

# Gamergate, fragmentary storytelling, and news narrative: Convergence, 'conversation', and context in journalism education

Kate Ames, CQ University, Australia

## Abstract

Fragments of conversation dominate contemporary media. These conversations occur in the form of comments, sound bites, tweets, and commentary on social media platforms. In this context, it is hard to make sense of an issue. Telling stories has always been a way for people to make sense of the world, but there is a difference in the way storytelling occurs in conversation and long-form narrative. Despite the tension between both forms of storytelling, there is a space for both in contemporary media, but incorporating understanding of conversational storytelling is rare in journalism education. In 2014, '#gamergate' as an issue dominated the gaming mediasphere in a way that highlighted how conversational voices on social media became 'news' in a more traditional narrative sense. As an issue, #gamergate was unique in the length of time it remained current (over three months) in specialist and general media, and it demonstrated the appropriation of the story in an ongoing way by a com-

munity of citizen and specialist journalists. In considering the way mainstream media was marginalised as the issue developed, this paper considers #gamergate as a case study and argues there are lessons learned for journalism educators in identifying what should be privileged when teaching storytelling that can help make sense of fragments in digital contexts.

## Introduction

**Contemporary media is dominated by fragments of conversations, which occur in the form of comments, soundbites, tweets, and commentary on social media platforms. Social media users engage with issues, and use hashtags and handles to interact, and the nature of the issue will determine the volume of conversational traffic.**

Keeping up with conversations, and determining any associated news value or public interest can be incredibly difficult because an issue can ‘take off’ at incredible speed. That issue can then disappear almost as quickly, as another rises to take its place. Understanding the function of conversations in the public sphere, and the way in which they integrate with and are appropriated by journalism, is a challenge for the profession as conversational narrative emerges as a dominant form of storytelling. Telling stories has always been a way for people to make sense of the world, but there is a difference in the way storytelling occurs in conversation and longform narrative.

This article considers the relationship between conversation and news discourse by examining the Gamergate debate, an online ‘war’ between journalists and the gaming community. Gamergate refers to an issue-based hashtag which emerged on social media in mid-2014. It started as a blog post in August 2014 and became a debate between gamers and journalists/journalbloggers. Central to this debate were arguments about ethics in journalism and gaming, and the treatment of women in the gaming community. The Gamergate ‘movement’ is “difficult to define and tortuously complex” (Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández, 2016, p. 83). A number of scholars have already reviewed Gamergate from different perspectives, or used it as a case study within which they have explored related issues. For example, Chess and Shaw (2015) have provided an ‘insider’ account as feminist gaming scholars on conspiracy theories, Gamergate, feminism and masculine hegemony with relation to a conference they organised in August 2014 that was affected by the debate. Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández (2016) examined a week of Gamergate debate in early 2015, based on tweets using the hashtag ‘Gamergate’, to explore the way in which issues emerged in social media and were linked to networks. Massanari (2015) used Gamergate as a case study to explore the way Reddit enables activism. This article also reviews Gamergate as an illustrative case study, but examines the link between online conversation and mainstream media practice.

I came to the debate early as someone interested in online communities and broadcast talk. The Gamergate hashtag attracted my interest in late August 2014, and I focused on the ways online conversation around the hashtag was integrated into news discourse. At that early stage, it appeared that only online gaming journalists were interested and narrative was polarised and opinion-based. My initial interest was in a semantically-based study, looking at specific discursive practice by gaming journalists. The issue did not subside and it became evident as time passed that the general media had been sidelined and played a minimal role in what retrospectively has been dubbed an “online culture war” (Wheaton 2015). I became interested in taking a broader view to explore the relationship between online conversation and traditional media. Two specific research questions emerged to drive the analysis and discussion: can theories associated with conversational narrative be applied in a convergent media environment? and, what does this mean for traditional journalism practice and educators?

This article is therefore conceptually-based. In illustrating specific points, it draws on data collected as follows: tweets (and blogs linked directly to these tweets) using the ‘Gamergate’ hashtag collected between 18 August and 30 November 2014 using the search engine Topsy, and media stories accessed via a database search (Factiva) using the keyword Gamergate during the same period. The article first provides an

overview of the first few months of Gamergate coverage, It draws on theories of conversational narrative generally that may be applicable to online conversation, and then specifically considers these in relation to Gamergate, and convergence and journalistic practice more generally. It considers lessons learned for journalism and consequently educators about privileging information in a conversationally-focused environment as a way of making sense of fragments in digital contexts.

