

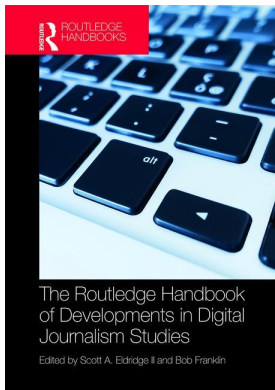
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HOW AND WHY POP-UP NEWS ECOLOGIES COME INTO BEING

Melissa Wall

Introduction

Much has been written about the instability of journalism in the twenty-first century, with observers calling for new understandings, new concepts, and new theories to try to better understand the discipline (Franklin and Eldridge, 2016; Witschge et al., 2016). News practices are in a state of dizzying flux as social media platforms enable collaboration and greater interactions between professionals, amateurs, and those in between and, at the same time, disrupt and potentially diminish long-standing expectations of what news can and should be. The borders of journalism have become increasingly permeable, with a host of other actors now also contributing to the increasingly unpredictable production of news and information around the world. This lack of fixity for journalism and its traditional norms has meant that those who study journalism are also reconsidering long-standing assumptions about news and its boundaries, frequently with the aim to travel beyond the current “edge” of the discipline (Carlson, 2015; Eldridge and Franklin, 2016: 8).

This chapter responds to these calls by aiming to further develop the concept of the temporary or pop-up news ecology, a term that seeks to take into account the rapid changes and liquidity in journalism (see Zamith, this volume, Chapter 7) as well as the move to rethink the ways research has tended to limit itself to examining news within individual organizational structures. The pop-up news ecology was originally introduced to characterize the dramatic rise of citizen, activist, and other oppositional forms of media in Syria, when an entirely new network of previously unheard voices sprang to life to offer a vastly different alternative to the information being distributed by the authoritarian news system controlled by the Syrian state (Wall and El Zahed, 2015). How this concept might apply to other cases situated within quite different political, geographic, and social contexts is the goal animating the essay that follows as it seeks to respond to change, disruption, and “deconstruction” in the news field (Ahva and Steenson, 2016: 25).

News ecology: growth of a concept

Research clearly shows that journalism is being carried out within more fluid and contingent spaces in which a range of nontraditional participants such as NGOs, grassroots activists, and even nonhuman actants such as algorithms, drones, etc., now collect and produce news (Blaagaard, 2015; Holton et al., 2013; Jensen et al., 2016; Lewis and Westlund, 2015; Usher, 2017). Taking

into account these changes, scholars have asked that we broaden our considerations of news beyond the traditional investigations of single institutions such as examining how BBC or the *New York Times* operate (Reese, 2016; Sjøvaag and Karlsson, 2016). The concept of an ecology is one approach used to grapple with the move away from fixed containers for news production.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) argues that as a “sensitizing concept”, news ecology can help us clarify the increasingly complex environment within which journalism takes place, taking our focus away from technology’s particular affordances to consider broader processes at work (15). In Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2016) genealogy of the news ecology concept, the origins begin with Robert Park and the Chicago School’s Progressive era attempts to understand immigrant communities and their communication practices in urban spaces. Many decades later, building on McLuhan’s work, Postman highlighted the idea of media ecologies as environments, launching the media ecologies subarea of research (Strate, 2016). Other researchers taking a different perspective of the ecological metaphor, such as Nardi and O’Day (1999), deployed the term information ecology. They defined an information ecology as a “system of people, practices, values and technologies in particular local environments” (Nardi and O’Day, 1999: 55). They further identified four key characteristics of an information ecology: (a) relationships among actors; (b) diversity, with a range of different actors occupying niches; (c) coevolution, in which change does not occur in isolation; (d) “keystone species” or central actors; (e) locality not necessarily bound by geography but by “spheres of influence and commitment” (55–57).

