EXPERIMENTING WITH AUDIENCE INTERACTION: TELEVISION NEWS

EFFORTS TO INVITE AUDIENCES INTO THE BROADCAST

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by

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion it is worth of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Ken and Lynette, who have always gone above and beyond to support me in any way they can.

To my husband, Colin, who has an incredible amount of faith in me and makes me laugh.

To my son, Ethan, who spent several hours during his first 4 months of life balancing between my arms as I crafted this paper.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the concept of interactive and participatory journalism in television news through the lens of Gatekeeping Theory. It aims to shine a light on newsrooms that have been early adaptors in the trends and technologies of interactive content between journalists and their audiences and to explore what the managers and employees of those newsrooms believe has been successful, what has not been successful and what other journalists can learn from their experiences.

The researcher employed in depth interviews with 12 employees in 3 newsrooms in the U.S. The interviewees included general managers, news directors, anchors and digital producers. The research identified three major themes that contributed to the success of exploratory interactive efforts: newsroom culture, a focus on the audience, and finding balance. Each of these themes ultimately serves the same goal of the survival of television news in a rapidly changing media landscape. This research will expand the field of knowledge of interactive journalism, and it has valuable information for professional journalists who hope to incorporate interactive efforts into their work.

Chapter 1: Introduction

As the mass media landscape shifts and changes in the Internet age, interactivity is becoming a more prominent feature of mass media communications. In fact, some scholars claim interactivity is the primary difference that sets online media apart from traditional mass communications media (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001; Bucy, 2004a, p. 393). While the concept of interactivity existed long before the Internet- first in face-to-face communication, then audience feedback during plays and later through letters to the editor or calling in to a radio or TV station- recent research has focused on what has previously been called "new media" (McMillan, 2006). Interactivity can take several forms including hyperlinks, search tools, quizzes, comment threads, message boards, and chat capabilities. While previous research has established multiple definitions for interactivity, for this study it will be generally defined as person-to-person interaction between journalists and their audience. Interactivity allows audiences more control over the material they consume (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000; Chung & Yoo, 2008; McMillan, 2006; Ruggiero, 2000), and it challenges traditional media's flow of information by allowing audiences greater access to those who produce news content (Chung, 2008).

Previous research has shown journalists are reluctant towards (and in some cases adamantly opposed to) interacting with their audiences (Chung, 2007; Light & Rogers, 1999; Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998), but there are a growing number of examples of television newsrooms that

are experimenting with creating ways to have a two-way flow of communication to try to engage audiences to be a part of the news conversation.

In the late 1970s the three major broadcast networks accounted for 90% of all primetime television watched in the United States (Veronis, Suhler, & Associates, 1994). Since then, that percentage has decreased dramatically due in part to cable television, DVR, On Demand, and the Internet. As audiences fragment, traditional local news organizations find themselves having to compete more and more for a share of the audience (Napoli, 2010; Webster, 2005). A Radio Television Digital News Association 2012 profitability study of broadcast newsrooms found TV stations across the country are increasing their use of social media in an effort to keep up with changing demands of audiences with nearly 98% of TV stations using some sort of social media (Papper, 2012).

As audience fragmentation continues, television newsrooms will likely continue to look for new ways to improve audience numbers, loyalty, and engagement with their product. One possible way to try to reach audiences is to interact with them. The shift towards audience involvement in the newsgathering process has led some scholars to suggest news communication should be a two-way conversation, rather than a one-way flow of information from journalists to audiences (Domingo et al., 2008). This challenges traditional flows of information as described in gatekeeping theory (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The primary purpose of this in-depth interview study is to explore the efforts broadcast journalists are making to tear down the traditional walls of gatekeeping in journalism in order to interact with their audiences, and to study

their attitudes towards those interactive efforts. I chose three commercial broadcast newsrooms that are or have tried to incorporate interactivity and participatory journalism into their news products. I then conducted semi-structured interviews with content producers and managers involved in those efforts to explore what television stations are doing to interact with their audiences. The interviews also probed into what they think has been successful in those endeavors, and what they have tried that they believe has ultimately failed in their efforts to interact with audiences. By exploring the experiences and views of broadcasters who have chosen to try to engage audiences in an interactive way, other professionals who later embark on similar endeavors can learn from past experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Defining Interactivity in Mass Media

While interactivity has been studied often in the last few decades, it is also quickly changing and therefore not clearly defined among scholars (Bucy, 2004a; Jensen, 1998; McMillan, 2006; Rafaeli, 1988; Stromer-Galley, 2004). Rafaeli (1988) offered one of the earliest definitions for interactivity in mass media as "an expression of the extent that, in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmissions" (p. 111). This refers to the ability of a content producer and the consumer to send and respond to messages, as opposed to a singular output of information without any ability for feedback between the two. While offering that definition he, like others who came after him acknowledged interactivity is not well defined as a scholarly concept. A decade later Jensen (1998, p. 185) still called it a "buzzword" widely referenced, but not clearly defined for scholarly research. Others have criticized the fields "lack of a coherent theory" (Bucy, 2004a, p. 373) that uses one word to define multiple phenomena (Stromer-Galley, 2004).

In an attempt to help define the field of research, several scholars have proposed their own frameworks from which to develop studies. While they differ slightly, many of them stem from the work of Szupowickz (1995) who identified three core types of interactivity in mass media: user-to-user, user-to-document, and user-to-system. User-to-user discusses interactions between two human

users while user-to-document and user-to-system are types of interactivity with the technology (Szuprowicz, 1995). McMillen (2006) later expands on this concept arguing that if scholars would use these three types it would help define research. Other researchers have combined the user-to-document and user-to-system categories into one concept- instead dividing interactivity into two categories that involve either people or technology. The names given have differed as Stromer-Galley (2004) called it interactivity as a process (with people) vs. interactivity as a product (with technology), Chung (2008) defined it as medium interactivity vs. human interactivity, and Bucy (2004a) discussed content interactivity vs. interpersonal interactivity. Despite different names, each of these studies focuses on the same basic concept that interactivity can easily be divided between those features that involve interacting with other people and those that involve interacting with the technological medium. For the purpose of this study we will focus on user-to-user interactivity, more specifically the relationship between journalists' and their audiences.

In addition to the common distinction between human interaction and medium interaction, scholars have further tried to provide a framework within which to research. McMillen (2002) created a four-part model of cyber-interactivity that includes monologue, feedback, responsive dialogue, and mutual discourse" She argues that these four types of cyber communication give users increasing control and therefore increasing interactive ability (McMillan, 2002). Jensen (1998) focused on the two-way nature of interactive communication (though not always between two people), naming four dimensions of interactivity:

Transmissional, Consultational, Conversational, and Registrational. He also

proposes a new definition, "A measure of a media's potential ability to let the user

exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication" (p.

201). Another proposed classification is "Four primary interactive news

presentation styles" that include 1.) Increased choice options, such as different

modalities; 2.) Personalized tailoring options; 3.) Customized opinions and

stories; and 4.) Interpersonal communication opportunities (Chung & Nah, 2009,

p. 858).

     While the previously mentioned classifications have been proposed to

help define the field of study, Bucy (2004a) warns against and criticizes previous

research for focusing too much on what interactivity does. Instead, he advocates

examining why it has the effects it does on audiences. Since then, some studies

have still focused more on defining what interactivity is (Chung & Nah, 2009;

McMillan, 2006), while others have instead tried to analyze its impacts on the

audience (Bucy, 2004b; Liu & Shrum, 2009; Tedesco, 2007). Overall much of the

research has begun to move in the direction of trying to explain the effects of

interactivity rather than simply defining it. Technology will continue to change

quickly, which is why it is important to study interactivity as a broader concept. If

researchers focus on the impact on audiences and/or journalists and their

reactions to feeling something is interactive those findings are more likely to

continue to be relevant despite shifting mediums as technology advances and

changes. This study will use the broad term "interactivity" to refer to person-to-

person interaction between news content producers and their audiences.