## # Gamergate – a Hashtag

Although the relationship between game developers and gaming journalists had been brewing for years, the start of Gamergate can be tracked to a blog post by a man called Eron Gjoni on 16 August 2014. Gjoni created a blog via wordpress called “The Zoe Post”. The post was the retelling of a story. The story was that of Eron’s break-up with his girlfriend Zoe Quinn. Quinn is a games developer known for her text-based game called “Depression Quest”. The post was a mix of text-based reflection and graphics which were screen shots of text-based chat conversation. Gjoni asserted that Quinn had become involved with a games reviewer Nathan Grayson. Gjoni’s post included snapshots of conversations between Quinn and Gjoni. These snapshots revealed Quinn’s concern about her relationship with Grayson and Grayson’s reviews of her game. The blog called into question the relationship between games development and reviews by gaming media.

On August 17 (the following day), a gamer called Mundane Matt uploaded a video titled ‘Hell Hath No Fury Like A Lover’s Scorn’ to YouTube. MundaneMatt is an anonymous YouTube personality. At the time, his avatar was a skull and he described himself as: “a Youtube personality who rants about movies, games, etc... Liked by a few, disliked by others. Either way its gonna be a party. :)”. □□Mundane Matt’s video was a 15-minute in-depth critique and commentary on Gjoni’s post. He retold the story for his followers. In doing so, he incorporated his opinion about what had happened. Mundane Matt had strong views about the potential corruption of gaming journalism, and made much of the relationship between a games developer and a games reviewer that had been alluded to in the original “Zoe Post”.

From this initial point, a number of key events occurred to mobilise comment and action. Notably, these ‘events’ were public comment within a community network, and these comments polarised around two issues: the treatment of women in gaming, and the ethics of journalism. For example, Zoe Quinn, the subject of the original Zoepost, complained about MundaneMatt’s post. Quinn claimed she was ‘doxxed’—that is, identifying information with malicious intent about her was published, although this was disputed by a number of commentators. There was immediate response by the gaming press, and commentary built within the gaming community more widely. The issue was picked up by 4chan, the “web’s most mysterious, yet undoubtedly popular, forum site” (‘What is 4Chan - Mashable explains’) which ensured its wider distribution. During August, feminist and videoblogger Anita Sarkeesian published a video blog on her YouTube channel in which she reviewed the way women were used as objectified in video games (“Women as Background Decoration: Part 2 - Tropes vs Women in Video Games”). Actor Adam Baldwin is then credited with having come up with the Gamergate tag on 27 August 2014 (see Chess & Shaw 2015; Massanari 2015) when he tweeted links to YouTube videos ‘Quinnspiracy Theory’ which talked about the attempt within the gaming community to silence concerns about ethics in journalism. The following day, a series of articles were published in gaming specific media and community comment mobilised.

The way in which Gamergate developed as an issue from this point has been considered, and analysed in specific detail by Burgess & Matamoros-Fernández (2016). Broadly speaking, more and more stories were retold, particularly via YouTube, Medium, and blogs, supplemented by conversational commentary on Twitter. As stories were retold, the focus of commentary changed. Key characters emerged as ‘thought leaders’, and pro and anti-gamergate sides emerged. Those who had no prior interest in the issue were ‘drawn in’ to making comment:

If you haven’t heard of Gamergate, lucky you. If you have, and you have an opinion about it, you probably fall into one of two camps. You are in the camp that thinks it is a web-based movement of gamers upset about a perceived lack of ethics among video-games journalists. Or you are in the camp that thinks it is a web-based campaign of harassment against women who make, write about and enjoy video games, masquerading as a movement of gamers upset about a perceived lack of ethics among games journalists. (Wofford 2014)

And random consumers, like me, who had no prior relationships in this scene nor stake in this fight but who are shocked and revolted at the cancer consuming our hobby. (Chu 2014)

What is significant for the purpose of this article is that by early September 2014, despite more than a million tweets being posted against the Gamergate hashtag, interest from mainstream media remained minimal. One of the first articles in *The Guardian* (Stuart 2014) was an opinion-based piece in the technology section that was consistent with the theme of retelling a told story, adding opinion and commentary to the mix. Stuart wrote:

