the majority of cases. It is a dicey topic. You can easily walk out into the hallway and tweet and come back in.

Gianna Cruet: In my First Amendment class, we talked about social media and cameras in the courtroom. They tell juries they can't talk about cases on Facebook or Twitter.

Journalist #2: Or if it's a big enough case, stay off Facebook or Twitter. Everyone will be talking about the case if there is no change of venue for the Holmes case. And that could be a weeks-long trial.

Gianna Cruet: Do you think social media has affected the authenticity of journalism? Do you think it is less authentic when you have "normal" people tweeting about stuff? It may sound pretentious.

Journalist #2: I don't think it lessens the authenticity. It's a bunch of people tweeting quotes. I think it dilutes the news. You have one worthwhile tweet. In the Holmes thing, maybe one out of 50, depending on what's happening.

He has these followers and people showing up in court and conspiracy theorists. These cases draw bizarre extremes. If you were only going to look at Twitter for your news on the theater shooting, it would be almost pointless. But it's a great snapshot of what's going on out there. I think it's valuable for journalists to see what other people are talking about. It's sort of like getting to eavesdrop on a giant conversation on what you are writing about.

I think that better informs the news and makes it more authentic. Someone who solely reads Twitter for news, that is not a valuable experience.

Gianna Cruet: I re-tweet stuff if I agree with it. But you can't call them citizen journalists if they are just re-tweeting the Denver Post.

Journalist #2: That's true but that amplifies that, so I don't hate it.

Gianna Cruet: That was basically the last question I wanted to ask.

[End.]

Journalist #3 Interview

Gianna Cruet: From what you've told me and from what I've heard and read, you have done a lot of stuff on Columbine.

Journalist #3: We all did a lot of stuff. Some of it was more of a breaking news variety. Some of it, particularly what I did, was geared more toward looking at broader issues that Columbine raised at the time, which we now see repeated with the Sandy Hook shooting and all the issues that were brought to the forefront.

[Names journalist] did guns. He got deep into guns and how they are bought and sold and traced and that sort of thing. I looked at a couple of different things. Violent video games. Again, a recurring theme when there is a shooting. Are violent video games really a cause of violence? We looked at the subculture of gamers, which was very interesting to me.

I wound up going to New York City for a big confab of gamers, like a tournament there. There was a young lady from this area who actually lived a stone's throw from Columbine. She went to the University of Colorado and realized she had this incredible aptitude for first-person shooter games and wound up winning the tournament in New York City, or the women's version of it.

Gianna Cruet: That must have been big.

Journalist #3: She didn't even tell her parents she was going. Her grades had gone down the tubes because she was doing something besides homework, but she became good at it.

Another thing we looked at that was raised by Columbine was the idea of religion in school and how those play out. You still hear it today - "we took God out of the classroom and now we have violence." We looked deep into that, what the laws actually did say about religion and how it was playing out around the country, really. I did a bit of

travel for that one.

We did that, but on a breaking news side of it, I, like several people, had a stable group of victim families that were "my" people that I would stay in touch with. We didn't want to get in a situation where different staff members were calling the same grieving families over and over. We wanted to forge relationships with families, and trust, so that when we needed something, they would know who we were and feel comfortable dealing with us.

I had a group of maybe 5 or 6 families that I dealt with. Usually, that involved breaking news stories. Columbine, maybe a little unlike Aurora, had legs, as the saying goes. The story just kept going. It didn't stop with the shootings. There were issues and issues and every time you turned around, there was a new breaking news angle that presented itself, whether it was the ineptitude of the authorities in investigating the shootings.

Six months in to this, we had a jarring event when the mother of one of the injured girls from Columbine committed suicide. Went into a pawn shop, asked to see some ammunition, put it in there and shot herself in the pawn shop. That re-traumatized the whole community all over again. It was incredibly shocking.

That is what it was at the time. I had a staple of families and was simultaneously working on longer range stories as well.

Gianna Cruet: Were you involved when it was actually happening or were you put on the team of families after the fact?

Journalist #3: We were all involved when it happened. There was a lot to do. I was not on scene. I was working it from the office. This speaks to the absence of social media at the time. We wanted to find people. Nowadays, you could go on Facebook or Twitter and find people in 30 seconds or less.

Back in the Dark Ages at the time Columbine happened, we found copies of the school yearbooks and we cross-referenced names of students in the yearbook with a phone book. Another lost art, I guess.

We are cold-calling families, saying, "here's the last name of a kid who was a junior at Columbine. Here is the listing in the phone book from Littleton. Same last name." Or maybe there would be two or three and we'd keep calling until we found the right one, and we'd connect the kids to their parents that way.

It was obviously more of a hit and miss proposition, but it worked. We had everybody working on this. You dropped whatever else you were doing. This was the story. We were able to make contact with a surprising number of kids.

We had people at the scene talking to students as well, or parents or whomever happened to be there. That was the way we did it back then. Those were the tools available to us at the time.

Gianna Cruet: And there weren't many PCs in the office. No individual PCs. Getting information online wasn't a priority. Was that true in your experience?