Applying the concept to journalism specifically, researchers have more recently used ecology as a lens to assess the complexities of twenty-first-century news practices. Anderson (2013) applied the concept of news ecology to show how news organizations in a specific city experienced new levels of connectedness as a result of the digitization of journalism. Anderson defined a news ecosystem as the “entire assemblage of individuals, organizations and technologies within a particular geographic community or around a particular issue, engaged in journalistic production and [. . .] consumption” (Anderson, 2016: 412). Drawing on Latour’s “Actor-Network Theory”, he argued that news ecology actors consisted of humans, objects, and technologies, and together these formed assemblages enabled by technological and social environments. These phenomena, of course, have now given rise to social and participatory forms of journalism, which are particularly destabilizing journalism cultures. Anderson’s work revealed the ways news organizations that were able to benefit from new, digitally enabled relationships were more likely to succeed in new networked news formations. Coleman et al. (2016) also used the news ecology lens to study a single city’s news environment, arguing that traditional and nontraditional news entities did not compete so much as carve out their individual informational niches within the overarching ecology. In addition to studying processes and practices of news ecologies, other researchers have emphasized that they may be productively examined at the time they are coming into being. Graeff et al. (2014) recommend examining the emergence of a news ecology around specific stories and topics that are their connective point. Similarly, Lowrey (2015), focusing specifically on the concept of organizational ecology, argues that to understand the ways news entities have responded to uncertainty and change, it is helpful to highlight innovations, which tend to emerge when an organizational ecology is developing. He argues that over time news routines become entrenched, leading the ecology toward stasis.

Pop-up news ecologies

Of particular interest here is the connection of the news ecology concept with the growing instability of news, which has been called “liquid” or “pop up” (Deuze, 2009: 15, 24). These terms work as metaphors for the rapid ways in which news actors, networks, and technologies may appear and disappear, oftentimes with no intention of permanency. The pop-up news ecology

concept was developed through an examination of Syrian citizen, activist, and professional journalism that sprang into being at the start of the Syrian civil war (Wall and El Zahed, 2015). Spurred into existence by resistance to an authoritarian regime, actors often working independently of each other contributed to the creation of a new, emergent news network that operated in opposition to the traditional, strictly controlled media system in Syria.

While Lowrey (2015) focuses on stabilization of the ecology as a protective move to reinforce boundaries and Anderson emphasizes connectedness, here, the pop-up concept highlights instability and emergence. Indeed, Wahl-Jorgensen argues that the concept of ecology as a lens for examining news systems works because it is not tied to assessing a single entity and thus allows for a changing cast of actors. The assessment of the pop-up news ecology in Syria focused on what Lowrey (2015: 145) highlights as a key to understanding journalism ecologies: its process of “becoming”. The Syrian case found a set of key factors that enabled a pop-up news ecology to come into existence, including:

- Existence of a news vacuum. A pop-up ecology forms in part because of an information void. In the case of Syria, this vacuum existed due to the long-standing control of domestic news media by the Syrian regime as well as the dangers of reporting on the emerging civil war, which left foreign journalists often unable to safely enter Syria and cover the conflict. (This also meant that external news outlets, especially Western ones, were highly dependent on internally collected reports.)
- An ability to rapidly coalesce. Emergent, often oppositional news ecologies rapidly come into existence, enabled in part by the availability of prosumer communication devices and especially by social media platforms taking advantage of networked communication forms. In Syria, a heightened sense of urgency around sharing news and information existed as the country descended into a vicious civil war.
- Amplification by external connectors. While the content may be produced within a limited geographical space or topical area, if the stories being shared are of high news value to those not directly in the network, other institutions and entities, including professional news media, pick up these stories and amplify them to much larger, sometimes even global audiences. In the case of Syria, some of these connectors included diaspora Syrians, but others were mainstream news media, some of whom had no boots on the ground.
- Adaptation to professional journalism norms. While many of the content producers in a pop-up ecology may begin as self-taught citizen journalists or content producers from other spheres (such as NGOs, activist groups, etc.), as the pop-up ecology grows, they appear to adopt at least some professional practices. They do so in order to make their content more palatable and trustworthy to outside news distributors. In the case of Syria, some of these amateurs received Western training and began to evolve their content based on these practices (see: Yousuf and Taylor, 2017). At the same time, some alternative content producers were able to create digital news outlets that sought to take on the appearance and some functions of mainstream news while existing only on YouTube and Facebook.
- Reliance on existing media tools and platforms. While analog efforts may also exist within a pop-up news ecology, these are primarily digital spaces, heavily dependent on social media platforms. However, social media are not neutral actors, merely hosting content or offering platforms for all to use as they please. They may regularly interfere with users of their networks; for example, they may take down content they deem inappropriate or in violation of their terms.