The last fortnight has seen that powder keg explode. A spiteful blogpost by the ex-lover of indie games developer Zoe Quinn, and the launch of the latest Tropes vs Women video by Sarkeesian, which analyses the sexist depiction of women in some games, have led to reams of appalling threats and abuse online. Both women have feared for their safety. Games writers have been seen to close ranks and defend the developers, criticising the gamer community, which has responded by huddling around the Gamergate hashtag on Twitter. Questions have been asked about the close relationship between development studios and games critics – sometimes to a ludicrous extent, with charts and diagrams posted online showing the connections between key figures. (2014)

Stuart was a games writer for *The Guardian* and his article makes note of his membership of the gaming (and gaming journalism) community. His story was about the ‘war’, so it was the conflict within the gaming community that was newsworthy. The tag line for the article was: “The last fortnight has seen a raging battle between self-identifying gamers and games writers and critics. Does it have to be this way?” (Stuart 2014).

It wasn’t until mid-October that mainstream journalists picked up and attempted to report on Gamergate. Their interest was sparked when prominent gaming blogger and feminist Anita Sarkeesian cancelled a talk she was scheduled to give at the University of Utah after she was threatened by so called ‘Gamergaters’ because she was concerned for her safety. This was covered widely in gaming media (Starr 2014; Wingfield 2014). Mainstream media then engaged with the debate, and attempted to catch up. For example, an article on the *Times* website titled “What Is Gamergate and Why Are Women Being Threatened About Video



Figure 1 – One day of Gamergate (20 November 2014).

Games?” started:

The online movement Gamergate, which has been brewing since August, took a frightening turn this week when feminist commentator Anita Sarkeesian was forced to cancel a speech at a Utah college following a

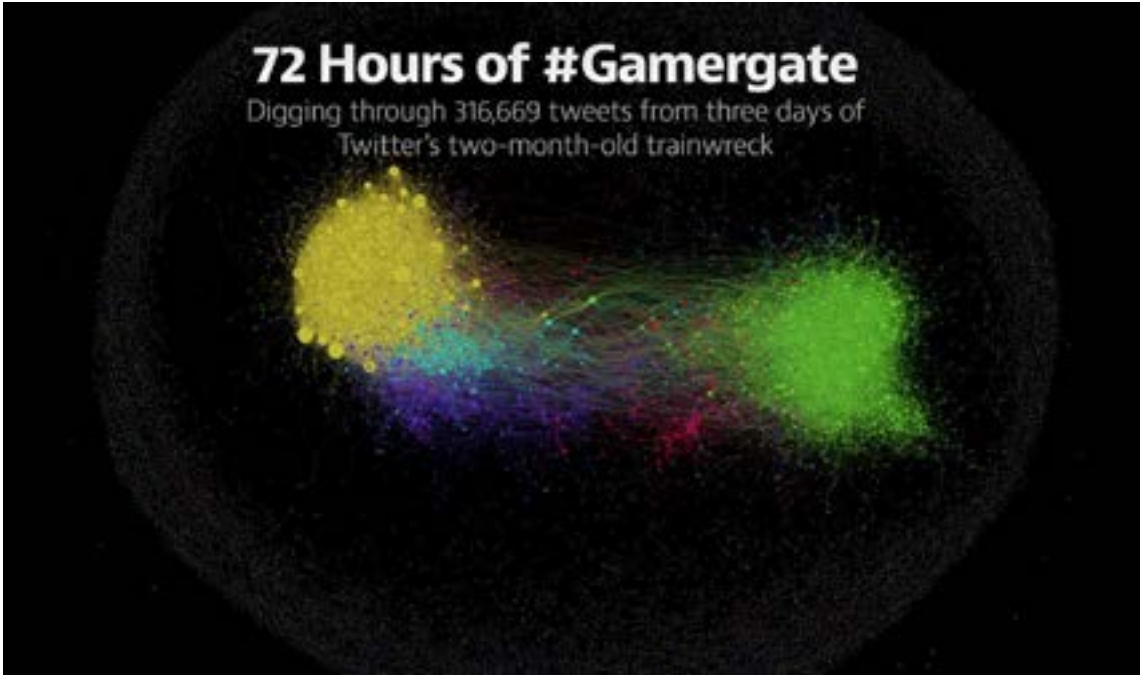


Figure 2 - ‘72 Hours of Gamergate’ [Andy Baio, Medium - <https://medium.com/message/72-hours-of-gamergate-e00513f7cf5d> (October 21 - 23)]