Journalists and Interactivity

  Journalists' attitudes. Interactivity challenges traditional media's flow of information, and it has changed the way journalists and other mass media professionals do their jobs because it has shifted the relationship between content producers and their audiences (Chung & Yoo, 2008). The possibility for two-way communication has changed the dynamic of a system that has traditionally functioned as a one-way structure of communication, delivering information from journalists to audiences. Instead, the audience's ability to provide feedback has created a new form of "network journalism" that allows more voices to join the conversation and forces journalists to pay more attention to their audience (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001). Some scholars have advocated the use of interactivity by journalists because they feel it would, "imply more equality of the participants and a greater symmetry of communicative power than two-way and reactive communication, and clearly more so than one-way communication" (Schultz, 1999, p. 2). On the other hand, news organizations can become vulnerable and lose control when they allow the public to comment or give input on content (Bucy, 2004b).

  With that loss of control has come journalist resistance to incorporating certain types of interactivity into their work. Qualitative research has found journalists have shown the most resistance to human interactivity, as opposed to medium interactivity (Chung, 2007). In the 1990's, interviews revealed reporters "were horrified at the idea that readers would send them e-mail about a story they wrote and might even expect an answer" (Riley et al., 1998). Many

journalists cited the time and resources it takes to participate in forums like

discussion boards as reasons they are weary about interactivity because they

fear it would take away from time spent on other parts of their jobs (Light &

Rogers, 1999). Chung (2007) found even award-nominated website producers

who value interactive features were cautious about a human exchange that

required feedback or allowed audiences access to journalists, citing the time and

effort it takes to manage that kind of interactive feature as a deterrent. Those

interviews with website managers also revealed when they did provide access to

journalists, many reporters complained. One quantitative survey on journalists'

attitudes towards interactivity, including social media, found only 7.5% of

journalists indicated social media was "very important" to their work (Lariscy,

Avery, Sweetser, & Howes, 2009).

Despite some journalists' resistance to interactivity, Napoli (2010) argues

media organizations will need to embrace it, at least for audience measurement

purposes. A changing media landscape means increased audience autonomy

and audience fragmentation, which leads to lower ratings. He thinks these

changes will lead to adjustments in the way ratings are calculated, and a large

part of that change will be a push to measure interactivity. Napoli argues

because interactivity causes higher levels of audience engagement, it is a tool

media producers can use to tout and sell their audience to advertisers (Napoli,

2010).

As mentioned before, journalists have shown resistance to interacting with

their audiences, but there is evidence to show historically journalists have

resisted change in general. When conducting an ethnographic study Ryfe (2009) found reporters rejected new rules and expectations placed upon them by an editor regarding the way they gathered and reported news because they felt it violated their sense of professional norms. They became "resistant and even resentful of what they see as encroachments onto their professional turf" (Ryfe, 2009). Other researchers found changes in newsrooms tend to be surface level, and despite uncertainty newsrooms have lacked innovation (Lowrey, 2011).

The social media shift. One of the ways journalists have begun interacting more with their audiences is through the use of social media. While most of the previously mentioned studies on journalists' attitudes towards interacting with audiences do not include the use of social media, there are more recent studies that point to its growing prominence and use in the field of journalism. The rise of social media has led to an increase in citizen journalism, including video of protests and other events that were uploaded to YouTube and other outlets, and later used by major networks in their reporting of the events (Newman, 2009). Diakopoulos (2012) referred to it as a "fixture of reporting" particularly in breaking news situations or in collecting eyewitness reports. However, he also warns that these reports must be scrutinized to make sure they are reliable and legitimate. YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are cited as some of the widely used forms of social media to provide user-generated content and citizen-journalism in the field of mass media (Newman, 2009).

The shift towards audience involvement in the newsgathering process had led some scholars to suggest news communication should be a two-way

conversation, rather than a one-way flow of information from journalists to audiences (Domingo et al., 2008; Singer, 2006). Another study found the use of social media in broadcasts "heralded a shift in mainstream news media ideologies" (Vidali, 2010, p. 382) This study hopes to expand on these studies that examine the uses and effects of social media on journalism, by exploring how journalists discuss their own use, attitudes, and views of interacting with audiences in their professional lives.

The Impact of New Technology and Economics

While scholars may push experimentation with a new communication flow, economists argue "the contribution of new technology to economic growth can only be realized when and if the new technology is widely diffused and used" (Hall & Khan, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, it is a culture's adoption of a new technology that determines its commercial success, and this is a process that can sometimes happen slowly. Therefore, acceptance of interactive programs will be partially driven by the general public's technology comfort level because people are more likely to choose to use interactive features if they have a higher level of comfort or education with technology (Chung, 2008; Vorderer, Knobloch, & Schramm, 2001).

Steensen (2011) found people tend to use online journalism in a similar way they use traditional media, including typical gatekeeping measures, however he believes this changes in cases of breaking news or crises events. Therefore, it may not be technology itself driving the changes, but users' want and need for information that can drive the use of innovations in journalism (Steensen, 2011).

This makes a case for culture driving or trumping technology, rather than the other way around. While a news organizations' desire and willingness to experiment with new forms of interactive content delivery is the first step in trying out new ways to engage an audience, the realities of audience use and in turn commercial viability also contribute to the failure or success of these endeavors.

Interactivity and Audience

      Audience preference. Despite findings that interactivity can cause disorientation, several studies have found most users still report that they prefer websites which include interactive features, creating an "interactivity paradox" (Bucy, 2004b). Findings of this type of preference have been noted in both experiments and surveys (Chung & Nah, 2009; Chung & Yoo, 2008; McMillan, 2002; Tedesco, 2007). Chung and Nah (2009) found users particularly liked customization features. McMillen (2002) found within her four-part model of cyber-interactivity respondents had the most positive reactions to the websites they perceived to be most interactive, and they gave the lowest ratings to sites they perceived to have the lowest level of interactivity. Overall, she also found people tend to perceive websites as having a higher level of interactivity than they actually do.

      Uses and Gratifications theory has been used to explain why consumers would choose to use interactive and new media as opposed to more traditional forms of information. Scholars claim new media is a prime candidate for Uses and Gratifications research because of several factors including its immediacy and interactivity. This allows for more choice and control over content, which

leads to a more active audience (Chung & Yoo, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000). Some research utilizes Uses and Gratifications theory to try and determine why and what kind of people are likely to use new media. When surveyed, consumers reported "socialization", "entertainment", and "information seeking/surveillance" as the main reasons they preferred to use new media (Chung & Yoo, 2008, p. 390). It is argued that those who like control are the most likely users to gravitate to interactive content because it allows more control over seeking information, and that experience would satisfy the needs for both information and control (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000).

Technology comfort levels and education have an impact on preference towards interactivity. Studies have also found people are more likely to use interactive features if they have a higher level of comfort or education with technology (Chung, 2008; Vorderer et al., 2001). As more people become comfortable with the web and different types of technology, a higher percentage of the audience will likely favor interactive material. An experiment that allowed people to choose their level of interactivity when consuming entertainment products found a correlation between participants' cognitive ability and their preference of the interactive choices. The study found that people with lower cognitive ability would choose the non-interactive option, while those with a greater mental capacity indicated they preferred the interactive component (Vorderer et al., 2001). Althaus and Tewksbury (2000) also cite computer anxiety as a reason people would not prefer interactive media, but they note an

expectation that as technology becomes more prevalent in peoples day-to-day lives this effect will diminish.

Actual audience use. Although people tend to report favorable and positive responses to interactivity when surveyed, studies show media consumers do not use interactivity to its fullest potential. Often, the way people use online media is not particularly different than the way they use traditional media (Larsson, 2012; Light & Rogers, 1999; Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2010). Even researchers who found interactivity to have a positive effect on users understanding of material note that just because they reported favorable results when told to use interactive media does not mean they would choose to if left to their own devices (Tedesco, 2007).