It should be noted that the Syrian pop-up ecology with which these characteristics are associated grew at the start of the conflict; thus, the pop-up that initially emerged and attained global

attention was one affiliated most strongly with the activists who were working nonviolently against the government. That said, other ecologies appeared later and were connected with the armed insurgent networks, some of which eventually became part of the Islamic State, which functioned within a sometimes overlapping but different news ecology (Al-Ghazzi, 2014; Farwell, 2014). One of several fault lines between the activists' pop-up ecology and the initial armed insurgent one was language, in which the use of English was a key dissemination strategy for the activists and their allies. It enabled them to speak to liberal Western countries but also meant that some attempted to package their information in ways that appealed to journalists and policymakers in Western democracies in order to gain their support. The armed insurgents' oppositional ecology was mostly reported in Arabic and developed tighter connections with audiences and intermediaries in Middle Eastern states. Likewise, while the insurgents also adopted outsiders' expectations, those frequently came from the Gulf States, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, where opponents of the Syrian regime generally favored content that showed and sometimes celebrated acts of violence and adherence to sectarianism (Lynch, 2016; Phillips, 2016). These more violence-oriented ecologies, particularly that of the Islamic State, eventually supplanted the activists in reaching global audiences, including within the West, from which they adopted high production standards but not liberal political values.

A pop-up news ecology emerges

This chapter seeks to apply this pop-up news ecology concept to a different case to refine the concept and see how it applies outside of Syria. The focus here is on the ways various individuals, organizations, and other networked actors operated in a loose configuration to distribute news and information about a series of highly publicized U.S. police shootings of African Americans that became the focus of widespread protests and attention (see Richardson, this volume, Chapter 29). The shootings were part of the fabric of the U.S. criminal justice system's disregard for African Americans, who even now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white Americans (Lowrey, 2016a). The topic was chosen as the focus for this chapter because, like Syria, it centers around high conflict situations involving life and death confrontations. Of course, the violence in these instances is not occurring in a civil war, and its victims do not take up arms. It also differs significantly from Syria as well in that it takes place in a media-saturated and technologically sophisticated information environment, occurring in a country with a long history of freedom of speech rights and a strong civil society and rule of law. Nevertheless, I posit that a digital pop-up news ecology emerged around these acts of police violence and resulting citizen deaths. New and preexisting sources of information seeking to document and sometimes challenge these events together spurred the emergence of a new, alternative news ecology focused on police violence against African Americans.

As with the Syria example, many of this ecology's dominant actors include individuals on social media such as livestreamers, podcasters, bloggers, Tweeters, and others using YouTube, Tumblr, Vine, etc. This ecology also encompasses the online sites of the traditional black press and newer iterations of online-only black media (e.g., *This Week in Blackness* [TWiB!]), along with websites specifically dedicated to the issues at hand such as *blacklivesmatter.com* and *fergusonaction.com*. Periodically joining these are the social media presences of black celebrities (e.g., Spike Lee, Wyclef Jean) or other well-known black figures and community and activist groups (e.g., Black Youth Project, the Rev. Al Sharpton) (Florini, 2017; Graeff et al., 2014). The presence of this emergent digital news ecology does not preclude the existence of a larger mainstream news ecology but is viewed as separate (while sometimes overlapping and interacting). Indeed, there is a long history of ethnic media establishing separate communication spheres specific to their communities in the United States (Squires, 2002).