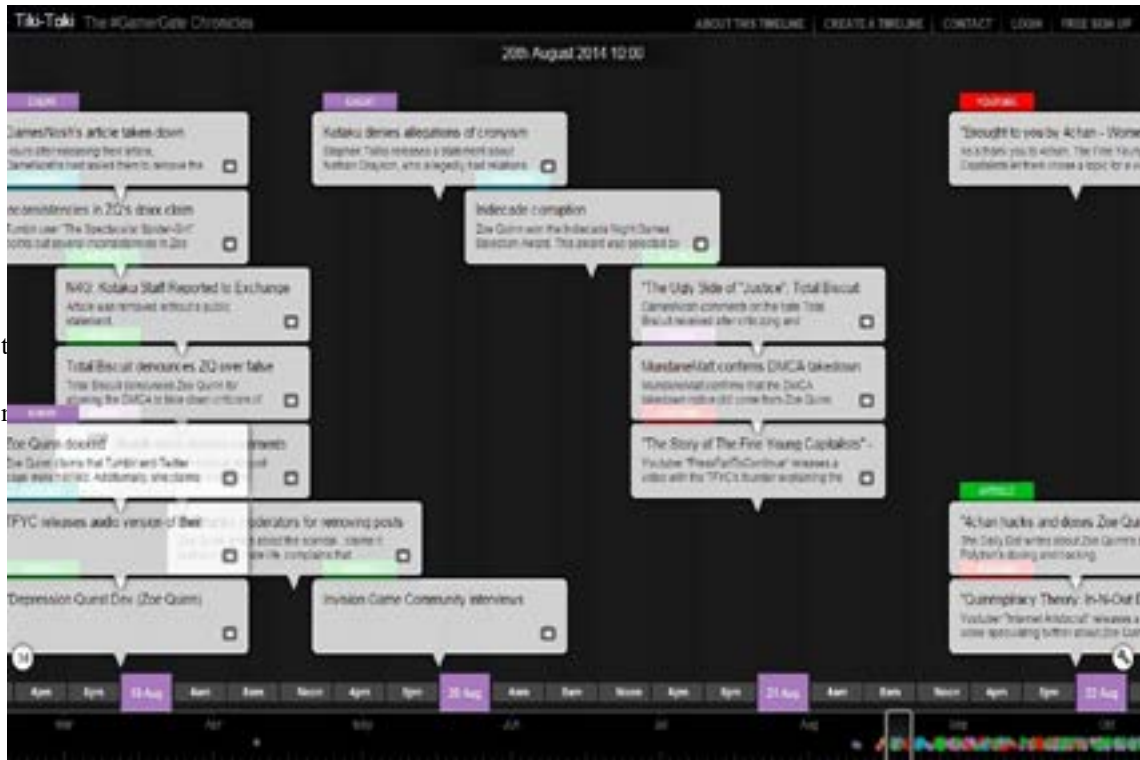


Figure 3 – The GamerGate Chronicles [<http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/336432/The-GamerGate-Chronicles/>]



referred to as something to which participants could orient or align. For example:

GamerGate wants to pretend that the world they see is the “real world,” with no subtext or damaging systems in place that impact people who aren’t them. (Kuchera, 2014)

Gamergate is convinced that there is a massive left-wing cabal in games journalism out to destroy traditional games culture. (Chu, 2014)

Interest was global, as indicated by a screen capture of 18000 tweets on a single day (Topsy.com, 20 November 2014, see Figure 2).

As commentators within the general news media and specialised media attempted to make sense of what ‘it’ was, varying attempts were made to make sense from a narrative perspective, in a range of forms (as an example, see Figure 3).

The story became told in fragments, articulated within the gaming community. They were re-told without context or basis. For example, the following quote from @\_icze4r was made in an interview with Mike Diver, writer for online media website [www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com) (Diver, 2014). @\_icze4r was at the time one of the key contributors or influencers via Twitter to the debate:

I came into it without even reading Eron Gjoni’s Zoe post, and I have to admit something here: I have no desire to ever know what was contained in that post. I came into GamerGate because of Leigh Alexander’s piece on “Gamers are over”; Zoe Quinn and Anita Sarkeesian are not even in the periphery of my focus when it comes to GamerGate. All of that takes away from why I’m in GamerGate: it’s not relevant to what I’m doing. I myself have tried to get Zoe Quinn’s “dox” removed from a website (unsuccessfully), and I’ve been reporting death and rape threats to Anita Sarkeesian, so consider where I’m coming from. (@\_icze4r in Diver, 2014)