Journalist #3: I remember we had two PCs in the newsroom that were connected to this thing called the Internet. Only half the people knew or were interested in using them. It wasn't like there was a line of people waiting to use these two PCs. It was a tool and we weren't quite sure how it fit into everything we did.

There wasn't Facebook or all this stuff that is on the web now. There were resources, but we were still learning what they were and they weren't as many and varied as they are now. I don't remember even thinking about using a PC for research, whether it was breaking news or otherwise at this point.

Gianna Cruet: How was content, then, distributed and edited? Was this all just for print?

Journalist #3: Absolutely. That was the medium. It was all geared to the print medium. There was a different news cycle. Now you have the 24-hour news cycle, which came with cable television, sort of. We were still on a daily newspaper schedule at the time. We weren't rushing things onto the web because there was no web.

We were reporting stories and doing them as thoroughly and completely as possible, having them edited at the end of the day and updated if we needed to. In the evening if we needed to make more calls and update information. Then run the presses and deliver the newspaper. That's how it went day after day. That was the rhythm of the news gathering and dissemination.

Television had its own different schedule and cycle. We were going day to day, not minute to minute like we do now.

Gianna Cruet: Some people argued the day to day was easier. Not easier because you had to get more, but others said that, because it's fast now, it is more important to be accurate. I don't mean to say it was less important to be accurate in 1999, but now, in Aurora, you had those updates immediately. Everyone was on the story. So what do you think about that?

We saw with Newtown that the wrong person-

Journalist #3: There's a lot of lip service given to the idea that accuracy is the most important. When push comes to shove, certainly faster is better. Everyone wants to be first and accurate, but that doesn't always happen, as we've seen in Newtown. We saw at least one incident in Aurora where that happened and there was a mistaken connection made between the shooter and a political e.

It didn't exist. It appeared to at first and some outlets ran with it. That is the nature of when you have instantaneous distribution of news. When it's out there, it's out there. You can go back and change it. Yes, accuracy is important, but the reality is that it is not as important to people. In my opinion, I think we pay lip service to the fact that accuracy is paramount and I think everyone believes that, but in practice that breaks down.

Gianna Cruet: What do you think differentiates the professional journalist like yourself from someone tweeting, like Aurora, someone tweeting something that has been happening? I think it's again about accuracy.

Journalist #3: It is. We should be held to a higher standard. There's no question. John Q citizen tweeting what he sees from the site of the shooting is one thing. As a news consumer, you consume that with the understanding that this is just some guy that's tweeting it. Maybe it's accurate, maybe it's not. When a journalist does that, they have applied a stricter standard to verifying that information. Again, in the perfect world. Does it break down in practice? Absolutely.

Gianna Cruet: That's what I've seen with breaking news events that have happened this year alone. Do you think this lends more to the competition? As in the competitive nature of news? That could be a negative of social media, but should that be attributed to social media alone or to the Internet?

Journalist #3: It seems to me there has been more attention paid to who gets something first. Even on websites, people tend to go out of their way to say, "as first reported on

such and such website," whatever that is. Some do and some don't. There is a lot of attention paid to who got it first.

I understand that to a degree, but on breaking news, I am not sure our readers or consumers of news are really that interested in the horse race of who got the story first. I think they are more interested in getting the news as quickly as they can, but getting it accurately as well. As we continue to explore not only social media but a variety of different ways of distributing the news product, you see breakdowns in that. We are learning.

There is a learning curve for sure. Will we get better at it? I hope so.

Gianna Cruet: You told me you wrote a paper about how the profession has changed. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Journalist #3: Again, this was not scholarly research. I wrote it almost like I'd write a news story. It was about how things had changed in terms of reporting. You see it more in some areas than others. In sports, for instance. I talked to some of our sportswriters. I used to be a sportswriter back in the day when it was just the newspaper and no websites.

Nowadays, in terms of communicating with players and player's agents, it is predominantly done on text, I was told. We have a baseball writer who probably has the most amazing connection with his readers on Twitter. He has conversations with them.

There will be a topic thrown out there, whether it's what the Rockies are doing in the off-season. He re-tweets questions with answers. It is this sort of give and take that he controls through his Twitter account. It is amazing.

During games, people are live-tweeting. While games are going on, there is a running conversation between the reporter and fans of whatever teams. That is there for everyone to read. It's almost like a parallel universe of news gathering and opinion, mostly. You have that going on.

We had a theater critic who cultivated an amazing following. I don't know that it was huge. Among the theater community, he had an incredible following because of the way he used social media and just the Internet to help him cover theater.

He had video interviews and audio podcasts. He had blogs and everything going on. He

was way ahead of the curve. He had workshops for the rest of us to explain how he had cultivated his audience. I think that's something we miss now in our theater coverage. As in every other area, we've cut back, we've shrunk. We have fewer people doing the same number of beats or covering the same ground, or at least trying to.

We don't have the same attention to detail he was afforded just being the theater critic.

Gianna Cruet: Do you mean stage?