Structuration Theory, or how people make decisions on content within the structure it is presented in, is one explanation for why users often do not use comment sections. It argues that most online newspapers are for the most part digital copies of the print version, and the "norm" or structure people have been accustomed to for years is one-way communication from journalists to the audience (Larsson, 2012). People have not been conditioned to look at news consumption as a two-way structure of communication, and therefore interactive features are underutilized. Other explanations offered for the lack of realized use of interactive features include a lack of time (Light & Rogers, 1999) or simply not feeling compelled to offer an opinion or to try to contact a journalist (Hujanen & Pietikäinen, 2004). Despite finding most people did not participate in discussion

boards, the same studies found evidence that those who do participate are quite active.

Referring to the previously mentioned concept of dividing interactivity into two distinct categories (human and medium), there is evidence that users are more drawn to and willing to use medium interactivity than they are human interactivity (Chung, 2008; Chung & Yoo, 2008). Quizzes are recorded as one of the more popular types (Light & Rogers, 1999), along with polls or questionnaires (Hujanen & Pietikäinen, 2004). Interviews with young media users found they are particularly unlikely to use interactivity to try and facilitate two-way communication with a journalist or news producer, suggesting a reluctance to break the traditional one-way structure of mass media. Therefore, "an increase in technological solutions does not result directly in an increase in actual contact" (Hujanen & Pietikäinen, 2004, p. 393). It is important to note many of the studies mentioned as people become more comfortable with new and interactive media their habits might change to incorporate more interactivity. In fact, one 2009 study showed thousands of people (including many young media users) submitted videos asking 2008 presidential candidates questions when given the opportunity by CNN (McKinney & Rill, 2009).

The State of Television News

Television newsrooms in particular should look for ways to connect with their audiences because studies have found in addition to declining and more fragmented audiences in the face of more channels, DVR and the internet (Napoli, 2010; Webster, 2005), many viewers feel disengaged with the current

state of TV news. Interviews with those in the millennial generation found participants expressed a "disconnection from and critique of mainstream television news casting" with many even cynical of it (Vidali, 2010, p. 373). Like newspapers and other forms of traditional news, the television industry must grapple with the reality that many younger viewers no longer get their information from traditional news outlets and have been found to be less informed than older generations (Mindich, 2005). The decline of younger audiences for local television news has raised financial concerns as well as concerns about long-term viability (Jurkowitz, 2013).

Despite evidence that younger audiences are less engaged with television news, when CNN reached out to viewers to post video questions online asking questions of political candidates almost 60% of the participants were age 30 or younger, suggesting this generation is interested in an opportunity to be involved in the news and information process (McKinney & Rill, 2009).

A 2004 Pew Research Center study found almost half of the respondents felt television news content producers and decision makers were out of touch with average citizens, and reported opinions showed the credibility of broadcast news declined ("Media Consumption and Believability Study," 2004). Despite those feelings, the 2004 study found local broadcast news viewership remained fairly stable. However, less than a decade later that was not the case as the same organization found local TV news viewership declined by 6% in the year 2012 (Jurkowitz, 2013). 2013 saw an increase in viewership for local TV news, but the overall audience trend still shows a decline ("State of the News Media

2014," 2014). Survey data suggests traditional broadcast media would have to make changes in order to compete in the Internet age because 34% of the people surveyed said they watched less television news because of their Internet news consumption (Dimmick, Chen, & Li, 2004).

Gatekeeping Theory and the Shift to Participatory Journalism

Journalism scholars have long studied the process in which journalists make decisions about what to cover and how they choose to deliver that information to the masses. This process is important, as it can help to shape news consumers' views (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The study of journalists as gatekeepers dates back to 1950 when David Manning White examined which wire stories a newspaper chose to run and which it did not over the course of a week and the editor's decision making process (White, 1950). Since then it has been used to study a variety of different decision making processes in newsrooms including selection of television news stories, international news, and how individual views and newsroom norms effect a content producer's decisions (Berkowitz, 1990; Gans, 1979; Shik Kim, 2002; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001).

However, with new technologies and delivery methods that allow for more audience interaction and participation, the traditional one way flow of information from journalists to their audience is changing. Therefore, traditional gatekeeping measures are in flux. While some studies have found journalists would like to keep the role of gatekeeping in some form, they are also pushed to balance it with new forms of user generated content brought on by the Internet which allows

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citizens the opportunity to publish content that could reach a mass audience (Singer, 2005). When studying coverage of the 2004 political campaign Singer (2006) found, "the internet defies the whole notion of a 'gate' and challenges the idea that journalists (or anyone else) can or should limit what passes through it" (Singer, 2006, p. 265).

Nip (2006) identified five models of journalism: traditional journalism, public journalism, interactive journalism, participatory journalism, and citizen journalism. According to these models, participatory journalism happens when news audiences are invited into the conversation to not only give input on what should be covered, but also to give their opinions on topics and events in news content. This includes audiences creating some of the content presented as news. She refers to participatory journalism as, "an attempt of the news media to incorporate the change in the relationship between professional journalism and the people made inevitable by technological change…" (Nip, 2006, p. 230).

First public, and now participatory journalism have pushed for the news process to evolve into a conversation that encourages public engagement and discourse (Kunelius, 2001; Nip, 2006; Singer, 2006). While much research on participatory journalism has looked at blogs and other forms of online content (Domingo et al., 2008; Meraz, 2009; Nip, 2006), this study hopes to expand that to examine how broadcast journalists are using the model of participatory journalism both online and in their on air products. It will also explore what journalists who consider themselves early adaptors of interactive technology

describe as successful and/or not successful in their efforts to interact with audiences.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Questions

RQ1: What efforts have broadcast journalists/managers made to interact with their audiences while encouraging participatory journalism?

RQ2: How do broadcast journalists/managers describe the outcome of those efforts?

- What do they think has been successful in their efforts to interact with their audiences and encourage participatory journalism? Why?

- What do they think has not been successful in their efforts to interact with their audiences and encourage participatory journalism? Why?

RQ3: What do those involved in efforts to interact with a broadcast audience think other journalists can learn from their experiences?

Interviews

To conduct this study I used semi-structured, in-depth, audio-recorded interviews with television news talent, digital producers and managers who work with programs that encourage participatory journalism through interacting with audiences as a regular part of the station's news programming.

News talent included anchors who focus on editing and presenting the entirety of the newscast or product (Chuday, 2008). Producers help to choose the content included in the news product and write stories that the anchor will present. For the purposes of this study, producers could work with either on air product, online product or both. News managers who participated in the study included both news directors and station general managers. News directors do

not typically gather news or write stories (though many have worked as reporters or producers earlier in their career). Instead, their job focuses on managing staff as they gather and produce content, guiding decisions on what stories the organization will cover, and developing newsroom policies. News directors must balance the journalistic mission of the newsroom with business and financial interests and realities (Chuday, 2008). General managers tend to have less direct influence on news product, but oversee business operations of the television station.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. (For the list of questions used as the interview guide, see Appendix A.) This length of time allowed enough time to gather sufficient information without becoming a burden on the interview subjects because newsroom employees tend to have busy professional schedules with deadlines to meet. While I aimed to get all the information through an initial interview, I also requested time for shorter follow-up interviews if necessary. In the end, I did not have to schedule any follow up interviews.

Interviews are well suited to this study that explored a specific group's experiences and attitudes towards a topic or phenomena because interviews aid us in "finding out about people's ideas, their thoughts, their opinions, their attitudes, and what motivates them by talking to them and asking the right questions" (Berger, 2013, p. 113). Specifically, semi-structured interviews helped guide the conversations in order to gather the relevant and needed information while allowing room to delve deeper into specific examples, experiences, and

explanations of their views. Interviews are "well suited for the exploration of perceptions and opinions" (Barriball & While, 1994).