The quote is of interest because it refers to reasons for initial engagement with the issue (“I came into GamerGate because...”), and the reason given was a response to a piece published on a gaming media site *Gamasutra* by Leigh Alexander (2014). The quote makes specific reference to characters in the story such as Anita Sarkeesian and Zoe Quinn. Most significantly, the quote reflects a disengagement from the original event and reflects a moving on from the original source: “I came into it without even reading Eron Gjoni’s Zoe post, and I have to admit something here: I have no desire to ever know what was contained in that post.” Ultimately, this quote and others highlight that the conversation itself, and fragments of the conversations became the story.

It became clear that the mainstream media was sidelined -- it was simply too hard to pick up the sequence of events, or make sense of this fragmentary conversation, so coverage of the issues and events was sustained by specialised gaming media and citizen journalists. This was despite the fact that there were very important issues that needed to be explored, with consequences that had far-reaching impact. For example, as a result of Gamergate and pressure by members of the gaming community, organisations such as Twitter, Intel and high-profile gaming magazines changed their policies to ensure greater transparency (see Billy D 2014). While the period of analysis central to discussion in this article lasted three months, the Gamergate hashtag remains active, and in mid-2016, still recorded an average of more than 20,000 tweets per day.

Gamergate involved the appropriation and reformulation of specialist knowledge within a community of interest—those interested in video game playing, developing, and writing. Gamergate called into question the professionalism of journalism. Stories were written and told by bloggers and journalists whose expertise ranged from quasi-professional to industry specialist across a range of media forms, demonstrating convergence in action. Accordingly, analysing Gamergate provides an opportunity to reflect on journalism practice, which will be the focus of the next section.

## Convergence and context in journalism

The past decade has been dominated by reconsideration and reconfiguration of journalism practice (Coddington 2014; Deuze 2005; Donsbach 2014). Journalism textbooks are full of ‘how to do’ convergence. It is well-recognised that we need to integrate digital reporting, broadcast, print, and data analysis into journalism programmes, and some have also reinforced the need to educate students in cultural and liberal studies (Anderson 2013, 2014; Cherian 2011). The latter argument, which calls for an appreciation of cultural and social context in journalism practice, is one that is theoretically easy to make but harder to apply. How do journalists action and make sense of context? How do they appropriate and articulate stories that demonstrate an awareness of context in a converged media environment?

Analysing Gamergate demonstrates the complexity of this problem. A mainstream journalist approaches a possible story with two primary questions: What is the story? Who cares about the story? In very simple terms, teaching undergraduate journalism writing is based on a few premises: a) that there will be an event or issue on which a news report is based; b) there will be 'a story' on which a longer narrative piece can be dedicated into which a range of sources can be integrated; c) a story needs to be verified as accurate; and d) a range of sources is required to ensure perspectives on a story give the issue or event some balance. Being able to do this in the "brave new world of internet communication" (Donsbach 2014, p. 662) is complex. Donsbach proposed five competencies for journalists in this new environment:

A journalist should:

- (1) possess a keen awareness of relevant history and current affairs, as well as analytical thinking,
- (2) have expertise in the specific subjects about which he or she reports,
- (3) have scientifically-based knowledge about the communication process,
- (4) have mastered journalistic skills, and
- (5) conduct himself or herself within the norms of professional ethics.

(Donsbach 2014, p. 667)

Further, Donsbach argued that:

All citizen journalists' activities, bloggers, activists, or social media fans forwarding links to news sites cannot replace the two core functions that professional journalism brings to society; that is (1) sorting out the relevant parts of reality, checking assertions about these, and relating them to other parts of reality in the present and past; and (2) building commonly accepted platform for social discourse credited with trust by society. (Donsbach 2014, pp. 673-674)

Donsbach's assertions are noble, but Gamergate illustrates that being able to sort out the relevant parts of reality, check assertions, and building a credible platform are extremely difficult. Mainstream media became sidelined because it was simply too hard to pick up the sequence of events, or make sense of this fragmentary conversation. Mainstream media had to simplify the issue into something easy for consumers to understand:

In the eyes of the popular media, it doesn't matter. Al Jazeera, the New York Times, NPR, and Stephen Colbert are focusing the spotlight instead on the violent threats and abusive comments from anonymous YouTube commenters, Redditors, Twitterers, and other social media denizens. (Foster 2014)