Journalist #3: Yeah. He went to openings of plays. He is still active, even though he isn't officially employed at this stage. It's a labor of love for him. He produced a video on the making of one particular play, locally. He still has his own website where he does blogs and stories of various types.

He posts on Facebook a lot. He used Facebook quite a bit. Again, he developed a following and was certainly for us ahead of the curve on all of that.

Gianna Cruet: So how are you in relation to social media? How are you active in it? You aren't quite as active as some people but you're still pretty active, it seemed.

Journalist #3: Like a lot of dinosaurs in the business, I was skeptical about Twitter and still am, in some regards. I've come to understand it and appreciate it much more than I used to.

Our charge now, as reporters, is when we write things for the paper and for the website, we generally tweet them out. We want to cultivate followers. That is the idea. That's everyone's endgame with Twitter. You want to amass the most followers you can. If you took a survey of our newsroom and any newsroom, you'd find incredible disparities in the numbers of followers that we have.

I recently cracked the 300 mark and I'm not actively trying to collect the followers, but you have some of these sportswriters in tens of thousands of followers. Bronco beat writers. Broncos in this town is the big story, always, and those guys have tens of thousands of followers. I'm sure there are people who have less than 100 here.

Then most of us are in the hundreds somewhere into the low thousands. [Names journalist] was campaigning to get her following up to certain numbers. We try to help each other in that regard too.

In terms of the way I use it, I would say I don't do that much breaking news. But when I do, I will tweet that out if I have a bigger story running, say on a weekend. I will tweet it when we have a link for it and maybe a day later I'll do a "in case you missed it" tweet and tweet it again.

Again, I think the way we use Twitter is all over the map. We've also been encouraged to use it not just for tweeting our own stuff, but if we see stuff from a colleague or a publication that we think our followers and readers would be interested in. You have a lot of re-tweeting to other people's links, whether it's *The New York Times* or something we think would be of interest to our readers.

Sometimes we go totally off-topic, which is okay too. In my case, hockey is an interest of mine, so if I see something interesting about hockey, I will post that.

Gianna Cruet: You must be happy now the lockout is over.

Journalist #3: That's the NHL. Hockey never went away. But it's good to have it back. Sometimes I'll do that.

People are encouraged, if they have a special interest, to go for it in that sense. Some people are interested in craft breweries and brewing beer here. Colorado is quite an epicenter for microbrews. We have people who tweet about beer quite a bit, actually. [Laughs.]

Gianna Cruet: That's an interesting niche.

Journalist #3: It is. And gardening. There is someone on the copy desk who is very into gardening. She tweets about that quite a bit.

They've encouraged us, if there's a niche we have or a specific interest to offer our readers, why not? You can diversify from your beat or general area of expertise at the paper and I think the feeling is the more we put out there, the better it is.

Certainly our page views and mobile views and all that are growing exponentially. We just got a recent round of numbers. The powers that be are thrilled that we really are catching on. I think we're on pace to hit 1 billion page views.

What does that mean? It sounds like a big number to me. It's certainly more than we've had, so that's all good.

As time goes on, even those of us who grew up with the print media - I brought a portable typewriter to my first job. Now I have a son who looks at a typewriter and goes, "what's that?" Even those of us who grew up in that area, we've generally embraced the new technology as much as we can.

There's a sense out there that these stodgy old people don't adapt. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was an early adapter of video here. This grew out of me videotaping my son's hockey games. Then I started playing with that footage as a storyteller and would produce a DVD for the team at the end of the season. And I brought that to the newsroom.

We have a blog we don't post nearly as much as we should, but I found I could use that blog as a place I could shoot short videos on education issues. We'd post the video there and I'd tweet it out. The page views to the blog would spike. People seemed to like looking at it.

We're not talking huge numbers, but relatively speaking. I have tried to embrace that as much as I can. I do Twitter but I don't do it as much as some do because I'm not doing as much breaking news. One is probably a function of the other if you do a lot of breaking news.

Some reporters are doing the trial of the Aurora shooter. We live tweet those hearings. I think there is a pretty big following for that. I've probably rambled on.

I don't use Facebook very much. I've come to think Facebook is not as useful. There's a period where it was good to use to find people sometimes. If you are doing an investigation and you needed to find, say, a shooter in a crime. You'd plug the name in Facebook and say, "there he is" and all the other stuff we can find.

You have to take Facebook information with a grain of salt. Nobody's verifying that. It is an individual putting it out there. But it gives you a point of reference, a place to start. Maybe on the Facebook page somebody lists their place of work. You can look that up and call and begin doing your real reporting, after you've gotten some basics from a Facebook page.

In terms of Facebook, I almost never post a status. I originally started it as a personal thing and you reach that point where you say, "I have this personal Facebook page. How much do I want to use this for work?" It can become a little uncomfortable. Some people do have dual Facebook accounts. I guess one they use for work and one they use for personal.

I still just have one and again, I almost never post. I look to see what other people are up to, whether it's friends or relatives or colleagues. Its use is not that great, in my case.