Interviews were conducted over the phone or using an application called "TapeACall" to record the exchanges. I conducted all four of the interviews from one station before moving on to the next. I transcribed each interview as soon as possible after the interview ended. While most of each interview was transcribed word for word, parts that did not seem relevant to any of the research questions were left out at the researchers discretion.

Previous researchers who conducted studies on journalists' views and feelings towards interactivity have similarly relied on interviews when getting input from electronic news staffs (Chung, 2007; Riley et al., 1998). This study builds on their previous findings and increases understanding by gathering information and input from content producers who work with different communication channels and tools than those interviewed in the late 1990s or early 2000s. It also differs from previous studies because it focuses on a few television newsrooms that have made specific efforts toward interaction and audience participation, a different sample than any of the previously mentioned studies.

Case Selection

I chose to study those who work in local television newsrooms because multiple studies and professional trade articles published by broadcast news organizations have expressed the growing importance of social media in TV newsrooms, providing evidence that practices have changed in the industry as a

whole (Marszalek, 2012; Papper, 2013). I also believe my own background and professional contacts as a TV news reporter and anchor helped me gain access and provide valuable insight on the day-to-day operations of local TV newsrooms and helped guide my questions during the interviews.

I chose a criterion sample of newsrooms that have implemented interactive and participatory concepts into their news products. To select the best possible cases, I first gathered a list of several commercial, local television news stations across the United States that have made efforts to encourage participatory journalism through interacting with their audience as a regular part of the station's news programming. The television news business is tightknit. When a station tries something innovative, information tends to travel quickly among professionals, and these efforts are often highlighted at conferences sponsored by groups like the Radio Television Digital News Association. (RTDNA). To help compile this list I reached out to industry professionals involved in such professional organizations to report potential cases. I also read through cases mentioned in articles published by professional trade groups such as Poynter and RTDNA. I recorded what each station is doing or has done in the past. From that list I chose 3 cases that exemplify interactive and participatory journalism. One of the three stations I originally selected did not wish to participate, so I had to go back to the list, and ended up contacting multiple stations before finding a final station that wished to participate.

Once I identified the newsrooms willing to participate in the study, I requested interviews with the primary news talent who works most closely with

the interactive efforts, a producer, the station manager, and the news director at each station. I left open the determination of what type of producer I would interview until gathering more information from each news director. In each case, the news director told me the person that worked most closely with their interactive efforts was the digital producer who oversees web and social media for their station. By interviewing these diverse positions at each news organization I gained multiple viewpoints. When I conducted interviews with each of the identified positions I also asked if there was anyone else in the newsroom they would suggest I interview, but they did not recommend anyone beyond the four previously identified positions.

I offered anonymity to my respondents by referring to each station as Station A, B, or C (descriptions of each can be found in the Results section). I will also refer to each interview subject only within the general category of his or her job (anchor, producer or manager). This allowed respondents who might not want to be identified to share their opinions and experiences more freely.

Coding

Within the data I looked for general themes of what newsrooms have done to encourage participatory journalism by interacting with their audiences and what they describe as successful or not successful in those efforts. I also looked for patterns that emerged within the data set and relevant examples to illustrate those patterns as well as any exceptions to patterns to include outlying cases in the response data. After I finished conducting and transcribing all of my interviews I read through each of them several times and first recorded several

descriptive codes. I then placed each descriptive code into one of 8 interpretive codes (allow failure, measuring success, pushing the limits without leaving audiences behind, understand the platform, training, flexibility, show personality and connect, and shifting role of the gate keeper). The interpretive codes were further grouped into 3 major themes (newsroom culture, focus on the audience, and find balance) that helped guide how I organized my reporting of the results. More in depth descriptions of each of the interpretive coding categories can be found in Appendix B. A diagram showing how coding categories were organized within the themes can be found in Appendix C.

Limitations

While a qualitative, semi-structured interview study provides a high level of validity by exploring individuals' experiences in depth, one of the major limitations is the degree of reliability (Silverman, 2013, p. 284). This study is designed to be a snapshot, which provides insight into a small group of journalists, and the findings should not be used to make general claims about any large group. The interview method also means the data set is only as complete as the information subjects are willing to share. When obtaining information about past experiences in particular, the researcher is dependent on the subject's memory. This study focused specifically on newsrooms that have made efforts to be early adaptors in interactive news tools and presentation, and therefore the responses can not be taken as representative of all newsrooms. Similarly, the employees interviewed in each newsroom led those efforts so their responses should not be generalized to show the views of other journalists even within their own newsrooms.

Geography provides another limitation. While it would be ideal to conduct all of the interviews in person to best develop a good rapport with the subjects as well as to note any non-verbal cues or behaviors, the distance and lack of travel funding made that unrealistic. Therefore, interviews were conducted over the phone, which limits certain types of data such as non-verbal cues or facial expressions.

Time also presents some obstacles. People who work in newsrooms tend to keep very busy professional schedules, so finding blocks of time to interview them was a struggle. While I was able to get through the entire interview guide with each subject, it was also apparent that a few were on a time crunch and could not allow the interview to go past the original commitment of one hour.

Chapter 4: Findings

Participant Station Descriptions

As both audiences and news content producers become more conditioned to use social media and other interactive methods in content delivery, the researcher expected to find there had been some shift in the use of audience participation in newsrooms over the last decade and in journalists' attitudes toward interacting with their audiences. This study sought out early adopters who strive to embrace a changing media culture. The researcher believes because this study focused on journalists who have been involved in specific efforts to increase audience participation, the pool of interviewees were more open to interacting with audiences than those interviewed in previous studies mentioned. Therefore, their views may not be representative of all journalists, but can help guide broadcasters in future interactive endeavors.

Three television news stations participated in the interview study. Four people from each station were interviewed: the News Director, the General Manager, a News Anchor and a Digital Producer/Manager. While each of the stations in the study has made efforts to incorporate audience interaction and participatory journalism into the news product, how each station chose to do this looked very different. Below is a brief summary of each station's efforts. From here on out each station will be referred to as Station A, B, or C.

Station A. Station A is a mid-sized market station in the Mid-West. In addition to an active presence on Facebook and Twitter it utilizes Google+ hangouts to invite its audience to discuss stories and ask questions of both experts and subjects of stories the station runs in its television news programming. At one point the station's anchor tried to conduct a hangout daily, but found participation was low. Now, the anchor conducts hangouts when she feels a story calls for it. Participation varies depending on the topic. The station also puts the video chats online so audiences can view them more passively at a later time. The station has also tried live chats revolving around sporting events. This station was involved in Public and Civic journalism projects in the 80s and 90s, and the General Manager sees interacting with audiences as an extension of those efforts in the 21st century.

Station B. Station B is a large market station in the pacific Northwest. It's most notable effort to include interactive content in its news product is an interactive show that airs on television each weekday. The station has seen ratings success as it beats Entertainment Tonight, the competitor's syndicated programming, on a regular basis. During the program the station asks for live tweet responses (which the anchor shares on TV), conducts live interviews, and has a reporter who goes to events to interact with people in person among other things to try to bring the audience into the newscast. At one point the audience could watch the anchor behind the scenes online during commercial breaks and she would respond to questions and comments during that time. Those interviewed from this station noted their market is tech savvy so things that work

there might not work as well in other markets. This program has been on the air for about 7 years (longer than most that have tried interactive programming on air), and it was one of the first news programs in the country to use a twitter handle.

Station C. Station C is a large market station in the Mid-West. It does several things online to encourage audience interaction including creating personalized travel forecasts for viewers who ask for them and an interactive sports show during football season. One issue the station has faced is it feels more people get involved in these efforts when they have a greater window of time to participate (as opposed to appointment viewing), but that also limits the amount of direct interaction. This station also tried an interactive newscast that aired on television weekdays at 4 p.m., but after a few months changed the show back to a more traditional format because they did not get the type of involvement and interaction managers had hoped for.

