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.

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.

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.

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

LaPierre’s enthusiastic defense of guns as a solution to gun violence, yesterday, Blake Hounshell — or given the way scanners filled an information void Thursday night, a reasonable one.

Amid all of this was the pursuit of information on scanners, which 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 LaPiere’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.”

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

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Listening to the Scanner Traffic

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by MirandaN 3 months ago

Listening to the Scanner Traffic

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"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 137NZt—Black Mercedes 350

3 MONTHS AGO

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

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

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

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 South Africa.
Why Twitter Didn't Believe the "Hacked" AP, But Bought False Facts About Boston Manhunt | TechPresident

1. **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.**

2. **GO**

3. **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.

4. **GO**

5. **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.

6. **GO**

7. **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.

8. **GO**

9. **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...
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7/26/13

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Seth Mnookin
@sethmnookin

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