

# Researchers examine the rise of liveblogging

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Dr Neil Thurman and Anna Walters, from City University London's Journalism School, have just published a study into liveblogging, which is becoming the default format for covering major breaking news stories, sports events, and scheduled news.

Liveblogging is becoming the default format for covering major [breaking news](#) stories, [sports events](#), and scheduled news, like the US presidential election, on the web. Here Dr Neil Thurman explains their appeal to readers.

In our study we found that liveblogs at Guardian.co.uk are getting 300 per cent more views and 233 per cent more visitors than conventional online news articles on the same subject. They also outperform online picture galleries, getting 219 per cent more visitors. Why are they so popular?

We believe that it is because liveblogs are extremely effective at engaging audiences, because they are well adapted to meet changing [consumer preferences](#) for news delivery and formatting, changes that have resulted - in part - from the displacement of news consumption from print to online.

The office space has become where a significant proportion of those in work consume news. These news-at-work consumers make regular visits to news sites throughout the day when they need distraction or more information about an event they are following.

Pablo Boczkowski has written extensively about this and says that news-at-work readers like to regularly monitor [news sites'](#) homepages and have a preference for text rather than audio or video because of [privacy concerns](#) in the office (read: not getting caught surfing by your boss).

Liveblogging fulfills many of these preferences for online news consumption. Firstly, with its regular updates it provides follow-up information about events. Secondly, it suits users' preferences for monitoring a single page rather than drilling down into a news site. Thirdly, liveblogging's heavy use of text content makes it more suitable for viewing in the office where readers need to look as though they are working.

Boczkowski also claims that news-at-work consumers have a preference for sports, crime, and celebrity stories, in part because such stories make better workplace gossip-fodder. But we found that more serious public affairs-orientated liveblogs were more popular with the Guardian.co.uk readers we surveyed than liveblogs that covered sport and soft news topics.

It may be then that the form of liveblogging itself, rather than the content it carries, is the attraction. An example, perhaps, of Marshall McLuhan's old adage that "the medium is the message".

In our research we spent some time talking to Guardian.co.uk journalists about the process of liveblogging. It will probably come as no surprise that liveblogging is produced at speed, and, as a result, it has what we call a looser culture of corroboration.

At Guardian.co.uk a typical liveblog lasts for six hours, is updated 40 times and has two authors/contributors in the office and a part-time contributor out in the field. What this means is that, on average, each journalist involved has to research and write a new update every 20

minutes for six hours.

Can they, then, do what journalists have long been expected to do and check and recheck to establish the accuracy of questionable information? The answer is no, not in the conventional sense. What they are actually doing instead is working with trusted sources, for example known Twitter accounts, and involve the audience in fact checking.

What about the readers? What might they make of this looser culture of corroboration? After all newspapers still lag behind television in public perceptions of reliability. Might the increasing use of liveblogging to cover hard [news stories](#) lower the public's trust in news organisations further? Interestingly we found not.

Readers said they thought liveblogs were "more factual" and less "opinion based" than standard [news](#) articles. Trust and objectivity does not only depend on verification of facts, but also on other factors such as transparency, providing supporting evidence, and balance; and in this regard liveblogs score very highly. As well as being popular we found that readers were twice as likely to participate with liveblogs than other article types.

The full article, entitled: "Live Blogging - Digital Journalism's Pivotal Platform? A case study of the production, consumption, and form of Live Blogs at Guardian.co.uk" is published on the *Digital Journalism* website. A pre-press version is available free of charge on the City University London website.

**More information:** [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2012.714935](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/21670811.2012.714935)

Provided by City University London

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