Newsroom Culture

When discussing why they felt their station had tried to incorporate different ways of interacting with audiences that many of their competitors and peers had not tried, interviewees consistently discussed a newsroom culture that allowed for experimentation (and in some cases failure) without fearing negative consequences, flexibility, and continuing training efforts to make sure employees felt up to date on new technologies and trends.

Allow failure. Innovation requires a certain amount of experimentation, and that experimentation means being willing to take risks without knowing if there will be any rewards. Almost every person interviewed talked about working in a newsroom where it's ok to fail, and many mentioned they did not feel the acceptance of failure was present in many newsrooms across the country as it is in theirs. Managers said they try to set the tone by establishing it is more important to try innovative things than it is to know something will be a ratings success before you ever try it. In many cases they even measured the success of a project by the fact that their station was the first in the market to try it rather than by the ratings or how many people participated.

"I think you have to allow for a fair amount of freedom in this space because it is emerging... You really need to allow the people in your newsroom who have an expertise and interest in it to explore. Some things you'll try that work and some things won't, but you try to build on the things that do work and stop the things that aren't." -Station A News Director

"I set the state of mind by saying we want to innovate. We want to experiment. We have a certain tolerance for failure." -Station B General Manager

"If we don't experiment we're not going to be relevant. We have to be relevant. If we're not relevant we're going to miss the boat. I think people want absolutes. People want guardrails that say do this and this will be that. It used to be like that- do this and people will watch. Not so much

anymore… I don't know what's coming next, so we've got to have our

fingers in all of these things and see where the majority of people are

going and be able to move rapidly to get into that space… It's ok to fail. It

really is." -Station C General Manager

"Any newsroom needs to be open to trying new things, and when

something fails you can't have that knee jerk reaction like oh we're never

going to try anything again because if you do you'll never get that next

best idea if you stifle people at the beginning." -Station C News Director

Many interviewees mentioned with new technologies trying things does

not have to be monetarily expensive, so the greatest cost is often people's time.

Low monetary costs help justify trying things that may not have particularly high

viewership. For example, while some Google+ hangouts tried by Station A have

drawn close to 8,000 views, most only get around 100. That's a relatively small

number when compared to the market share. However, the anchor that leads the

Google+ hangouts is already at the station, and the only tools needed are her

webcam and an Internet connection so the station continues to do them because

they find value in providing a connection for those who want to be involved, and

managers feel the experience is valuable. The station's General Manager said,

"Right now there aren't large amounts of people who want to turn on our news

and be involved in this Google+ discussion. Having said that, we're in that space

and we're learning. It's a slog uphill to a certain extent, but if it takes off and it's

something the viewers want at least we'll be schooled in what's working and

what's not."

The News Anchor at Station B believes the audience also allows for a certain amount of failure when a station tries new things. During the interactive newscast she anchored for several years she would have a webcam where people could watch her and see what was going on behind the scenes during commercial breaks. When she had time she would also interact with them by answering questions via Twitter during the commercial breaks. "Sometimes it was great, and sometimes it was awful. Sometimes the show was falling apart and I sounded really bossy. Sometimes it was brilliant. Whatever it was people were along for the ride, and they knew they could come on board and see what things really looked like behind the scenes.," she said.

While these stations were all willing to give a long leash to employees who wanted to try things they also watched and measured participation to try and determine quantitative success and worked to change or ended efforts that did not seem to reach a large number of people. Station A tried to create live chat opportunities online around sporting events multiple times. Station C experimented with an interactive newscast that ultimately did not have the ratings success the station management had hoped for. Eventually, both of the efforts were ended because management decided the resources put into it did not justify the outcomes. However, neither station describes any regret in having tried these things.

> "For the people who are in there it might have worked, but we didn't have
> large numbers joining us. That's why I call it research and development
> more than failing. That's what research and development is about. It's

about trying and not working so let's try to tweak it. What did we learn, and apply those lessons the next time." -Station A General Manager

"I think if you don't expect to fail you're going to be in trouble, and you're not being innovative enough. No one knows exactly what will work so you have to just try stuff… I try to keep a pretty open approach to stuff both on TV and behind the scenes because I don't have anything to lose. Viewership is dropping on TV. It's growing online. I'm a big believer in go ahead and try. If we fail, oh well, we'll move on and do something else." -Station C News Director

Flexibility. When stations use new technology just because they can, interactive programming can feel forced. Instead, interviewees suggest allowing for flexibility in how stations use new technology and using interactive tools when it makes sense with the content instead of trying to meet quota of how often you want to use the interactivity. Both Stations A and C originally tried to have a show or live chat every day and eventually ended up only choosing to use the interactive tools when they thought they had a story the audience would want to interact around. "Doing it every night, while I think it was laudable, it was hard to get the community engaged in that. I don't know that people really want to be engaged at that level," said the News Director at Station A. While those efforts may not have been considered a success daily, interviewees did find with the right content they could be effective. For example, when Station A covered a reported gunman on a college campus it used social media and a Google+ hangout to connect with students who were on campus that could give them

information they would not have had otherwise. The Google+ hangout also allowed them to continue to provide information for students and parents who were concerned even when they were not on the air with news programming.

> "You can't do it for the sake of doing it. Live chats are an excellent example of that. I would never do it unless I thought the topic was the right topic at the right time with the right people because I've seen so many of them not work." -Station A Digital Producer

> "We still tap in to what's trending and what people are talking about, but instead of trying to make the show all about that it just becomes a tool for delivering the news. It's just something we use to see what people are talking about. I think that has been important. We've kept a lot of the best from the old version and added back in a lot of things that we know resonate without audience, which is more local hard news." -Station C Digital Manager

Multiple interviewees noted breaking news, controversial topics, elections, sports and weather often encourage interaction while much of the news of the day (like city council meetings) does not. Stations have found audiences are often more willing to participate by sending in pictures for a photo gallery than they are to having their face shown as part of a video chat. However, one digital manager did say sometimes users will passively watch a video chat about a topic they are interested in if "experts" are participating. Then, as they watch they might be encouraged to participate by asking a question or giving limited thoughts.

While stations A and C have decided not to have a daily interactive newscast or chat, Station B does air their interactive broadcast each weekday. The management at that station expressed that multiple stations in the U.S. have tried interactive newscasts, but many have canceled them after just a few months while this one ha been on for years. They believe that is in part because the audience in that market is very tech savvy. Station B's General Manager said another key to its success is even though they have a template to follow when producing the interactive newscast, the producers leave a lot of room for flexibility in the way they produce the program. For example, there is always a live interview, a question where they ask for live responses via Twitter, and trending topics, but the length of each of these segments varies from day to day. The amount of true person-to-person interaction during the show can vary greatly depending on the news of the day.

Those interviewed said when using interactivity on TV it is also important to ask if the interactive content helps to further tell the story. If it does, use it. If not it will likely alienate parts of your more traditional audience. Online, digital producers said journalists have more leniencies and can interact just for the sake of interacting or getting audience involvement and opinions because having a niche audience online does not drive away other users like it could on television.

Training. Previous studies done in the 1990s and early 2000s found journalists resistant to interacting with their audiences, but most of the participants in this study felt that had changed. They said many journalists in their newsrooms embrace interaction, particularly on social media. Managers

expressed while some employees may complain about not having the time to get everything done, most understand interaction at some level is a part of their job now. Station managers expect it and make it a part of the hiring process.

"The expectation was set a long time ago. It's not a do it if you want to. It's this is part of the job. I don't have to prod reporters to try to engage and communicate with their audience." -Station A Digital Producer

"We require it. That's the best way we encourage it. We just say it has to be done. Every reporter has to engage on a social media platform." - Station B Digital Producer

"It's an absolute essential requirement going forward. We're not going to hire anybody who doesn't have the interest, capacity or skill set to do it." - Station B General Manager

If managers are going to require interaction, they also have to provide the tools necessary for their employees to succeed. Many interviewees noted training is an important part of helping those journalists to be effective on those platforms. Multiple managers said retraining veteran journalists in their newsrooms on how to write for the web, use social media and use new technologies took great time and effort. Station C's Digital Manager even created individualized plans for each of the station's on air talent to work on their weaknesses and showcase strengths. Participants also said because there are constantly new social media platforms and new tools the training must be constant and ongoing. Recently applications called "Periscope" and "Meerkat"

have gotten the attention of journalists, but those interviewed recognized within a year those tools may be cast aside for new apps.

