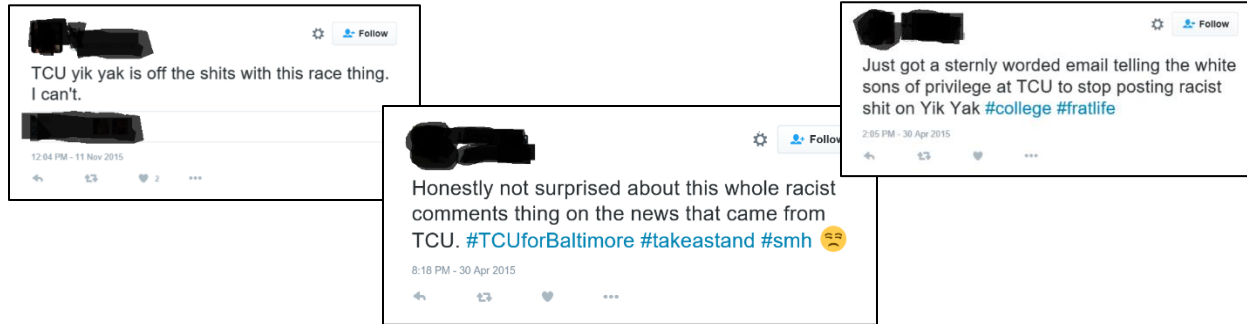


Me, Myself, & Twitter: News-Sourcing

Autoethnography by Mckenzie Marciante



“TCU yik yak is off the shits with this race thing. I can’t.”

“Honestly not surprised about this whole racist comments thing on the news that came from TCU.
#[TCUforBaltimore](#) #takeastand #smh”

“Just got a sternly worded email telling the white sons of privilege at TCU to stop posting racist shit on Yik Yak #college #fratlife”

These three Tweets represent my first exposure to a sequence of events in the spring of 2015, including the **rioting in Baltimore**—after the severe injury of an African American man, Freddie Gray, while in custody—and the following flood of **racism on Yik Yak**, by students at Texas Christian University, in response to the riots. Interestingly enough, I found out about the much greater event, the riots, through the discussion of the lesser events *via* trending topics and retweeting and commentary on the homepage of [my Twitter account](#). I saw many such posts as the ones above, referencing the Yik Yak problem, before I had even heard about the [Baltimore Riots](#). I find fascinating the concept of my personal use (and other people’s use) of Twitter as a news source, and am especially curious about its effects on myself—on the range of knowledge I have on current events and on my behavior as a citizen of various

communities (i.e., whether or not I seek additional information, beyond the content on Twitter, to increase awareness of current events.)

Twitter Conventions

[“Twitter Is the 21st Century Newspaper,”](#) according to Founder and Chief Strategy Officer of *Insightpool*—“The Leader in Organic Influencer Marketing,” which aids companies in “optimizing [their] marketing campaigns—and blogger for *Huffington Post*, Adam Wexler. A summary of the book (referenced in Wexler’s article) [Hatching Twitter: A True Story of Money, Power, Friendship, and Betrayal,](#) explains the movement of Twitter from its [originally intended purpose](#), to becoming a **newspaper-replacing resource**, “a tool for fighting political oppression in the Middle East, a marketing musthave for business, and the world’s living room during live TV events.” Meaning—as a social media platform—the site **promotes subjectivity** by allowing the general (unqualified) public to post commentary and news on trending topics and current events.

Though Twitter provides an excellently-updated source for both small-scale local news and large-scale international news, it also has a major flaw contributing to a lacking credibility and consequential potential to corrupt the accuracy, neutrality, and, especially, diversity of my personal awareness of social, cultural, political, and religious news.

Twitter CEO, Dick Costolo himself, openly discusses—at a lecture hosted by the University of Michigan, also referenced by Wexler—[Twitter as an “information network”](#) which provides “real-time, multi-directional and unfiltered” content; these content characteristics, in his opinion, add a certain value, unique to social media platforms, to Twitter. However, in light of my personal experience, I find these characteristics to be quite problematic, and see them as the major flaw of the site. In my opinion, Twitter allows and encourages—as the culture of Twitter is to contribute your honest opinions—too many people to

participate in discussion of current events, in order to maintain any sense of accuracy and unaffected perception.

Adam Wexler contrarily claims Twitter is great for people who “like both points of view weaved together,” *because* of the broadness it allows. Yet I see this provision, instead, as encouraging the growing **impossibility for objectivity** on easily-subjectified and emotionally-charged events, as well as creating **inherently limited perspectives and understandings of news events**.