While the original explanation of pop-up news ecologies was that they arise only within authoritarian countries (Wall and el Zahed, 2015), the pop-up news ecology here arose within the context of a particular space of authoritarianism created when African Americans interact with the U.S. criminal justice system. As researchers have argued, the “unmasking” of power within a state apparatus comes during moments when authoritarian actions are taken (Hall et al., 1978[2013]: 214). The violence against African Americans represents such a space. Indeed, critics argue that authoritarian practices have long been a part of the criminal justice system in the United States, and as the national security and counter-terrorism apparatuses have become embedded within local police operations, it has become more visible to outsiders who are not its focus (Bieler, 2016). This is seen particularly in the use of military equipment and operational practices against civilian populations in minority communities. Thus, the law enforcement agencies here exhibit a sort of “subnational authoritarianism”, that can exist within an otherwise functioning democracy (Behrend, 2011; Gervasoni, 2016). This pop-up ecology is a response to these tendencies.

Applying the concept

The key characteristics identified earlier as necessary for the emergence of a pop-up news ecology are applied to a secondary review of research as well as some key journalistic accounts of the police violence against African Americans. Here, my goal is an effort to refine the concept of a pop-up news ecology to determine the ways it may have broader applicability.

Filling an information vacuum

The pop-up news ecology in Syria provided alternative views from the discourses created by the Syrian government through its control of the existent media system. Much of this pop-up or temporary ecology’s content was produced at the grassroots and took an oppositional stance, created by citizen journalists and activists documenting what they were seeing and experiencing.

Similarly, the racial justice ecology developed to fill an information vacuum in the United States. For example, Graeff and colleagues’ (2014) network analysis of the media reaction to the shooting of unarmed teenager Trayvon Martin by a neighborhood watch member in Florida clearly outlines the emergence of a new news ecology (although they don’t distinguish it as separate from the mainstream ecology). These researchers argue that initially this shooting was a small local news story, generating an uptick of attention mainly from nearby Florida-based news media. Then, a media publicist hired by the Martin family amplified the story, gaining the attention of some national mainstream news media, but that attention was both short-lived and not widespread. From there, a web of other grassroots actors began to highlight the story within their own communication networks. This included students from Howard University (a historically black university or HBCU) and the activist group Change.Org along with media aimed at ethnic minorities such as Global Grind, Color of Change, Black Youth Project, and This Week in Blackness. Together, these and others brought Martin’s story to a much higher level of attention.

As with Syria, these new actors filling the vacuum also sometimes created their own news entities or what has been called an improvised “ad hoc news wire” (Richardson, 2016: 2). This news wire was not inconsequential in terms of audience reach. For example, “This Week in Blackness Reporting” was on the ground when the results of the Florida trial of the man who killed Martin were announced, as well as in the response to the shooting of another unarmed youth, Michael Brown, in Ferguson, Missouri. This digital operation has had 1 million downloads of its main podcast. Perhaps most notable has been the use of Black Twitter as a keystone actor in this pop-up ecology. Indeed, Twitter was a main host for individual citizen journalists

who became movement leaders. For example, activist Deray McKesson, a former public school administrator from Minnesota who traveled to Ferguson during the height of the protests, live tweeted news about the protests, and also shared commentary and news about police violence and racial injustice more broadly. Researchers have shown that McKesson was the “most referenced participant” producing content about the Brown shooting and subsequent uprising, becoming a “trusted source of protest information”, generating more than 1.1 million retweets and mentions on Twitter during this time period (Freelon et al., 2016: 54).

It is important to note that the vacuum included not just the lack of sustained coverage but also of narratives challenging the dominant frames for what was reported. Examinations of mainstream news coverage of these deaths has found a tendency to support the status quo view that police violence against minorities is justified (Willis and Painter, 2016). Thus, mainstream news of these high-profile incidents of police violence is often described by researchers as producing a pro-police point of view (Araiza et al., 2016; Florini, 2017; Willis and Painter, 2016; Hockin and Brunson, 2016). As sociologist Michael Eric Dyson notes, “We’re in a culture that disbelieves black truth” (quoted in Wagner, 2016: para 8), and this in particular appears to greatly contribute to creating a space for this pop-up news ecology. In sum, this new ecology offered a different lens for viewing the violence against African Americans, highlighting alternative perspectives, particularly from within that community (Florini, 2017). While mainstream news sometimes presented the victims of the police violence as threatening and criminally inclined, the pop-up ecology’s narratives framed the story as one about police brutality against ordinary people who were victims of systemic racial injustice.