In addition to training existing journalists, station B has started to hire what the General Manager called "unconventional hires." Partly because many older journalists do not seem as comfortable with new mediums and technologies, the General Manager noted they are more likely to hire younger journalists or people with little journalism experience if they are good at social media and connecting with people because they bring a skill set TV stations need.

> "Just a few years ago, if someone didn't have a pretty significant track record coming into this television station from another market or a great journalism school we would never hire them. We wouldn't even look at them. We don't do that anymore. It's almost a reverse apprentice kind of thing. It's almost like we have as much to learn from them as they have to learn from us… Once you embed your newsroom with digital natives that instinctively understand that they're constantly navigating between multiplatforms and it just comes so naturally, it role models that behavior."
> -Station B General Manager

She continued to say having digital natives in the newsroom is a valuable tool to teach more tenured journalists about interaction, and in turn those younger journalists learn reporting skills from older journalists. The interaction of these two groups is one form of training.

Focus on the Audience

When reflecting on what interactive efforts they consider to have been successful, participants noted the importance of focusing on your audience, how they want to connect with news anchors and reporters and how they want information delivered to them on different platforms.

"Remember the viewer. If we're doing it because we want to push something of ours, it's not going to work. If we're doing it because somebody says we should so we're going to throw it in the show it's not going to work. If you stay viewer focused, you will succeed." -Station C Anchor

"It's always been important to us to have the public as part of the discussion. To a certain extent I believe the television station belongs to the viewers, to our audience. We need to reflect who they are and what they do." -Station A General Manager

Show personality and connect. Interviewees, particularly the news anchors, noted the importance of showing personality in order to connect with the audience in a way they felt they had not done before the proliferation of social media and interactive efforts in TV news. Each of the news anchors mentioned early in their careers when they produced content only for traditional newscasts chances to show personality were limited both by time and by expectations. Using social media and web based chat features the journalists are no longer limited to a 30-minute newscast, and while they still feel the need to stay objective about things like politics they now try to show what their life outside of

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work looks like. One mentioned sharing the riddles she puts in her child's lunchbox. Another got her audience involved on Twitter to contact a celebrity to convince them to do a live interview on her show. She said lots of users responded well to that and seemed to have fun being involved. Often the anchors received more interaction from users on posts about their kids or other aspects of their personal life than they do on the average news story they create a social media post about. While these things do not directly improve the news product the audience receives, these journalists believe it does improve their relationship with the audience. They think when they offer a personal connection the audience is more likely to turn to them in their professional capacity for news and information. One anchor said she also hopes it makes the audience more comfortable interacting with her in other ways and about big stories when she tries to incorporate it into the news product.

Furthermore, these journalists all said it is important to respond to the audience. In their opinion it isn't enough just to ask a questions or post something anecdotal about yourself. They then find it imperative to answer any questions or thank people who respond for their input in a similar way to how they would respond in a face-to-face conversation rather than as a lecture. The anchor at Station C said her ideal would be to have every television viewer watching the newscast with a phone or tablet in their hand so they could communicate directly with the anchors if they would like. This is part of the changing role of journalists as gatekeeper, which will be discussed later in the findings.

"It's supposed to be a real genuine thing so you have to take the time to actually respond and let people be heard and talk to people like they're real people. I still see people on social media talking to people in their news voices, and it's like let's just be real for a second… The content doesn't change, but maybe your delivery does, so that's something people really need to work on." -Station A Anchor

"The addition of Social Media allowed me to do something that's always come very naturally to me and that's share a bit about myself. It's very easy to say that's narcissistic, nobody cares what you had for lunch. The point isn't that you should care what I had for lunch. The point is what did you have for lunch? I don't even like calling them my viewers because it feels like a one-way thing. I call them my friends; I just haven't met them in real life." -Station B Anchor

"I think the casual everyday life posts are just as important as the big news posts. If they learn to trust you when you're sharing the silly riddle you put in your kid's lunch and they relate to you on that front, they'll be more likely to listen when you have something important to tell them about." -Station C Anchor

While the news anchors interviewed are the employees actually trying to connect with audiences, multiple news managers discussed the importance of this practice as well. From the managers' point of view, they hope having a connection with the anchor will give people a reason to turn on the television and watch the newscast. In fact, they see this connection as one of the advantages

TV news has over other types of journalism. "If they can identify with our people they're more likely to use our brand when they need it," said the Station C General Manager. Several study participants echoed that sentiment, but one warned against going too far. The digital manager at Station C recalled a situation at a previous job where the station posted a cartoon to make light of a story and people were offended by it. She said while it is important to allow audiences to get to know the journalists, it is still important to be respected and trusted.

Understand the platform. Another key to connecting with audiences is to understand what type of information they want and how they want it customized depending on the platform it is being delivered on. News managers expressed a blanket approach of presenting information the same way on TV, web and mobile does not work.

When Station C station tried to put audience members on television as reporters (using smart phone video) it found the low quality was a turn off to others watching the show. The station changed its interactive format after only a few months because of low ratings, and has seen improved viewership since making that decision.

> "On TV we still incorporate digital elements and that sort of thing, but some of the interactivity wasn't what people wanted. Also, the concept of anyone can be a news contributor also wasn't successful on the TV side of it. We were going with the idea that we would talk to this person or that person who may not be an expert television presenter. We brought a lot of

people on as sort of reporters that didn't have those skills, and we shy away from that now because viewers wanted what they're watching on TV to be people who they know are trained journalists." -Station C News Director

On the flip side, when the same station tried to produce high quality videos (similar to what it would create for TV) as part of its digital weather content the videos did not get as many views as the digital manager had hoped they would. After taking some time to look through analytics numbers and see what types of videos do get lots of plays on the web, she now hopes to try a more casual approach. "Since we're a TV station, we tend to want to produce things that look really slick, but sometimes the best ways and the most authentic ways to talk to people about what they care about is just sitting at your desk with your web cam," the digital manager said. She has come to the conclusion that on TV the audience expects higher quality video and a more polished performance. On digital platforms the audience is more forgiving of lower quality video and off the cuff content, and in fact often seems to prefer it.

The News Director at Station C also discussed times they have tried to have special interactive shows online for sporting events or to give people individualized travel forecasts around the holidays. She has found people do not like to have what she calls appointment viewing online. If the interactive tools are only available for a set 30 minutes to an hour she says fewer people use them. When they made changes to the interactive weather content where people could ask for a personalized forecasts in the weeks leading up to the holidays, more

people used the service. While this limited the immediate interaction the weather team could have with the audience, it increased the scope of its interaction.

In addition to changing how information is presented from the TV broadcast to the web, interviewees said it's also important to differentiate between different online communication channels. People behave differently on Facebook (leave written comments) than they do on Google+ (a video chat service). Station A has found the latter takes more commitment from the audience, but those who use it have a high level of engagement with the journalists. Therefore, how they prepare to interact with the audience on those two networks is very different.

Find Balance

For journalists, the field of possibilities for interacting with audiences is new and quickly changing. As they try to navigate the best ways to interact they find themselves in a balancing act trying to push the limits and bring in new technologies without alienating potential audiences, trying to figure out how to measure the success of their interactive efforts and trying to live up to the traditional role of journalism while also letting audiences help drive content decisions.

