The accused is entering the courtroom: the live-tweeting of a murder trial.

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Question and method

• What strategies do journalists use in live-tweeting criminal proceedings?
  • How do these differ from, or align with, traditional reporting styles

• Trial of Oscar Pistorius – March 3rd to 12th September
  • 49 days of court session
  • Time-limited to court session

• Twenty-four journalists
  • Twenty individuals – four organisations
  • Two agency, ten broadcast, twelve print
  • Nine international, fifteen national

• 80 000 Tweets
Findings – Tweet elements

- Hashtags – 78% of tweets included hashtags #oscarpistorius #oscartrial in line with now accepted practice.
  - Individual accounts varied 99% to 25%
- Retweets and mentions – 19% included @ to other users
  - Variation between 0.5% and 19%
  - 62% of retweets were other journalists
- Images – 2% of tweets included images
  - Most images were of Oscar (41%), or other people involved in the trial
  - 24% were of other members of the media
- Links – not widely used (0.1%)
  - Majority were to own news organisation (69%) or other news organisation (17%)

Tweet types

- 66% direct and indirect quotes from the stand
  - 5% explanation, 5% visual description, 9% commentary and observation
- 80% of Tweets were formal statements of events and facts, 20% were conversational, humorous or personal
- Approaches were: stream of consciousness, summative or commentary
Tweeting strategies

• Promotional strategic approach (2 primary, 4 secondary)
  • High emphasis on links to own website and content
  • High use of hashtags
  • Limited use of engagement or response
  • Limited personal voice
• Reportage approach (14 primary, 4 secondary)
  • Stream of consciousness description, rapid fire tweeting
  • Limited links or analysis, limited commentary
  • Note-taking for later reportage?
• Interactive approach (2 primary, 5 secondary)
  • High level of conversation and response
  • High level of commentary and opinion

Correlations

• No correlation found between gender, medium or international/national
• Journalists working for British press (all apparently British) no more or less likely to insert personal comment or speculation into reporting (despite the fact that this would be forbidden in British court reporting)
• Broadcasters no more or less likely to use images than non-broadcasters
• Women no more or less likely to be interactors, or to use personal voice than men, despite Hedman, 2015; D. Lasorsa, 2012; D. L. Lasorsa et al., 2011;
Thank you

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