Hollingworth argued further that the role of journalism was generally under question:

But I also think it's about far more than just games. I'd suggest it's not even just about the apparent conservative versus progressive conflict that we see playing it in our own houses of government, down to tabloid papers and backyard conversations. Of course, it is all of those things, but at its heart, it's a manifestation of the friction between Old Media and New. It's a generational rift between old ways of reporting – and consuming – news and media in an age struggling to cope with a quantum shift in what it means to be a media organisation. (Hollingworth 2014)

Discussion about Gamergate demonstrate that consumption and conversation are related. Mass amorphous commentary on an issue, often in the form of social online conversation, drives the media cycle but what to do with that conversation remains problematic.

## Conversation in journalistic practice

Conversation and journalism are synonymous to the extent that journalistic practice is reliant on interviews which are then integrated into stories which can differ in structure and approach depending on genre. Different organisational principles influence the way news stories are structured and the way a source's voice is integrated into the story (Corner 1995). An interview has been the dominant form of voice-based news gathering practice, and is a specific form of institutional talk with a defined function (Clayman, 1990; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Ekström 2001; Heritage & Greatbatch 1991). However, rather than speech-based narrative being a remembered sequence of events (Labov & Waletzky 1966) or an account of an event, 'speech' is now text-based, in the form of comment, that occurs via the public sphere that is the internet. Speech in this context is often conversational in that it takes place using turn-by-turn sequences (Sacks 1995) and is interactive, and responsive.

The use of the term 'conversation' has been routinely associated with journalism (Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg 1996; Hermida 2011; Kornelius 2001; Meadows 2001), but in the form of metaphor. What specifically constitutes conversation and how it is integrated and applied as journalistic practice is contested and loosely defined (Marchionni 2013). In a staged experiment in conversational journalism conducted in the late 1990s, Risto Kornelius questioned whether the metaphor of conversation or dialogue could offer insights into a 'more useful' method of journalism (2001). The study was to determine whether stories could emerge from conversation around an issue (in this case, the issue was finance). The study's findings identified the orientation to values in talk ("Values" is something about which everyone can be an expert" 2001, p. 35) and the self-construction of roles which were played out in 'public'. Kornelius argued at the time that current forms of journalism were "not well equipped with modes of stories to report a conversation" (2001, p. 38), and he suggested "the precondition for developing the genres is that there will be new kinds of extratextual situations in which the citizens, journalists, politicians and experts meet and are exposed to each other in new ways" (p. 49). He argued that a better understanding of conversation could provide better understanding for journalists of social interaction and organisation. The 2016 world of journalism as we all know is a vastly different place to the one that existed in 2001, and since Kornelius' experiment, internet-centrality within the public sphere has become a reality. However, the relevance of the findings of his study resonate loudly.

Conversation has become associated with 'public' and 'democracy' in journalism research, and the genre to emerge related to 'voice' is that of citizen journalism, referred to in the early 2000s as public journalism. Theorisation of conversation as interaction, however, in journalism has been limited. In practical terms, analysis of conversation has been limited to use in broadcast talk where conversation analysis as a specific form of ethnomethodological research used in pragmatics has been applied to examine social interaction in media contexts. Ekström argued more generally for the use of conversation analysis in journalism studies (2007), and there is precedence for its use and usefulness (Lawson 2008). Conversation analysis, however, is potentially limiting because of its reliance on formulaic turn-by-turn interaction (Sacks 1995), and Gamergate reflects a more complicated picture, one that reflects the results of the talk-based focus group experiment conducted by Kornelius. Taking a linear, turn-by-turn approach to studying conversation and teaching it as conversational practice for journalists has limitations.

However, Gamergate demonstrates that media conversation generates stories. During Gamergate, professional journalists were held to account, and sidelined as conversation bypassed them when the issue became appropriated by community 'influencers' using media platforms such as YouTube and Twitter to make public comment. It was, in a sense, a revolution about journalism started by citizen journalists, but at heart of the conversation was an issue/series of issues as opposed to an event. As per Kornelius' study, conversation about Gamergate oriented to values, and participants self-constructed roles as they contributed to cultural debate.