Gianna Cruet: From my experience with it, especially when it came to Aurora, I first found out it happened on Facebook. After that, I went out Twitter and I looked at CNN and other websites. I didn't care as much about personal opinions.

Facebook would be worth it maybe if you had a fan page that had a lot of followers. There is a broadcast station in Reno that has a lot of followers. That is huge for Reno. They always post on Facebook. The other stations, hardly at all.

Journalist #3: It's the institution. The Denver Post Facebook page does well. I think they have hundreds of thousands of followers as well. That is a little different, I guess. That is a way to disseminate news. From a reporter's standpoint and having an individual Facebook page, I have a handful of times used it to find people with a certain interest. Not an individual, necessarily, but people who were interested in x.

Then you see a Facebook page for people who knit or play video poker or whatever. Take your pick. I've used that as a way to try to find people. With the Aurora shooting, I was trying to find one particular victim's family. I used Facebook for that and I got no response. It's become so accepted that news outlets will use Facebook to find you that I think people sometimes tend to shut off Facebook like not answering the phone, because I know it's the media calling.

Gianna Cruet: I did cold calling. Jonathan Blunk is from Sparks and I was the person around to report on that. I did what you had mentioned earlier. I was able to talk to his estranged wife and got to visit her and got that story because the paper wanted the local angle.

I didn't think to look at Facebook. We mostly do that with the college paper. We've used Facebook a lot. When you want to interview college students, Facebook is a really good tool to use because almost all of us have one. Maybe it depends on who you are talking

to. It does seem more difficult. On Twitter, it is easy to follow someone.

Journalist #3: I definitely use Twitter way more than I do Facebook as an education writer. On TweetDeck, I have a column that is just for education and that is constant during the day. You can keep your finger on the pulse of what is going on nationally in any given beat area. That is helpful just as a way to keep tabs.

Gianna Cruet: This is pretty much my last question. We kind of talked about this but it's specific. Do you think social media and all the people using it have affected the authenticity of journalism? Some people genuinely think it's become less authentic because everyone can report. We talked about holding yourself to a higher standard. Do you think it's still as authentic as an institution?

Journalist #3: I don't think the technology defines the authenticity. I think the individual journalist defines the authenticity. You can use crowd sourcing or social media any way you want. I think there's a right way and wrong way to do it. With the riots in Great Britain a year or so ago, that's when crowd sourcing turned out to be absolutely bogus in a lot of situations on breaking news.

Relying on that reduces the authenticity, to use your word, of the news, I think. In the hands of a competent, principled journalist, I think all those tools can only make us better or more authentic as journalists, if we not only use those electronic or digital tools, but also verify in more traditional ways as well.

It's that melding of the two, the traditional journalism ethics and practices with the digital tools that makes or can make for great journalists and journalism. Again, I think the technology is neutral. It's how we use it to make us more or less authentic.

[End.]

Journalist #4 Interview

Gianna Cruet: [Describing thesis...]

I know that you didn't have Aurora, but since you were around for Columbine, I thought it would be worth talking to you a little bit about that. Kristen Go had told me that you were an editor at the time, is that correct?

Journalist #4: Yeah. I was the [lists editor title].

Gianna Cruet: So what was your experience when Columbine broke? Were you even at work?

From what I've been told, everyone on staff that day pretty much had to drop everything they were doing.

Journalist #4: Yup. I was the first assigning editor. My boss was out of the office when it happened. We got a call from our broadcast partners at the time that we worked with. I guess I would call this the very very beginnings of kind of multimedia coverage. We had an arrangement with um, channel 9, which is the NBC affiliate here in Denver.

Our attitude was that we briefed each other in the morning about what stories each was going to cover. Occasionally, we actually collaborated on a story. But most of the time it was to say "here's what we're doing and did you hear about this story?"

Anyway, I had just gotten off the phone with them from that morning chat we usually had and someone from 9 called me back and, um, just said, you know, "Did you hear that there had been shots fired at Columbine?"

And so we hadn't heard that yet and we tuned in and everyone listened to the cop radio. In a couple of minutes, we had people on the way out the door.

Gianna Cruet: So what was the process for publishing breaking news at the time? Kristen Go told me that you only had a couple of computers and that a lot of people didn't even have their own cell phone.

Journalist #4: Very few people had cell phones. Probably none of them had their own. We had a handful of cell phones in the newsroom and they were bigger than bricks. And

um, so we doled those out as quickly as we could. You know, they were the first folks who left.

Again, the technology was so primitive compared to now. It wasn't just the fact we didn't have cell phones. It was that the whole cell phone network, for miles around Columbine, very quickly jammed up. Even if you had cell phones, the service was unreliable at best for several days. So, [coughs] you know, I don't think [pause], I can't remember. I am sure we had laptops.

I think most of what we did was telephone dictation. We set up a system where reporters could call in to certain relay people or editors and dictate what they had. But our whole emphasis was on the next day's paper. I mean, we did have an online site at that point, but I remember the guy who was in charge of it coming to my desk in the middle of the afternoon and saying, "do you have anything I can use?"

