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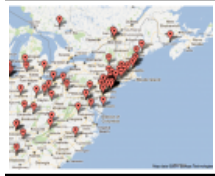
Why Twitter Didn't Believe the 'Hacked' AP, But Bought False Facts About Boston Manhunt

BY MIRANDA NEUBAUER | Wednesday, April 24 2013

When the Associated Press' Twitter account caused a brief stir Tuesday by posting a false report that President Barack Obama had been injured in a fictitious bombing at the White House, stocks plummeted — for a few minutes.

Other Twitter accounts associated with the AP announced that the wire service's handle had been hacked. An NBC reporter posted an image from the station's live feed of the White House, showing that everything was peaceful. Soon the incident became fodder for jokes, such as "I think if I hacked AP, I would go with 'SETI detects coherent narrowband non-terrestrial signal. President to address nation at 7 pm EST'" — humor developing into a strong indicator that an event is approaching the end of its social-media life cycle.

That response differed significantly from the situation late into the night on April 18 and early the next morning, a Friday, as the first reports emerged of the manhunt that would bring Boston to a halt for a full day.

AP **The Associated Press**
@AP   [Follow]
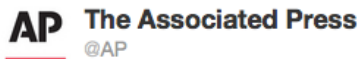
Breaking: Two Explosions in the White
House and Barack Obama is injured

↩ Reply   ⇄ Retweet   ★ Favorite   ••• More

4,680   250
RETWEETS   FAVORITES

10:07 AM - 23 Apr 13
Fake!

What began with the shooting death of MIT campus police officer Sean Collier and the wounding of another officer, transit policeman Richard Donohue Jr., worked its way into the public consciousness after the sun had set and as many East Coast journalists were preparing to go to sleep.

In that news vacuum, people online turned to feeds of Boston-area police scanners for immediate information. What they heard was confusing, but complemented with some reports coming from people tweeting on the ground, listeners were able to piece together several details about the confrontation Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev are alleged to have engaged in with police.

The scanner audience grew from 27,000 to more than 80,000 within those hours as characters as diverse as journalists, civilians in the Boston area and New York City, Washington, and California, the actress Mia Farrow and Democratic strategist Matt Ortega all signed on to Twitter to relay what they were hearing.

Search Engine Land editor Danny Sullivan created a Twitter list of people believed to be on the ground in the Watertown area in an effort to bring order to the confusion. When CNN finally began covering the chase just after 1 a.m, for those following on Twitter, it could not compete with real-time scanner traffic. People even announced they were watching CNN on mute, with an audio feed from the scanner turned up.

LD Burnett
@LDBurnett   **Follow**

Watching @CNN on mute, listening to #boston police scanner. tunein.com/radio/Boston-P...

12:30 AM - 19 Apr 2013

5 RETWEETS **2** FAVORITES

Those were the circumstances when, between 2 and 3 a.m., someone suggested that police on a scanner feed had said missing college student Sunil Tripathi and another person were the bombing suspects — names that were carelessly, even disastrously unrelated to the Tsarnaev brothers.

Alexis Madrigal writes that a user called Greg Hughes tweeted out that claim, but a review of police scanner audio showed that one name had briefly been mentioned earlier in the evening and Tripathi's name appeared nowhere in the audio but was ubiquitous amid the speculation on Reddit.

All of this came out the next day, after the suspects' names had already been plastered across the Internet and on television. In that moment late on a Thursday night, there was no immediate, authoritative reply — which is likely a reason why innocent people were the subject of scrutiny online for hours. In the moment, at least two people at least two people responded to Hughes by saying they hadn't heard what he had heard on the police scanner. But those denials were barely retweeted at all. Absent someone with more authority on social media to amplify calls of shenanigans, misinformation carried the day.

Lisa Horne @LisaHorne   19 Apr

@ghughesca I've been on scanner all night....heard first name an hour ago...but not second

Vivek
@Vivek_here7   **Follow**

@LisaHorne @ghughesca me too heard the first name an hour ago not the second.