Push limits without leaving audiences behind. One of the challenges of learning all of the different possible interactive platforms is figuring out not just how to use them, but when. Multiple participants discussed times when they wanted to incorporate a new technology, but the majority of their audience was not comfortable with that technology. While they want to innovate, if the audience

isn't there it can make those efforts futile. "It's a combination of you don't want to do something just because you want to use the technology. On the other hand you don't want to not do it because you don't think there's a time to do it," said Station A's general manager about deciding when to try out a new technology.

To try and solve this problem, stations try to make accessing their content as simple as possible. For example, when station A does a Google+ hangout it provides a link instead of making their audiences search for it. Clicking on a link is something most of their audiences are familiar with so it becomes less intimidating than if they approached it with the mindset of trying a new platform, even if the end result is the same. Interviewees also mentioned going back and trying things again after some time has passed because as people become more and more comfortable with technology something that did not draw many users may have a much wider appeal a year later.

> "I think we're at a tipping point where a good chunk of the audience is looking for more from their news sources. They want to see video and the news but they also want to laugh. They want to do an online quiz or send in their photos and see them in a photo gallery. They want streaming video. They want to hear something unique on a live streaming show." - Station C Digital Producer

While study participants said technology comfort level was one of the major barriers to getting audiences involved, a few also mentioned balancing the audience's comfort level with what makes compelling broadcast news content.

Broadcast is a visual medium, but many people are less likely to interact if their face is shown.

"I think getting people to show themselves in a video is a huge barrier. Whether it's technical or a personal preference or it's just too much work, it's a barrier most people don't want to get past, but typing a 4-5 word response is a piece of cake and they do it all the time. It seems getting them to comment on periscope is nothing, but getting them to log into a hangout is a real challenge... I think there are different layers there. There's the technical hurdle. I think some people might feel like they don't have the technical aptitude or the software or hardware to do it, or they simply don't want to be seen. I think there's a lot of lurkers out there who are perfectly happy not to show their face, especially when talking to a TV station." -Station A Digital Producer

While it may be easier to get people to send in a written comment than a video of themselves, multiple interviewees noted that does not make for the most compelling television. In those cases they felt it is best to leave the interaction online rather than try to bring it into the broadcast.

Measuring success. One of the greatest challenges the news managers interviewed expressed was trying to accurately and objectively measure success. Managers at all 3 participant stations said they use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to try and measure, but often find it difficult to do. "There's no surefire, cookie cutter, cut and paste kind of way to get engagement," said the digital producer at Station A. "It's a lot more like an art than a science."

Station B has an interactive newscast it has considered a success for years, and Station C tried an interactive newscast but cancelled it after a few months. While these two efforts had different ends, both stations mentioned it is currently easier to define success in an on air broadcast than digital because there are longstanding tools to measure ratings. While tangible measurements are still elusive for much of the digital content, managers felt like the tools to get similar measurements to TV ratings are in the process of being created, and they hope they will become more accurate in the near future.

Each station in this study uses analytics to measure views on its website and Facebook engagement, but other mediums like video chats and twitter have less established measurement tools. While quantitative numbers are important from a business standpoint, at other times they use a more qualitative "gut feel" to decide if new innovations should be considered a success and if the station should continue to dedicate resources to them.

"We can't use metrics in the traditional sense because some of this is about innovation. It's about getting into the space first and being familiar with the space. It's about knowing as more and more people choose to only live in one space or another, and that may not be TV, what are we doing to make sure we're in that space." -Station C News Director

Sometimes a platform that does not have definitive numbers to show success at first can later prove to be a very effective tool for the newsroom. For example, 5-10 years ago Facebook was not considered an important part of a station's news effort. Today, it is seen as a valuable way to reach the audience.

While many new digital platforms may not reach large numbers immediately, sometimes managers still consider them a success because they are the first in their market to try something and feel their station will be ready to use the tool well when it does become more mainstream with audiences.

Other times the station regards the quality of interactions to be a more important measurement than the quality. "I try to draw a distinction between what we can measure and the value we're giving to our audience that we can't measure. That second thing is a real thing, and I don't want us to ignore it," Station A's Digital Producer said. If a new effort only reaches a small number of people but elicits good content and reactions that could be presented as part of the broadcast, encourage strong loyalty to the station's brand or could be used as a information gathering tool, then interviewees said the station would likely continue those interactions and find value in them.

Shifting roll of the gatekeeper. The traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers who ultimately make the decisions about what is news has shifted in these newsrooms that value audience interaction, but it has not disappeared. Interviewees conveyed a strong effort to uphold the standards of journalism while also opening up the lines of communication to invite news consumers to take part in the process of creating content. Ultimately, while the journalists and news managers want a multi-way flow of communication that gives audiences more influence than they have had traditionally, they still employ gatekeeping practices that work as quality control measures in the newsroom.

"For me it is about relationship building, which is such a far cry from the old days of a one way channel where I talk, you listen. I'm thrilled that those days are gone because we are nothing but a reflection of the people we're working for. I'm supposed to serve the needs of the people in my community, but how do we do that if we don't know what those needs are. That is what makes social media so brilliant." -Station B Anchor

One of the ways those interviewed expressed they still embody the gatekeeping roll is by fact checking. Two of the newsrooms in this study referred to policies that any news tip, picture, video or other type of user-generated content (UGC) must be vetted by journalists before it is published. (Employees in the third newsroom did not refer to this policy, but very well may have a similar practice in place.)

"We see photos sent to us all the time from viewers about things happening, and we know we need to check out those photos because it's a photo showing somebody hit by a car or something happening- it may not have even happened in our town. It may have been Photo-shopped. It may be from years ago. So I think in our newsroom there's definitely a decent amount of skepticism towards what people see." -Station B Digital Producer

In addition to accuracy newsroom employees also check UGC for appropriateness. While in general they try not to censor content, if something includes foul language, personal attacks, etc. they will often delete the content or choose not to use it in the broadcast. One of the most difficult times to implement

gatekeeping measures to UGC is during breaking news when journalists are trying to get information out as quickly as possible. Station A's news director said one way they try to remedy the possibility of inaccurate UGC is to be very transparent about where information is coming from, if or whom newsroom employees have confirmed that information with and what should be considered speculation. They always attribute any information they decide to share and try to explain how dependable the source may or may not be.

Journalists interviewed also said once they have assured UGC is accurate and relevant to a story they try to give it context and weave it into the larger story. The goal is to have a mix of UGC with enterprise reporting to provide the most complete story possible.

"If you look at any of the major stories that have happened across the country you'll probably see user generated content. It's the smart phone video of somebody recording what police didn't do well or a horrific car accident or something. It's going to show up there first. As a gatekeeper we still have to have editorial control, and we've got to put context, and we've got to be a credible source. We may get user generated content from somebody, but just to throw it on the air unreferenced, unsubstantiated, I still think we play that role. We've got to be the trusted source for information." -Station C General Manager

Station B's digital producer said upholding the role of the gatekeeper is easier to do in the traditional broadcast than it is on digital platforms. It the station's interactive newscast everything that makes it on the air is filtered by the

digital team, newscast producers or both. "On the web it's nearly impossible to do," he said. "We try to delete stuff as we see it, but it's definitely more of a whack-a-mole." While moderating digital content can be more difficult, he also thinks web viewers understand the process of moderating content takes time so they are more forgiving.

While these journalists have tried to uphold the role and values of a gatekeeper in several ways, as early adaptors to interactive technology they have also actively tried to tear down some of the walls journalists have put up in the past. Rather than a one-way flow of information from the reporter to the audiences, they now invite a conversation and want feedback. "We're much better today than we were last year and 10 times better today than we were a few years ago at listening. We didn't used to listen," said Station B's General Manager. Participants expressed that by listening to audiences they build a deeper connection and better understanding of what types of stories will resonate with the communities they serve. These interactions also often lead to story ideas, and newsrooms use their interactions to help drive content decisions and coverage on a daily basis.