Coming into existence at high speeds

Just as with the Syrian case, this new news ecology was activated quickly, which led to the racial justice movement’s stories being rapidly and widely shared in ways that traditional vehicles such as the black press, operating on slower schedules and employing less nimble practices, could not have carried out. Although Syria’s pop-up ecology also experienced a high-speed birth, there, the internet connections were less robust and security was such that those who collected media content, particularly videos, were not always the ones who uploaded their own stories. Instead, a chain of participants funneled content to safer harbors for global dissemination, thus delaying their posting. Here, the high velocity in distributing information is evident in the widely available live coverage of the police actions against citizens, the protests, and other on-the-ground responses. Content was oftentimes either uploaded immediately or simply live broadcast using tools such as Ustream and, after its April 2016 introduction, Facebook Live (the tool that carried live the shooting of Philando Castile, who was pulled over during a traffic stop in Minnesota. His girlfriend sitting in the passenger seat used Facebook Live to document him being shot to death by a police officer).

Researchers tracking some of the key cases of police violence find that the stories were brought to public attention first on Twitter, which is considered much faster than Facebook (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015; Hitlin and Vogt, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2012). In the case of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, the incident garnered thousands of tweets within 24 hours (more than 10.6 million would be posted within the first eight days after the incident), while it took another 24 hours for the first wave of mainstream news coverage to begin when cable television news covered the story in their prime-time news hours (Hitlin and Vogt, 2014). Jackson and Welles (2016: 397) call the posters of these first waves content “initiators”, who are the first to cover the event but often fade away or even simply stop posting after a day of serving as a top initiator of social media coverage.

The speeded-up production of content can also enable an oppositional ecology to launch a new, shared counter-narrative before one is established within a dominant mainstream news ecology. In this pop-up ecology, this was particularly effectively done using hashtags, which enable a rapid alternative storyline to widely circulate and be reinforced by social media denizens (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015). For example, three days after the shooting of Michael Brown, grassroots social media users launched the hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown in response to the unflattering photos of Brown being used by mainstream news media that implied he was an unsavory character. African Americans, particularly youth and young adults, used the hashtag with photos juxtaposing images of themselves. In one image, they would appear wholesome (e.g., photos of them graduating or serving in the military), and in the companion one they might be construed as engaged in socially unacceptable behavior (partying, etc.). In this way, they rapidly challenged racist images of Brown and other African Americans (Everbach et al., 2017).

Enacting autonomous values

The Syrian pop-up news ecology saw some of its activist contributors adopting professional journalism norms, taking note of ways to source and present material that would make it more trustworthy to professional journalists from the Western news media (and likewise, the insurgent ecologies highlighted content showing visceral violence and whipping up the sectarianism their funders preferred). The ecology that built up around opposition to police violence did not follow these patterns. While it was not uncommon for the content of some contributors to this temporary news ecology to be noticed by the traditional mainstream news outlets, this incorporation did not appear to be sought after (Jackson and Welles, 2016). Instead of a move to train and incorporate those creating content for this oppositional ecology, a reverse pattern took place: mainstream news media adopted some of its practices. For example, a key citizen journalist, Ferguson alderman Antonio French, relied heavily on Vine videos as he reported from the resistance in the streets, and soon after, the mainstream news reporters adopted this platform as one of their means of producing content about the story (Araiza et al., 2016). Indeed, as noted earlier, rejection of the underlying frames evident in mainstream news coverage was a key characterization of this oppositional ecology's content, which established and followed its own values, including emphasizing emotional content; heavily relying on live coverage and street reporting; and fostering connections among like-minded voices.

Many of the key actors in this ecology relied on emotional language in their content production, which Richardson (2016: 17). Describes as “unapologetically subjective”. For example, Black Lives Matter activist Johnetta Elzie, one of the key Twitter voices covering Ferguson, wrote with “unchecked emotion” (Lowrey, 2016b: 39) Likewise, Poepsel and Painter (2016) argue that the participants’ “constant, live broadcasts carry implied tones for audiences” (106), often providing subjective frames for their content. The embrace of live, on-the-scene reporting and use of oppositional narratives can be seen in the approach of many of the Livestreamers, some of the most popular of whom had more than 1 million views of their footage (Poepsel and Painter, 2016). Many sought legitimacy by describing themselves as embedded with protesters, providing “first person coverage of the movement” (p. 100). Like a generation of bloggers from earlier eras, authority derived here from connections with an audience that supported the resistance to police brutality and violence.