2:17 AM - 19 Apr 2013

Police officials have said that information on scanners should be treaded as unverified and shouldn't be shared — because it might be wrong and because sharing it might put it within earshot of the wrong people. But with thousands of people listening, it's unclear if that's a realistic request to make — or given the way scanners filled an information void Thursday night, a reasonable one.

Yesterday, Blake Hounshell from Foreign Policy, posted, paraphrasing NRA spokesman Wayne LaPierre's enthusiastic defense of guns as a solution to gun violence, "The only way to stop a bad guy with a Twitter account is a good guy with a Twitter account."

In situations like the Boston manhunt, that's more true than Hounshell may have realized.

Here's a Storify that shows how scanner traffic made its way onto Twitter on Thursday night:

by MirandaN   3 months ago

Listening to the Scanner Traffic

Jacob Harris
@harrisj

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members of Congress to follow, let alone the general public — but a new app proposes to make it easier for people to stay abreast of action on Capitol Hill no matter where they are. Called "Capitol Bells," the new tool attracted attention on Reddit through an AMA session with its creator, 29-year-old mechanical engineer and former Hill staffer Ted Henderson. **GO**

WITH REAL-LIFE DIPLOMACY ON HOLD, ISRAEL LAUNCHES TWITTER 'EMBASSY' IN ARAB STATES

In its latest foray into digital diplomacy, the Israeli foreign ministry has established a Twitter "embassy" for the purpose of engaging with the Arab countries of the Gulf region. Called @IsraelintheGCC, the account was launched on July 18. As of this writing, it has 685 followers. **GO**

wednesday >

SOCIAL MEDIA IS DRIVING MASSIVE ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN BULGARIA

After 40 days of peaceful anti-corruption protests, violence erupted late Tuesday night outside the Bulgarian parliament after demonstrators built blockades and trapped more than 100 people inside the building. Riot police forced their way past the protesters and the blockade on Wednesday to free the politicians and journalists who had been trapped inside the parliament building for more than eight hours. Some Bulgarian journalists credit the Internet and social media for inspiring and spreading the #DANSwithme protests, as they are known on Twitter.

GO

AN APP TO SHIELD TIBETANS' TEXTS FROM PRYING EYES

There may finally be a tool Tibetans can more safely use – at less risk of censorship or surveillance – to communicate with each other inside and outside of Tibet. Since YakChat launched in March, the new messenging app has taken Tibetan activists "by storm," explained Nathan Freitas of the Guardian Project, an organization that creates secure, open-source communications software. Around 5,000 Tibetans have since adopted this app, though most of them are outside of Tibet. **GO**

CIVIC HACKERS BUILD APP TO VISUALIZE VOTES IN ARGENTINA'S NATIONAL CONGRESS

Civic hackers have built an application to help Argentinian citizens and

"In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate yet equally important subreddits..."

3 MONTHS AGO

Adam Gaffin
@universalhub

MIT suspect may have blood on him, from the officer. #mbta police are swarming the Red Line

3 MONTHS AGO

Will Roseliep
@WillRoseliep

Heard on Suffolk County Scanner: "Let the Red Line know we're going to go car to car" to search. broadcastify.com/listen/feed/62...

3 MONTHS AGO

CNN Breaking News
@cnnbrk

Police, FBI respond to reports of gunshots on campus of MIT, near Boston, school says. 1 building cordoned off. on.cnn.com/XUkSuE

3 MONTHS AGO

The Boston Globe
@BostonGlobe

Police conducting manhunt across MIT campus and on the Red Line for gunman b.globe.com/177a4tz

3 MONTHS AGO

Matthew Anderson
@hewanderson

.@MITnews is giving us excellent crisis PR. Even with nothing new, they're updating every 20 mins. #casesmc bit.ly/Zw4nDo

3 MONTHS AGO

Michael Page
@MichaelPageWx

Cambridge u/d: Vehicle has Mass. Reg 137NZ1--Black Mercedes 350

3 MONTHS AGO

Michael Page
@MichaelPageWx

Breaking: Cambridge PD responding to 816 Memorial Drive. Caller says car was stolen by armed person. Drove him around for ~30 min.