I consult Twitter for news on both significant and insignificant issues—anything from football updates to national tragedies. In the following discussion, I would like to expand upon the aforementioned example in which I sought Twitter for local news (concerning controversy over Yik Yak posts around TCU), leading to my exploration of news (of the Baltimore riots) on a grander scale, and, finally, my limited awareness of events, in general, featured in the news.

Me, Myself, & Twitter

In general, I use Twitter for the purpose of keeping up with current events, especially those local events in areas around TCU or the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. According to both the frequency with which I use Twitter as a news source, contrastive to my using it as a form of entertainment, and the [research](#) of *Lifhack* expert Jennifer Walpole, I relate more to the typical demographic of male Twitter users. I rarely tweet or “share” any content, but, instead, I use the platform as a sort of **“quick access” to relevant and updated information and news**.

The only time I myself actually Tweet—or retweet (or quote), as I do so much more often than I write and share something of my own—is when I want to share a piece of inspiration or humor. Walpole highlights the differences in gender in relation to social media tendencies, but the one of the most relevance to me is the varied purpose(s) for which men and women use different sites. She mentions the

most common reasons for why women (generally) use social media, including some of which I myself subscribe to; for example, I will, on occasion, use Twitter for more fun or social purposes. I sometimes find myself getting on to use the app as a mere technique of either time-wasting, awkwardness-easing, or silence-filling, or as a procrastination tool.

I log on from time to time just to look at funny content, or at the tweets and accounts of others' to stay up-to-date with their lives—or to “creep” and see what a friend, or even a friend-of-a-friend, is up to at any given (specific) moment. I do also, somewhat rarely, view content in the form of a “how-to” or something else more relevant to “real-life,” as Walpole mentions women tend to do—though I much more often find my finger hovering in search of the artsy red and white cursive P, when in search of such Pinterest-like content.

However, my attention remains on the use of social media sites, particularly [Twitter](#), as a source of news; I'm interested in the relationship between my use of **Twitter as a source of local news**, and my limited range of knowledge on current events—partially attributed to the lack of diversity among contributors to my newsfeed.

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Yik Yak Scandal

So what happened on Yik Yak at TCU? Basically, a small populations of students was unhappy with the reaction of rioting in Baltimore, and many of the students in that population chose to share their opinions on a social media platform known as [Yik Yak](#)—used for anonymous posts made public within a 5-mile radius. The problem was, many of these **sharp comments** were **targeted towards African Americans** and, specifically African American students on TCU's campus.

Many TCU students began a sort of **response-to-response** on Twitter, because of the nature of the “Yaks.” Individuals and organizations, including (minimally) the institution of TCU itself began **conversations which overwhelmed my newsfeed**, when I opened my Twitter app for the weeks following the riots in Maryland and posts to Yik Yak. Because the majority of my friends, connections, and acquaintances on campus are minorities, most of the postings I saw were from the same perspective—that side opposing the comments. I cannot deny my personal disgust with the comments, but I do *recognize* a **certain bias to which I may have been exposed**. However, I do think the summary-inclined (partially enforced by the 140-character limit and partially by the unspoken etiquette of concise tweets on Twitter) nature of Twitter **encouraged me to seek additional information** beyond the brief reactions (like in the examples I previously presented) I initially read—in fact, Twitter continuously encourages me to do so, as this Yik Yak incident is just one example in which I used it as an initial sources of news.

After reading the generally emotional Tweets, I did some **research to find more objective content**, both on and off Twitter. I explored common hashtags associated with the events, such as [#BaltimoreRiots](#), which led me to (generally more credible in the eye of the public, at least in comparison to Twitter) news sources such as CNN. My searches on Twitter also led me to official accounts, such as that of on-campus, student organizations, and of Texas Christian University itself. Interestingly enough, TCU as an institution did not have much to say on the events in Baltimore, or on Yik Yak.

TCU on Twitter

I came across one tweet from a student at TCU, saying, “this is what TCU has to say to those who are hurt by the insensitivity and intolerance of their community,” before retweeting [@TCU](#) itself: “We expect better of our students. TCU educates its students to act as ethical leaders and responsible citizens.”