Some Livestreamers not only engaged in practices outside the norms of traditional journalism, they worked to draw attention to those differences. Rather than seeking to establish himself as a fellow journalist, a Livestreamer interviewed on CNN is instead shown aggressively confronting the CNN reporter to, as he puts it, “shine light on police and police behavior” (101). The Livestreamers’ connections to the activists and oppositional groups is reflected in one’s

comment that he would not show video of the protesters “doing things that could get them into trouble” (Poepsel and Painter, 2016: 106). Indeed, as coverage would continue of protests, etc., the goals of the pop-up ecology’s actors often shifted from merely producing content to supporting and engaging the community. This could be seen in practices such as creating new uses for hashtags, such as when activists used #FergusonFriday as “space for reflection on the movement” that could bring voices together beyond providing immediate responses to action in the streets (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015: 10). All of these differences are important because studies of mainstream news ecologies in the US suggest that such ecologies continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by traditional news providers in the form of professional news outlets (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Amplified by external connectors

In another notable difference from the Syrian case, the relationship with other sorts of connectors, in particular mainstream news media, are not the same here. In the Syrian conflict, one of the important connectors was external mainstream news media, which served as important amplifiers of the stories being produced. This included both Middle Eastern outlets, particularly satellite news channels, as well as Western news media. Able to reach larger audiences, they pushed out content from a range of oppositional actors. Activist actors in particular (as opposed to armed insurgents) incorporated English versions of reporting into their content to reach Western audiences. Oftentimes, though, activists and insurgents downplayed content for Western audiences that revealed in violent actions.

In comparison, while mainstream media prompted additional attention to the issues circulating through the racial justice news ecology, the high percentage of African Americans on Twitter meant that they propelled attention themselves regardless of traditional news notice, and activists did not change their content to attract mainstream coverage. Here, there were at least three categories of connectors: allies, opponents, and parasites.

- Allies consisted of sympathetic alternative left-liberal news media including the Huffington Post, *The Nation*, Vice, AJ Stream, and Gothamist as well as local alternative news outlets such as the *Riverfront Times* in St. Louis (Poepsel and Painter, 2016). Such sites boosted the reach of stories of police violence through their distribution and amplification to their own networks. While these news producers regularly cover police violence and broader African-American issues, for most, such stories are but one area of many in their reportage. In addition, the hacktivist group Anonymous, which periodically provides news and information about social and political issues from the left or libertarian angle, often by leaking additional information, served as a connector.
- Opponents consisted of conservative news outlets such as the *Drudge Report* and the *Daily Caller* and right-wing social media denizens that produced counter-narratives to the pop-up ecology (Graeff et al., 2014). Despite being hostile toward the racial justice ecology’s entire *raison d’être*, nevertheless, opponents pushed the story (told through their counter-frames) to additional audiences and thus likely helped it place higher on the mainstream news agenda. Ironically, they worked in opposition to what those producing content for the pop-up ecology believed, further contributing to the need for the pop-up ecology to exist.
- Parasites were the final type of connector, here consisting of two forms: one was made up of opportunists who used the attention generated by the racial justice ecology to gain their own audiences (leading to potential advertising revenue). For example, according to Freelon and colleagues (2016), a key disseminator of news within the ecology was the Bipartisan Report, a site that generates millions of Facebook visits. It bills itself as “the Internet’s newspaper”

with a liberal perspective but is described by observers as hosting “clickbait” content that is not actually true (Westneat, 2016). The second includes Russian government-owned English-language outlets such as RT (formerly Russia Today), which has become increasingly well-known for participating in the distribution of alternative news (and “facts”) about high-profile news stories in the United States and other Western countries. Indeed, the Russian state has subsequently been identified as playing an outsized role in supporting oppositional voices throughout the Western world. These gray actors are important because they represent what has increasingly become a concern in liberal democracies, with the ability of social media to foster (and make money from) propaganda that thrives on disinformation and lies. It could be argued that Russian state media themselves have become a sort of pop-up news ecology that serves to support the aims of an authoritarian state by involving itself in the internal political conflicts of other countries, particularly through news media coverage and social media manipulations.