3 MONTHS AGO

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journalists track the voting records of Congress members. The app, called *Década votada* (A decade in votes), was the winning project at a Hacks/Hackers Buenos Aires hackathon in April 2013.
GO

tuesday >

HOW MUCH DID ANONYMOUS REALLY GET FROM CONGRESSIONAL STAFFERS?

A recent release of email address and password combinations apparently used by congressional staffers to manage mass emails to constituents raises concerns about security, but likely won't lead to much change in the use of third-party services by members of Congress, according to Brad Fitch, president and CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation. People claiming to be affiliated with Anonymous announced last week that they had obtained and released emails and passwords for 2,000 congressional staffers in a move designed to attract attention to their displeasure over online surveillance by the National Security Agency. But the passwords were not paired up with email address when they were released, rendering them of less use to actually breach security, and The Hill reports that they appeared to be login information for the widely used iConstituent email newsletter service. **GO**

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70 PERCENT OF CHINA'S NEW INTERNET USERS LOG IN ON THEIR PHONES

Since January, China's Internet populace grew to clock in at 591 million at the end of June, according to the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). Phones are the preferred (or the only) way to surf the net: 70 percent of the new Internet users accessed the Internet on a phone.
GO

0

monday >

SAN JOSE STATE GIVES PILOT WITH MOOC PROVIDER A FAILING GRADE

A pilot collaboration between San Jose State University and the online course provider Udacity to provide certain basic courses to students over the Internet performed so poorly that SJSU is putting a halt to the program at least until next spring. **GO**

2

GOOGLE'S 'WHITE SPACE' EXPERIMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA A BOON FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS

Back in March, Google began testing a new broadband Internet service in

0

Bill Carter
@wjcarter

CNN took ton of heat earlier, but props tonite-only news net going live w nu photo+MIT shooting. Isn't that what news net is supposed to do?

3 MONTHS AGO

The Tech
@thetech

MT @joannaskao: According to Boston police scanner, carjacking & headed towards Harvard Sq. License plate 137NZ1. broadcastify.com/listen/feed/62....

3 MONTHS AGO

Steve
@alertnewengland

Watertown PD spotted the carjacked Mercedes, report of shots fired in Watertown.

3 MONTHS AGO

Garrett Quinn
@GarrettQuinn

SCANNER: Jacked car now in Watertown. Shots fired.

3 MONTHS AGO

Anand Giridharadas
@AnandWrites

Folks, listen to Boston police scanner. Shots being fired at officers from vehicle, they say @nytimes

3 MONTHS AGO

Billy Baker
@billy_baker

Cambridge police scanner reporting shots fired in Watertown in vicinity of Dexter and Laurel.

3 MONTHS AGO

NewsBreaker
@NewsBreaker

BREAKING: Scanner: Shots fired in Watertown, Mass.; unclear if it's related to carjacked SUV/MIT officer killed

3 MONTHS AGO

Steve
@alertnewengland

Police are taking heavy fire.

3 MONTHS AGO

Cape Town, South Africa, and now hopes it can power products in the United States. But it might also be a way to deliver low-cost wireless Internet access to remote areas that wouldn't be connected otherwise. Gigaom reporter David Meyer recently traveled to Cape Town and reports that the six-month experiment is benefiting local schools. **GO**

OBEYING FRENCH COURTS, TWITTER HANDS OVER IDENTITIES OF USERS WHO EMPLOYED ANTI-SEMITIC HASHTAG

On July 12, Twitter gave the French authorities the necessary data to identify the authors of anti-semitic tweets accompanied by the hashtag #UnBonJuif (#AGoodJew). The decision officially ends a lengthy legal battle with France's Union of Jewish Students (UEJF) and several anti-racism groups. The case pitted hate speech laws against free expression and privacy on the Internet. Hate speech laws triumphed, but the outcome has reignited public debate on the subject of rights and responsibilities of both Internet users and companies.