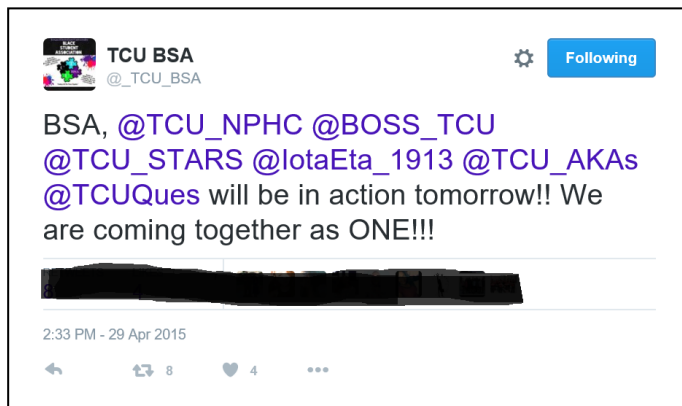


An article titled “[Baltimore Riots Stir Racist Comments in Yik Yak Posts](#),” in *TCU’s* own “student-led and faculty advised” online magazine, [TCU 360](#), also provided **little coverage** of the Yik Yak event. Author Kylie Walker mentions several of the less **racially-tense tweets**, as well as briefly discusses the responses, outside of social media, of both

Chancellor Boschini and the [Black Student Association \(BSA\)](#) on campus. She says Beverly Anyeyi contacted the Chancellor about the Yik Yak issue, and he replied: “I hate Yik Yak because the people saying these things are not just racists but also cowards.” Walker then quotes the BSA’s formal statement, foreshadowing their coming actions—much of which promoted through Twitter; in an interview, the president of BSA, Mequilla Powell, stated: “It’s sad that we have to deal with racism on campus [...] However, this is where the BSA comes in. BSA is dedicated to being **the voice of the African American community** and also making sure there is a **positive presence** of the African American Community [emphasis added].” The TCU 360 article ends with a generic statement of duty, quoting vice chancellor of student affairs Kathy Cavins-Tull: “we all have responsibility to address things we know are wrong.” Despite bringing up the issue of race on TCU’s campus, (and nationwide), Kylie

Walker fails to provide a proposition of action (or re-action) as response to her quotes. Similarly, I could find little as far as a proposal on behalf of the whole school as an institution.

However, I did find one tweet and two retweets [on the account of TCU's BSA](#)—from the same day

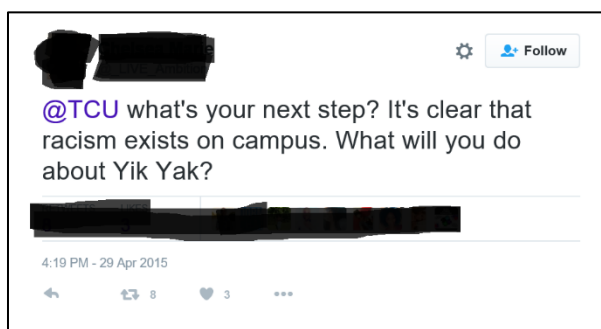


as the publication of the article, April 29th, 2015—which provided evidence of a population on campus which did decide to propose and perform in response to both the Baltimore Riots and the racism on TCU's

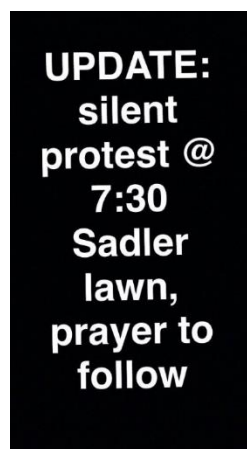
campus. After tagging multiple other on-campus, African American, organizations, the BSA says “[we] will be in action tomorrow!! We are coming together as ONE!!!” They then retweet an image of the plan, with details about a [silent protest](#) to take place on campus, as well as a disturbed student’s challenge to the university:

“[@TCU](#) what's your next step? **It's clear that racism exists on campus.**

What will you do about represents one of many the schools passive problems.



Yik Yak?” This tweet showing frustration with response to the racial



Ignorant or Informed?

The question of whether or not my awareness of current events is skewed by use of Twitter is unignorable. Though it often leads me to research on outside sources, the bulk of the information I receive on current events comes from my newsfeed and what’s trending on the site. However, I do think the bias of Twitter news-sourcing has (at least) one advantage: it reveals, or rather inspires inquiry and

conversation about the preferences and **unspoken opinions** of certain parties on social media, such as Texas Christian University. I can't help but wonder whether or not TCU's minimal public commentary on the events of the spring of 2015 has any underlying reasoning...So perhaps a more relevant question might be: given my Twitter news-sourcing habits, **am I ignorant** of the various perspectives of current events, **or am I informed** about cultural norms, represented through social media norms, and *underlying prejudices* of publicly (via media presence) neutralized institutions?