Ultimately, Gamergate was an uprising by "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen, 2006) as a social grouping who as former passive recipients learned that they could interact with journalists and others online: "What was once a lecture was turning into a conversation, a two-way exchange, not always civil, in which the professional journalist did not always get the last word" (Daly 2012, p. 439). The question arises, therefore, as to what journalists need to know and be able to do to remain relevant and engaged in cultural debate? Challenges for journalists and journalism educators in the digital era are well recognised (Deuze 2005; Mensing 2011) and I propose that an understanding of conversational theory and how stories are retold (and why we retell them) is a critical 'futureskill' for journalists. This also responds also to Donsbach's assertion that scientific knowledge of how people communicate is a requirement for journalists in the current environment (2014).

## Conversational narrative

Neal Norrick's work on conversational narrative provides a good starting point for considering the ways theory relating to conversational storytelling might be applied to journalistic practice. Norrick's work has examined orally-based conversational storytelling in a range of contexts (2000). He has considered talk for an overhearing audience, first-time and retold stories, and explored conversational storytelling as an interactional achievement. In doing so, his work considers the way in which tellers introduce stories to attract listener interest, and 'gain control of the floor and ensure understanding' (Norrick 2000, p.1). Norrick examines the techniques conversational storytellers use to retell a story for a 'newly arrived listener' as opposed to retelling the same story for a different audience (p. 68). His work is useful because it explores specifically



how participants in conversation engage in interaction, and provides a framework for rhetorical organisation of conversational narrative as a performance.

Norricks work is based on orally-based interactions, but like Kornelius' study (2000), it is possible to see parallels in online interaction. There are three key elements of conversational storytelling that could be seen in Gamergate: response stories, alignment and stance, and story retelling. Response stories are parallel stories told in response to an initial telling, such as "this is what also happened to me". The 'response story' as parallel experience was a feature of Gamergate coverage (as examples see Day 2014; Rachel M 2014; Wilbur 2014; Wu 2014). According to Norrick, sharing response stories lays "claim to parallel experiences, and often to shared values and feelings as well" and in doing so ratify the teller's membership in a group as the initial teller (2000, p. 115). They are written in the first person, a feature of conversational storytelling, and they demonstrate the recounting of personal experience. These response stories occurred from within the gaming or associated community (such as acting) and took a range of forms from blogs to opinion columns.

Alignment and stance refers to the attempt by a teller to influence the audience to their point of view: "Tellers typically seek to achieve this end by means of evaluative comments around and within the story itself which convey their stance toward its characters and content" (2000, p. 116). Norrick notes that tellers clearly identify their stance and motivation in the telling of a story. In journalistic writing, we are familiar with this idea as opinion pieces, but in Gamergate stories, as Norrick has found in conversation, alignment and stance was overtly stated from the outset. The following examples are the first paragraphs of alignment stories:

*If you're a person who cares about video games and also happens to care about other people, you should denounce "Gamergate." You might have heard that it's a movement about ethics in video game journalism, but in practice it's a months-long campaign of harassment against women and progressive voices that's just the latest in a long history of online abuse amplified by reactionary right-wing media trolls. (Sottek 2014)*

Games aren't very fun these days. As anyone paying even tangential attention to videogames likely knows, the medium is in the throes of a misogynist backlash so virulent it often could be described as terrorism. (Hudson 2014)

The deliberately provocative stances that aligned the writers to a position clearly worked in attracting attention and engagement through the act of sharing. For example, Sottek's article was shared 2093 times via Twitter and attracted 1654 comments, while Hudson's article was shared 3006 times on Facebook and attracted 864 comments (as at date accessed, 2014). We know from conversational storytelling that "conversationalists routinely align themselves through matching their response stories with foregoing ones" (Norrick 2000, p. 125). In Gamergate, this was evident in the way the story was retold. Bloggers and gaming journalists in particular would produce response stories which would in turn prompt further response. We know that the ways in which participants engage in conversational storytelling is closely associated with group membership (Norrick 2000). By engaging in stance-based conversation about Gamergate, journalists and bloggers demonstrated that they belonged to a particular type of community, one based on values – you were either pro-gamergate or anti-gamergate. The dominance of values-based discussion further reflects Kornelius' research (2000), but as Kornelius might have predicted, finding the story was hard for mainstream journalism which was trying to summarise and find a neutral position.