GO

friday >

WITH KICKSTARTER FUNDING, FOIA MACHINE WANTS TO HELP FIX PUBLIC RECORDS

FOIA Machine, a platform that aims to streamline the process of tracking of filing and tracking public record requests, has raised more than $29,000 on Kickstarter — exceeding its funding goal by more than $10,000. **GO**

ONLINE AND OFF, ASSAULTS ON INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN ZAMBIA

In the past two weeks Zambian authorities have stepped up their assaults on the independent news site the Zambian Watchdog. Since July 9, three journalists have been arrested for allegedly contributing to the site, and at least one has been charged with sedition. Meanwhile, authorities blocked access to Zambian Watchdog on Tuesday. After the site was moved to a different address, the new location was quickly blocked as well. Reporters Without Border created a mirror site, but today reported that it was blocked within hours. **GO**

JOURNALISTS IN MOZAMBIQUE HAVE A NEW WAY TO GET HELP REPORTING ON ELECTIONS

The municipal elections in Mozambique are over four months away but short-staffed newsrooms are

WGBH News
@wgbhnews

Scanner: explosions in Watertown

3 MONTHS AGO

Wesley Lowery
@WesleyLowery

Cops are all coming to Cambridge side of the river. Speeding down memorial. #MITShooting

3 MONTHS AGO

Sam Gustin
@samgustin

Scanner: MULTIPLE SHOTS FIRED Ok, something's going down. Cambridge Police, Fire and PW Live Audio Feed broadcastify.com/listen/feed/13...

3 MONTHS AGO

Andrew Kaczynski
@BuzzFeedAndrew

RT @rafsanchez: Scanner: [Panicked officer] They have explosives, some types of grenades, they're inbetween houses down there.

3 MONTHS AGO

Anand Giridharadas
@AnandWrites

This police scanner is sounding like a dramatic situation in Boston area with #MIT situation, carjacking, etc. ht.ly/kdaR7

3 MONTHS AGO

Andrew Kaczynski
@BuzzFeedAndrew

On the police scanner: Loud explosions, loud explosion. Shots fired. Shots fired. They have grenades.

3 MONTHS AGO

Allie Morse
@allieemorse

Trigger warning: Do not listen if you are easily upset. Too far in deep now.. ht.ly/kdaR7 (police scanner)

3 MONTHS AGO

Anand Giridharadas
@AnandWrites

Officers screaming "shots fired; shots fired" on Boston Police scanner. Reports of grenades, too. ht.ly/kdaYP

away but short-staffed newsrooms are already preparing to deal with the persistent conundrum: how do they accurately cover the elections with over 2,500 polling stations to monitor across the country? A new tool called Citizen Desk allows newsrooms to incorporate citizen reports into their news stream, to act as eyes and ears for the upcoming elections. **GO**

Seth Mnookin
@sethmnookin

Reports of massive explosions and grenades. Can smell smoke in Watertown near Arsenal Mall.

3 MONTHS AGO

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Prokofy • 3 months ago

Those telling this story tend to tell a self-exonerating version of it and to leave out parts that implicate any of the "progressive" media.

I was listening raptly to that Boston Police Department scanner on an Internet site myself.

I had *not* read the Reddit threads about Sunil Tripathi. Indeed, I had not heard of his name, although I vaguely remembered something later about a Brown student.

I had absolutely no reason to make up that name, or the next one. *I heard them read off the police scanner. I wrote them down*.

Precisely because I had never heard either name. I began to research them to see if they fit anywhere. The first place I searched was Twitter itself. There, I instantly saw a tweet from a local TV station reporter on the ground also listening to the scanner. *He tweeted both names*. I'd have no reason to disbelieve a) a police scanner b) a local TV station so I tweeted them myself. This is exactly the primary source and verification that a journalist might look

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