Dependent on social media tools

Pop-up ecologies in Syria and the US are extraordinarily dependent upon social media to fuel their communication networks, suggesting that these new media companies are foundational actors without which these ecologies would be severely weakened or perhaps not even exist. In the Syrian case, the citizen and activist content on YouTube, a key social media platform they depended on, was sometimes taken down based on the company’s rules (for example a video being too violent or otherwise offensive) (Wall and el Zahed, 2014). This meant that content was unstable, and even the producers of this content also were shown to take down their own accounts, often for unspecified reasons. Takedowns of social media content can happen in a much freer system as well (although these may be less frequent due to the ability of citizens to flag the apparent censorship). For example, when the Facebook Live video shot by the girlfriend of Philando Castile went viral, it was initially taken down by Facebook. A public outcry followed and the takedown was reversed, with the company claiming it was a technical glitch. Thus, reliance on social media tools for distribution comes with those risks no matter which country they are being used in due to the enormous power and reach of the media companies providing these platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Conclusion

The pop-up news ecology that developed around the U.S. racial justice movement suggests some of the same factors found in the case of the Syrian civil society-fueled ecology were present, while others were not. Just as with Syria, an *information vacuum* existed due to a lack of news coverage by mainstream news outlets along with the presence of a limited range of status quo-oriented narratives that tended to support the police or draw boundaries around the ways the stories could be addressed. As in Syria, this ecology *came to life rapidly*, generally disseminating its information before the mainstream news ecology did, in part by frequently choosing to post content live. This follows a history of social media forms leveraging speed to race ahead of slower moving professional news outlets, which exercise greater levels of professional judgment. Likewise, the pop-up ecology here was heavily *dependent on social media* and other corporate media tools as its platforms for creating and disseminating content. That said, there were some important differences.

Here, the pop-up system did not seek to mimic or adopt the mainstream news ecology’s values, instead *creating their own news values*. These actors were able to leverage their own large audiences to the extent that they were apparently less concerned about shaping a message to

fit outsiders' expectations. That difference meant that the racial justice ecology may have been less influenced by *relationships with external connectors*. In further developing the pop-up ecology concept, the existence of a range of differently motivated external connectors was identified, suggesting a sort of news equivalent of biological polymorphism. Overall, the differences found here from the Syrian case may be attributed in part to the more highly developed American news environment. It appears likely that a similar ethnic-related pop-up news ecology formed in the US in connection with the opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock. Examining that pop-up news ecology as well as additional cases from nondemocratic countries would help clarify this chapter's arguments.

In conclusion, regardless of where they originate, pop-up news ecologies are marked by their liquidity. Key actors may quickly disappear to be replaced by others, and the technologies fueling the ecology may become unstable or even unavailable. While this chapter focused on the formation of pop-up news ecologies, it does not track them through their decline and demise, which remain important directions for future research. Pop-up ecologies may lose public attention or become too fraught with challenges to continue. (This is in part what happened in the case of Syria, as the political situation changed and the violence intensified.) Other possible outcomes for pop-up ecologies include becoming so connected to a dominant, mainstream news ecology that they cease to be distinct, losing much of their value and perhaps even being replaced themselves by some other oppositional news ecology.

Further reading

Essential readings on news ecologies include Chris Anderson's (2013) *Rebuilding the News: Metropolitan Journalism in the Digital Age* and his chapter (2016) on "News Ecosystems" in *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (2016) expertly excavates the foundations and history of the news ecology concept in her article "The Chicago School and Ecology: A Reappraisal for the Digital Era." The idea of a pop-up news ecology was first explicated in "Syrian Citizen Journalism: A Pop-Up News Ecology in an Authoritarian Space", which I co-authored with Sahar el Zahed (2015). Coleman et al. (2016) provide an excellent road map for assessing a local news ecology in their study of the city of Leeds in *The Mediated City: The News in a Postindustrial Context*.

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