

## Lipman: In search of reliable tweets in Thailand

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BANGKOK, Thailand -- A media traditionalist at its finest, I never really believed much in the power of blogs and Twitter.

Though I've been tweeting for well over a year, it tended to be about the more mundane aspects of my life: thoughts on new music, how delicious a new restaurant was or reactions to the latest soundbite in the news. I wasn't adding value to Twitter, and was likely one of those who contributed to making the infamous "Overcapacity Whale" angry.

Then I became a traveler. Through the real-time website, I was linked up with hundreds of like-minded people who also were planning or had already embarked on the "trip of a lifetime." I was introduced to countless new blogs and learned many of the tips and tricks of travel through Twitter. People who had broken the news about travel to their family and friend were able to offer suggestions on how to do it with ease. And when I finally decided to start my own blog, "She's in Love with the World," there were travel "tweeple" there to promote it. On the road, it proved advantageous when my laptop or iPod could connect to a wireless network and I could send a quick 140-character message.

My use for Twitter grew exponentially when I decided to stay in Bangkok. I spend most of my time with a group of 10 or so other expatriates, all whom I met, in some capacity, through the blue bird on the Interwebs. While we all vary in age and are working on different types of projects, we all remain connected through this site. With tweets from local restaurants and the latest development in real-time, instant gratification websites, [Four Square](#) check-ins, we're all able to learn of the latest expatriate networking meet-ups and happy hour events. I've had the opportunity to mingle with journalists for the International Herald Tribune, Bangkok Post and [CNN International](#). Twitter has made everyone accessible, but even that (or the half-price drink specials) are not what has made me fully appreciate the value of such a monstrous networking website.

In one of the most tense and openly violent days in Bangkok since the red shirt occupation began more



than two months ago, I was able to follow what was happening in real-time through both citizens in the chaos and journalists on the scene. From the moment rogue red shirt military leader Major Gen. [Khattiya Sawatdiphol](#), better known as Seh Daeng, was fatally shot in the head (sample tweet: [@andrewmarshall](#) [Seh Daeng] was shot while being interviewed by [Thomas Fuller](#) of the [New York Times](#).), to translations of the Royal Thai government's presser amid the action, all could be followed on Twitter through various outlets.

Despite the constant updates though, the website can have its downsides. The advent of citizen journalism is a dangerous thing. Almost anyone with a camera and a smart phone is tweeting the first things they see and hear in Bangkok without any confirmation of what is really happening. For example, unsubstantiated reports of Seh Daeng's death -- he was on life support before his eventual death -- and accounts of gunfire that were in reality fireworks. It allows for the rumor mill to spread things rapidly, causing unnecessary panic in areas that have yet to be affected.

Especially during times of political turmoil, it is important to remember the difference between civic journalism and those who are paid to be on the scene by a reputable outlet. There comes a time when ordinary tourists interested in tweeting or live-blogging the events while on their holiday need to step back and do so from a safe place in the city, rather than in the hot zones. I stopped visiting the various protests after a grenade went off near a Skytrain station on April 22.

In addition, it's important for those following the live streams to realize the differences and consistency between authorized or official accounts from professional journalists and from those snapping photos on their iPhones from their cab windows and posting reckless tweets saying something like, "Smoke coming from Din Daeng Hwy. Probably lots dead!" I'm doing my best to follow the action from a safe distance, as my area is still largely unaffected and continues to operate business as usual. As the action continues into the weekend and I begin to plan my next move (if the violence doesn't subside soon, I'll likely choose to leave the country prematurely), the updates continue to stream in at a pace with which it's difficult to keep up.

For interested readers, I'll continue to post some of the most interesting and reputable tweets and Twitter accounts I come across throughout the week on the [Passport: The World](#) blog.

Sarah Lipman is documenting her travels around the world. Visit her blog, [Passport: The World](#), at [www.stamfordadvocate.com](http://www.stamfordadvocate.com). To read Sarah's blog, go to <http://blog.ctnews.com/lipman>.