And I honestly don't know if we even took time to get him anything. It was just so unimportant at that point. It wasn't at the top of our minds because we weren't used to it and I can't imagine who our traffic was at that point, who are readers of that online site would have been.

Gianna Cruet: I imagine probably not a lot for 1999. That's why it makes sense for me that it would have been more of a last priority.

Journalist #4: Absolutely.

Gianna Cruet: So how do you feel about the change, then? Now, if something like that happened, like with Aurora, it was immediately Twitter and online updates.

Journalist #4: So, you know, the siren call for me, or the point at which I realized how fundamentally this had changed, was when we had another school shooting here, in maybe 2005. If you look it up on Google, which we basically didn't have either, the school shooting was in a suburb in the mountains west about 35 minutes.

One student was shot and killed ultimately. But I was working at the university at that time and one of my colleagues walked in the door and said, "there's been a school shooting." Immediately, I was online and started reading about it. That was how I followed the news of that shooting.

Then, Virginia Tech happened the same way. I went online and read about Virginia. And that was pre-Twitter, you know, that was when it started to come home how important that was. Um, and I followed the Aurora shooting on Twitter and online.

I think it's huge, you know. I think it's really really important what's happening, and more interesting. Obviously, there are huge risks as we saw with Aurora, and even with the wildfires we had out here earlier in the summer. News went out and it can be wrong. I can only imagine the temptation for the reporters who are on the scene and want to be first to pick up something that seems credible but later turns out not to be.

One of the distinguishing factors of Columbine that is no longer the case is at the time, there were two newspapers in Denver. We were very evenly matched and we were enormously competitive. I can only imagine now if they still had that, you know, constant competition going on, how that would play out in this framework of these instantaneous [unclear.] I think that would be really potentially dangerous in terms of accuracy.

Gianna Cruet: I went to Denver about two weeks ago now and I went to *The Denver Post* office. I saw on the front page of I think it was the April 21 paper from 1999, at least 20 people were dead. I think 12 or 13 was the actual count. But you got it from the law enforcement so that's their fault.

Journalist #4: Right. But now imagine that in the environment where, from law enforcement's standpoint, everything is changing by the minute. They have to soothe the media beast all the time. The potential of inaccuracy on their part and our part goes up enormously.

Gianna Cruet: When I've been talking to people, the recurring theme is that what sets journalists apart today from people on Twitter tweeting news is that they have the responsibility of being accurate, holding themselves to a higher standard to be accurate. I could just get on Twitter and say whatever I want. When you're a journalist, you can't do that, obviously.

I was just gonna ask, do you agree with that?

Journalist #4: Absolutely. And they have the responsibility not only to be accurate in their own reporting, right? When I was the reporter, I was the one picking up the phone or doing the interview on site and making sure I was accurately reporting what my sources said.

Now there is a whole other level go challenge where you're taking in all of this information that citizen journalists and law enforcement sources, that anyone who can figure out how to tweet, is putting out there. And as a journalist, you have to figure out what is credible and you have to verify as much of that information as you can.

It's huge. It's a big difference.

Gianna Cruet: Because I have no idea about this, I was 8 years old, in 1999, was it as commonplace to have a lot of misinformation going around when a breaking news event happened? With Newtown, at first, the suspect was his brother and that was something spread around a lot by news outlets. That was a big mistake.

Journalist #4: I think that [pause] yes, there was misinformation, but we had what now seems like election week of time to get it right. You have a case like the misreporting of the number of victims in Columbine, but in that case you are relying on the source within the building and there's not much you can do about that. A lot of the other misinformation that was going on, rumors that a student might have [unclear] in the parking lot, you have time to verify that and put in a little bit of context.

If it's tweeting, it's up to the journalist to verify any information they will use and check and double check it. Once it's out, it's there.

Gianna Cruet: Then you have the challenge of disproving it, which they did eventually. I saw on some blogging website, that once people heard it was the name Ryan Lanza, they tried to pull up his name on Facebook. And they got the wrong guy's profile and put it out there and said "this is him," but then they corrected it and said "this isn't him" but they still left it out there. I thought that was pretty bad.

Journalist #4: By the time it's out there, it's so many places. Again, you had five or six major media outlets in Denver at the time - the two news stations and the two newspapers. They all got the same information from the sheriff and we all put it out there.

But we kind of put it out there in a defined space of time. When it proved not to be true, we all had the same defined period of time and people were getting their news from our sources, so we were able to reach that to the same audiences with the correct information.

Now, millions and millions of people are getting this information and they're not all

getting the correction.

Gianna Cruet: Right, so it seems like now it's harder to be a journalist and do the journalist's job because of the wealth of information out there.

Journalist #4: I think that's right. It's easier in that information is easier to come by, and it's easier perhaps because ultimately you don't have to rely completely on official sources. So you may get a fuller picture or more accurate information. If you have official sources who for some reason are trying to hide something, cover something up, the chances that as a journalist you'll be able to find the truth about that are probably a lot better because there are more unofficial sources who may [pause] provide information that helps them.