Finally, the retelling of the story was a feature of Gamergate and has arguably contributed to its longevity. Norrick notes that in conversational storytelling, stories can "remain substantially intact from one telling to the next. This suggests that tellers redesign a basic story for the audience present, rather than reconstructing a narrative from the ground up for each new audience" (2000, p. 69). The repeated narrative and sameness of stories about Gamergate became a point for discussion and comment ("Gamergate: Much ado about nothing" 2014), so understanding the reasons for retelling and the way context frames and influences the ways stories are retold is potentially useful for journalists. For example, there's an increasingly strong argument that students need to learn how to integrate digital conversations and make sense of the fragmented in the "narrative as sense-making" form. Ezra Klein, editor-in-chief of Vox Media touched on this when he acknowledged the success of the video "How the Euro caused the Greek crisis" (2015). He noted that Vox readers normally preferred text heavy narratives and 'explainers' but:

*...the video has "been watched about 4 million times on Facebook — including, I would guess, by millions of people who don't read Vox and aren't typically interested in detailed explanations of European monetary policy but who, on that particular day, really did feel confused by the news, and so suddenly became our audience. (Klein 2015).*

This could be seen as summary long-form journalism that starts the retelling of a story for different audi-

ences.

This article has only just touched on key points to illustrate the potential for understanding *how* people interact with one another conversationally in relation to an issue. It is relevant because the role journalism plays in an internet-centric media environment has been problematised for over a decade but more questions about practice than answers about *how to do* journalism effectively remain. What makes the news doesn't happen anymore – it 'emerges', and a journalist's job is now often to catch it quickly as it emerges before anyone else does. While traditional news values based on considerations of news judgement are still relevant, much more is going on. Being able to *predict* what is going to be 'the story' based on convergent and concurrent conversations about an event or issue (or even non-issue) is a new skill. Martin Hirst, in his analysis of Twitter use in the Arab Spring, acknowledged that journalists often don't know what a story is about until it is on top of them and are influenced by the "bias of convenience" (Hirst 2012). That is, they produce what they have and know. The problem for traditional journalists is that there is a significant risk that once an issue emerges, it may be quickly appropriated by a community and is, therefore, no longer new and newsworthy.

It is also not enough to simply practice convergence and work with data. Data analytics provide only one tool, and practising 'sensor journalism' (Waite 2013) simply results in more data being added to an already huge pile. We don't just need to teach students how to use Twitter; we need to teach students to make sense of Twitter, interact with communities, and anticipate the direction of an issue. We can easily see how many tweets are published against a hashtag, but teaching students about connections, networks, influencers, and how to find and make sense of the news in this environment is also required (see Coddington 2014). Issue mapping in sociocultural contexts, as noted by Burgess and Matamoros-Fernández (2016) may well become a critical skill.

These are all arguments we're familiar with. However, privileging an understanding of conversational storytelling and why/how people interact can help because journalists need to be content-creators as well as conversation facilitators. It is not simply about convergence, moderation and curation, but about genuine understanding of why people seek to engage in public space – creating spaces for interaction, and writing to elicit meaningful response. While we can (and should) argue about what conversation really is, there is much to be learnt from considering conversational storytelling from a theoretical perspective, because it helps us consider what should be privileged in the new media space. This may be finding the new story or finding ways to retell the story in a way that promotes a sense of involvement in the drama. This presents a fundamental challenge for those of us aligned with journalistic traditions founded on notions of independence.

## Conclusion

This paper has considered Gamergate as a case study to illustrate the way in which mainstream media were sidelined in public conversation that dominated the media sphere. It also broadly considered the way stories emerged from online conversations, and the way these were retold. The development and interactional pattern may have been predictable if we applied theoretical concepts based on previous conversational work (Kornelius 2000; Norrick 2000), and there is a lesson here for us moving forward. Gamergate demonstrated that mainstream journalism, in attending to issues in a traditional way—trying to find the story and report the story—found itself ultimately disengaged from the story. Mainstream media's attention focused on single significant events, or summarising the conflict to help the disengaged or non-related public 'catch-up' with the issue. We can continue to teach journalism students the traditions of writing, research and reporting, and we can talk about doing convergence but there is also much we can learn from considering theories of interaction learned from orally-based conversational storytelling in the digital era. The alternative is to remain sidelined when a public gets engaged. The challenge is to balance knowledge and skill in practising objectivity with knowledge and skill in interaction and engagement. This will enable future journalists to make sense of, and privilege, appropriate information that seems to come out of nowhere, as was the case with Gamergate. In an increasingly complex communication environment, this will remain an important role.

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