You know what I'm saying? In other words, if the cops are saying it's so and so when it's really the deputy chief's kid who did the shooting, to give you a totally hypothetical, there will be a lot of people in the Twitterverse who know who it is.

And so, some of the stick truth to power piece of journalism may get a little easier if it is properly verified and reported. You have more potential news sources. So that piece of it, it may be better and immediacy is better. But the job of filtering and verifying, that part's harder.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. I agree with that. So, do you think that journalism is more, and I know it's a weird word to use, authentic because of all this information going around? By authentic, I mean, what a journalist was was pretty well-defined up until citizen journalism started happening. The earliest I saw was 2004 or 2005.

Journalist #4: So, here is my take, which may be partly off, but when I hear your question here is what comes to mind. I think journalism in the traditional sense is less authentic and here's why.

Because the number and the [pause] quality and experience of journalists has been devastated in the last six or eight years. The trained and experienced journalists who would have reported stories like Newtown and the shooting is down so much that journalism isn't as authentic and isn't as well-reported.

Yes, you have citizen journalists and yes some of them are really good, but, I mean, I worked with over 200 people at the Post who did Columbine and I don't know what the

number is, but there are far fewer now.

Gianna Cruet: Two hundred sounds like a lot of people to me.

Journalist #4: No kidding. We had the fashion reporter putting together the community news sources to publish. We had business writers writing for us. We had the whole entire population all working essentially on those stories. And the result is, the second or third read on the story by the editor or someone had the time to debrief the reporter and ask questions that hadn't been asked and verify questions that hadn't been verified is hugely better.

Believe me, we still made lots of mistakes. So.

Gianna Cruet: That makes sense. Someone I was talking to in Denver sort of made that point but also said now that there are fewer journalists, journalists have to be better. It was more optimistic. It was, "now that you have fewer journalists, you see better quality journalism."

Journalist #4: I'm not in a position to judge that entirely because I'm not in the newsroom anymore. As a consumer of journalism, I would frankly argue that point. Yeah, what I see coming out of the Aurora shootings or Newtown seems to me that there is less depth and less persistence in the reporting.

For instance, at Columbine, a lot of people would argue that we did too much coverage and it was inundation. I would argue that some of the investigative reporting that came out after Columbine really gave the public a lot of information in terms of some of the things that were mishandled by law enforcement.

Before it happened in terms of their investigation of Dylan [Klebold] and Eric [Harris], because for many of these things there was ample evidence that both guys had trouble. And then the way the law enforcement went into Columbine. That is to say they waited for several hours. That has completely changed.

Law enforcement nationally, and I suspect internationally, they go in regardless. I'm not saying that's all what journalists did, but they had more resources for more sustained coverage.

Gianna Cruet: I am inclined to agree with that.

Journalist #4: And there were two newspapers in town. Double the number of folks we had at the Denver Post. And those papers covered that story constantly for easily a year.

Gianna Cruet: That's a lot of depth. See, I would personally appreciate that more. To say it's inundation, I guess I can understand it, but that was a huge event and there have been hundreds of school shootings since Columbine.

Journalist #4: Part of it, when I talk about inundation, I think part of what we did that some of us might make different decisions about now and I think some folks are making different decisions about how we handle victims. I think that's a legitimate complaint for being inundated. Maybe we could have been more sensitive in a lot of ways to that.

And I think that, when it comes to the investigative stuff, that's where I wish there was more. Part of it also is that Columbine was this mind-numbing novelty at that time. No one could imagine a school shooting on that scale. Now, it's, I won't say it's routine, but it's not infrequent either.

Gianna Cruet: Right. Unfortunately.

Journalist #4: Watching the coverage of Newtown, you could almost predict, it's going to be a young male with massive firepower. The patterns are so clear it's just scary.

Gianna Cruet: And he killed himself - actually I don't know if they resolved that, but he ended up dead.

Journalist #4: You know, the interesting thing with the Aurora shootings was that this wasn't the case. So this will play out much differently.

Gianna Cruet: Right. That will be interesting.

That basically covers the questions I wanted to ask you.

[End.]

Journalist #5 Interview

Gianna Cruet: [Describing thesis.]

To my understanding, you've covered both events. Did you cover them in a breaking news sense? I know you did for Columbine but for Aurora there were so many stories.

Journalist #5: Well, I actually was there the first day of Aurora and I went on vacation and I was thankful to be on vacation. One of those was enough for a lifetime. Um, my wife is the main reporter for the Los Angeles Times on the Aurora shootings.

So I hear a lot about it.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. But mostly you did breaking news on Columbine then?

Journalist #5: Much more so. I did breaking news in the beginning and then I broke off and covered the gun industry as a beat for a year.

Gianna Cruet: Right. I saw some of your stories on that. Can you tell me a little bit about your role in the breaking news part of the Columbine shooting and what the environment was like? To my understanding, pretty much everyone had to drop everything they were doing to cover that and everyone had their specific roles at first.

Journalist #5: Well, I had gone home early for lunch. [Laughs.] So my wife met me at the front door and said, "well, it's a good thing we didn't move to the suburbs." We didn't know how bad it was at the time. There was already a team in place here led by a fellow named Mark Obmasczik.

I would say there were 25-50 people involved on that first day. One was a woman named Ann Schrader who lived in the area and had a daughter in the school system. When they kicked out all the reporters, they missed her and she got to hear . . .

Gianna Cruet: Most of it?

Journalist #5: She got to hear the parents asking for dental records of their children.

Gianna Cruet: Ah. Okay.

Journalist #5: That was the first day. By the third day, I was beginning to take on a different role. There was a fellow here named Pete Chronus who was a gun collector and probably an NRA member. He bought and sold guns but he was not a violent man and he was not a dangerous person. He was a knowledgeable gun owner.

The two of us teamed up and by golly, we were about 30 minutes behind the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. [Laughs.] We were calling people as they walked out the door and very quickly we realized all of these guns had been obtained directly or indirectly from the Tanner Gun Show. By the way, there is a Tanner Gun Show this month, though to me Tanner is long dead. It goes on.

Anyway, I ended up going all over the country, including a trip to Miami in an attempt to interview, I think his name was Carlos Garcia. He bought the Intratec sub-machine gun into the United States. He was a Cuban refugee.

At any rate, he made a very special kind of gun you could turn into a machine gun. And there is a famous shooting in San Francisco with one of his guns and there was a lawsuit with his company. I think it was called Navegar. The particular gun that was used in the Columbine shootings was called a Tec DC9. It was his way of saying "fuck you" to the city of Washington DC which had attempted to ban his guns.

Gianna Cruet: So you did do a lot covering guns?

Journalist #5: Oh yeah. And I only shot guns twice in my life. Once when I fired my father's shotgun into a cornfield and about tore my right shoulder off. [Laughs.] I held the shotgun two inches from me. The kick left a bruise on my shoulder for some days.

The second time I fired a gun was after the Columbine massacre. I went to the Ohio, uh, place where there was a short rifle called a carbine that was used in the massacre. I went and interviewed the maker of the carbine, the actual person that made it.

He was pretty mortified. It was a Saturday night special. It was a cheap prime gun, you know. It was a, you know, these kids wanted to be able to kill a lot of people for 140 bucks.

The manufacturer felt just terrible about what happened and he invited me to tour the plant with him and he ordered his employees to talk to me. Then he took me to a shooting range where I fired his rifle and the Tec DC9. He was proud of the fact his rifle was more accurate than Carlos Garcia's.

Gianna Cruet: So did you revisit gun coverage after Aurora happened?

Journalist #5: Um, yeah. If you want to Google the New Haven Register and me, you will find the first interview with a fellow named Josh Sugarman, founder of the Violence Policy Center up in Newtown, Connecticut. The answer is yes.

Gianna Cruet: Okay. I know writers at the Denver Post did some special coverage for the New Haven Register but I didn't know you were part of that.

Journalist #5: I was part of that from here. [Names Denver Post journalist] was actually in Connecticut with a couple other reporters. I had known Josh for 25 years so I just called him.

Gianna Cruet: So, as far as Columbine breaking news went, [names journalist] told me -

Journalist #5: Who is [names journalist]?

Gianna Cruet: She was working at *The Denver Post* when Columbine happened.

Journalist #5: Oh. Right.

Gianna Cruet: [Names journalist] said most people didn't have their own PCs and putting an update online was the last priority on everyone's minds. Do you agree with that?

Journalist #5: [Laughs.] We had these things called coyotes and they were ugly. One of them caught fire in the newsroom. [Laughs.] I can't remember her name but I remember it. There were jokes that she was typing some smoke and stuff.

We had to take turns to access the electronic library. It's in the corner of the room and was pretty close to typewriters here.

Gianna Cruet: Now it is so different. How do you feel about this change to social media? I know you have Twitter. I did notice that. But you're not on it as much as some people.

Journalist #5: I completely resisted it. And then finally, you know, I got word through my editor that the editor-in-chief was paying attention to how much people were participating. And so I just participated.

There is some interesting stuff. Right now, I am getting all this stuff about the woman who was raped to death in India.

Gianna Cruet: Right. Yeah. I heard about that.

Journalist #5: Now I'm interested. So.

Gianna Cruet: How has the use of social media changed your personal reporting practices? Or has it?

Journalist #5: I've been married twice with a long relationship in between. My first wife who lived in New Hampshire in the summer now and Florida in the winter, has a sister who lives in Oregon who grew marijuana on a farm. They are all very interested in pot in Colorado.

We had a round table meeting here because marijuana is legal in Colorado and we are trying to figure out the ramifications. I called my ex-wife - I didn't call her, I emailed her. I emailed people who used marijuana at one time regularly. My ex-wife said "sure, call me."

There is another guy and I'm looking at a picture right now. He is a National Merit Scholar from Rapid City, South Dakota. He is a complete maniac Libertarian. He thought President Obama was the worst president in the history of the United States until he didn't anymore.

He was actually driving to lunch in Tucson when Gabby Giffords was gunned down and couldn't figure out what all the yellow place tape was. He and I are now close email friends. We are finding common ground on a lot of things. It helped me understand - I didn't know a lot of people who, uh, were [pause] or would rather have Ron Paul or Mitt Romney as president rather than Barack Obama. And he was my window into that world.

He also gave me some really good financial advice. Anyway, I'm giving him a gift and he sent me a gift too. I'm digressing here. I'm trying to say is that, um, on a particular issue, legal marijuana in Colorado, I could extend messages to various people I knew to see what their reaction was.

Gianna Cruet: But was that mostly email? Not necessarily Facebook?

Journalist #5: It was email, it was phone calls. I might've tweeted something. I probably did. On my mother's side of the family, everyone is on Facebook. So I sent Facebook messages to them on that subject and various other subjects. My mother's side of the family included George McGovern, presidential candidate in South Dakota. They are kind of a South Dakota liberal to radical family. Some mathematical geniuses in there.

Gianna Cruet: Would you say that, maybe, social media or the Internet in general has made reporting easier in the sense of reaching people?

Journalist #5: It has made reporting a lot faster. It doesn't make stories better. There are still some really good storytellers out there, but when I went to journalism school, and this would've been in Boston in the mid-1970s, we took a course that included a look at the 1876 presidential election.

Gianna Cruet: Sounds exciting.

Journalist #5: That was the one where the Democrats won the popular vote but gave up the presidency to Rutherford B. Hayes and in exchange they got to reinstate something close to slavery in the South. So it was a very interesting election.

The particular assignment I had was to look at the Chicago Tribune in 1876. It was a

Republican newspaper and the correspondents were sending messages by horse from Louisiana about how Democrats were torturing and killing black people who were trying to vote.

So that was the media. The Chicago Tribune now owns the Los Angeles Times, where my wife works. The newspaper industry has changed tremendously in 130 or 140 years. But there are good and bad things.

There used to be 30 or 40 newspapers in New York and 30 to 40 newspapers in Chicago. Anyone who wanted to find different points of view could just go buy newspapers. Now we are all supposed to be as objective as we can be.

Gianna Cruet: There isn't a niche paper anymore. You have to appeal to a broad audience.

Journalist #5: Right. We have to write for everybody.

Gianna Cruet: Even in Denver with *The Rocky Mountain News* folding, it is even more important at the Post.

Journalist #5: For a while, my closest friend was a reporter at *The Rocky Mountain News*. Then he came to the Post as a senior news editor here. He now works two blocks away at something called iNews, which is interesting.

You'll find some of the most talented people at *The Rocky Mountain News* are now two or three blocks from here.

Gianna Cruet: Going back to your comment about the Internet making news faster, pretty much the general consensus so far has been that it is even more important to be accurate now and that is what sets apart we professional journalists from just people tweeting news. Professional journalists have to be accurate and that can be problematic when you look at what happened in Sandy Hook-

Journalist #5: The wrong guy is the killer, they had the wrong grade for the kids, they missed the most basic things. The National Shooting Sports Foundation are the organization that sold AR-15s as deer hunting rifles to the United States.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation is in Newtown, Connecticut. Josh Sugarman knew that. They were across from the bowling alley, for Pete's sake. Bloggers can say whatever they want and I think everyone gets to say whatever they want. But you have to distinguish between people who are professional and people who are opinionated.

Professional people are also opinionated. I certainly am. But there is a distinction to be made there. One of the things that my wife's editor in Los Angeles is particularly proud of - and I have been proud of this myself on occasion - is what they didn't report. In the

lust to be first, some people make grievous mistakes.

Gianna Cruet: Right, and it seems like for some people competition is more important than accuracy.

Journalist #5: Competition brings out the worst in some people.

Gianna Cruet: But you guys have said your main goal is accuracy. Other people have pointed out it's mostly TV stations that are more competitive.

Journalist #5: Some thumb their nose at the TV reporters. I know some good TV reporters. Well, I would say accuracy is very important. It's not all-important. Passion is important, truthfulness is important, wisdom is important - there are things that are important that are important about being human.

In my case, it is important for me to be human and to be a storyteller, to tell people things that I believe is terribly important for them to know. And be accurate at every turn.

Gianna Cruet: This is kind of my last question. Do you think social media has affected the authenticity of journalism? I've read studies online that think that it made the profession less authentic because the line is blurred.

Journalist #5: I disagree. I think the emergence of social media has, uh, after some really rough years, has made newspapers more important than ever. One indication of that is, and I saw this in an email, but last year for the first time in five years, newspaper profits increased nationally or globally.

What's happened is there are fewer people working for newspapers than there used to be, but there are more people coming in and working in the digital side of newspapers. Those reporters who remain are veterans and are, as a general rule, the cream of the crop.

Gianna Cruet: Interesting. That basically covers what I wanted to ask you about.

[End.]