> "We go into our morning meeting every day saying here's what's trending. Here's what is being picked up. Here's what people are clicking on. So we use that tool also when we formulate our news for the day. It's one of the first things everybody talks about. What's trending on FB or our webpage or Twitter? That helps guide our coverage." -Station C General Manager

There is still a need for a gatekeeper, but those pushing for interactive and participatory journalism are making an effort to invite more people to come through the gate.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Survival of TV News

Every person interviewed for this study said the effort they and their station put into interacting with audiences is worth the results. For some it fulfills a desire to connect. Others said interactivity helped them to find information to aid in breaking news and improving journalistic content. Each theme explored in the results of this study at its core has the same goal of ensuring the survival of television news. While some of the interactive efforts previously discussed may not have had large numbers in terms of viewership, those involved would have considered it a bigger failure if they hadn't tried the ideas at all. Many of the interviewees talked about "being relevant" and felt innovation is the only way TV news stations will survive and thrive as the media landscape continues to change.

> "The reality is the audience expectation is changing. We need to interact with them in any medium that we can. I think it's about being relevant in someone's life. TV Newscasts are still very relevant and we continue to put a lot of time and effort into that, but at the same time we know there are people in the market who don't interact with our newscasts as much but are still interested in local news. " -Station A News Director
>
> "Be hyper focused on your audience. It's all about our audience. If nobody's watching we're not going to be here. You have to be hyper

sensitive to when you're losing audience, where are you losing them to? When you're gaining audience how to keep them there, and how to serve them on all of your platforms." -Station B News Director

"If they're stuck in the time warp of doing it the old way then they will perish. They will be irrelevant. You can fight change all you want, but it's going to happen with or without you." -Station C General Manager

While study participants were very concerned about the future survival of their industry, they also noted TV news might not always be on TV which is why they feel the need to put time and resources into digital enterprises even if they do not have as large of a monetary pay back as TV does at this time.

"It's very clear that our viewing audience is changing, and it's very clear that people are over television in general. People have lives to live, and they're going to find it on their phones or computers. I feel like nothing is ever a big failure, and nothing is never a tremendous success. We just have to cast a wide net constantly." -Station A Anchor

It is important to note that I (the researcher) work as an anchor/reporter in a newsroom that tried to implement an interactive newscast in 2011. It was cancelled after less than a year because of low ratings. While I did not have any role in the production of this newscast (it was off the air before I was hired by the station), I have had extensive conversations about the program with several people who were involved with it. They have expressed that while they had good intentions the average viewer in our market did not have the desire or the technological tools/comfort level to get involved in the on air broadcast at the

time it aired. While I made an effort not to let my ties to this program lead to a bias in this research, it is what prompted my desire to study the subject.

It is my opinion that interactive and participatory journalism will continue to grow in importance for those who work in television newsrooms, but it is important to determine when to use interactive tools. Digital platforms offer an inexpensive way to test new ideas with low risk of alienating those audiences not comfortable with the technology or those who do not wish to interact with journalists.

In regards to newsroom culture, newsroom management should encourage experimentation and give employees a long leash to implement any ideas they have to incorporate interaction on digital channels. In the newsrooms studied the anchors, producers, and digital producers led many of the interactive efforts and did most or the work to make them happen, but they felt supported by their management to try new things before they ever presented the ideas. Interaction during the on air broadcast can be successful, but it should involve more planning and the presentation should be more polished than the expectations for digital content.

When trying to focus on the audience, I do suggest that journalists find some sort of personal information that they are comfortable sharing with their audiences in social spaces. Unlike the news anchors I talked with for this study, it is counterintuitive to me as a journalist to share aspects about my personal life. However, when I do I have found my experience aligns with theirs when they suggest trying to connect with audiences on a personal level over social media.

On my own professional Facebook page I used to strictly post news and work related content. More recently I started posting more personal material, like pictures of my son, and I generally get much more interaction in the form of comments and likes on the personal content than the news links. The more people comment on personal content (and I respond), the stronger the connection between me and that particular audience member becomes. In some cases those people have started to also comment on news articles I post. While it may seem awkward for some people to share aspects of their personal life with people they have never met face to face, the willingness to do so does seem to build loyalty and should be encouraged (within reason).

When trying to find balance in these efforts, I suggest newsrooms first approach new ideas as a learning experience. Rather than go in with the expectation of high audience numbers or a hope to immediately monetize an effort, journalists and newsroom managers should approach new interactive efforts with a spirit of exploration. If the goal is to learn how to better reach an audience, it will give these efforts a little more room to breathe. Then, once you have allowed staff time to fine tune and figure out what works, you can turn the focus onto how to measure success and potentially make the interactions profitable to the news organization.

The participants of this study acknowledge the importance of innovation in broadcast newsrooms. The trend of audience fragmentation will likely continue, leading to declining numbers of people who depend on the nightly newscast to stay informed about their communities. To stay relevant to their audiences,

journalists need to innovate, put content on multiple platforms and make an effort to listen to their audiences in those spaces.

Research Implications

This study could have significant practical implications. By exploring the previous experiences of journalists, the findings could potentially help guide newsroom managers and employees to better understand how to successfully incorporate interactive and participatory journalism into their newsroom efforts and what pitfalls to avoid. As newsrooms continue to fight for viewership understanding what others have found to be the best practices could be very valuable in navigating a shifting media landscape.

Future Research

Future studies could make use of the data collected in these interviews to compare how the television news industry has incorporated audience interaction and participation to other primary mediums (like print or a solely digital product). Other studies could also investigate the use of interactivity in news from the perspective of the audience. There is evidence that users are more drawn to and willing to use medium interactivity than they are human interactivity (Chung, 2008; Chung & Yoo, 2008). Interviews with young media users found they are particularly unlikely to use interactivity to try and facilitate two-way communication with a journalist or news producer, suggesting a reluctance to break the traditional one-way structure of mass media (Hujanen & Pietikäinen, 2004, p. 393). However, like the previous research into journalists' attitudes towards interactivity, this data was collected before social media become a

widely used tool in journalism. It would be interesting to see if or how things have changed since those studies were conducted.

Researchers could also explore the idea of training the audience in new technologies. Some interviewees discussed the need to make technology simple to encourage the audience to try new things. Others mentioned the idea that certain interactive efforts didn't catch on the way they hoped they would because "the audience wasn't ready", meaning the technological tools used were not widely used by audiences yet. It would be interesting to find cases where newsroom employees have tried to reach out to the community to try and teach or train community members how to use new interactive technologies and research the affect those efforts had on the audiences' willingness and want to interact.

Finally, scholars could examine new types of interactivity on the technological horizon. Many questions about understanding, preference, and use will continue to be applicable to future developments. A constantly changing field is difficult to define or pin down, which is why continued research into interactivity is both necessary and interesting. If scholars worked to answer any of the questions posed, it would help the field to better define and understand the effects of interactivity in mass media.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Tell me why/how you came up with _____ program? What motivated your station to want to create it?

2. What types of interactions do you have with users?

3. Ideally, what is your goal? What types of interactions would you like to have?

4. How would you describe your job as it relates to that program?

5. How does your station try to encourage interaction between your journalists and the public within that program?

6. What methods (if any) have you used to measure the success of your interactive and participatory efforts?

7. What do you think has been successful in those efforts?

8. Why do you think what you just described has been a success?

9. Can you give any specific examples of times when interacting with your audience has improved you news product?

10. What have you tried that you do not view as successful in encouraging audience   interaction or participation?

11. Why do you think what you described was not successful?

12. Can you describe any specific instances when trying to bring in audience interaction/participation seemed to hurt your news product or did not go as planned?

13. Do you feel the effort put into these efforts is worth it, considering what you get as an end result?

14. Over time, what changes have you made to your interactive programming? Why did you decide to make those changes?

15. Tell me about the attitudes and perceptions towards this effort from those in your newsroom not as directly involved.

16. How does your station ownership group support you? What kind of resources does your parent company provide?

17. What do you think journalists who hope to incorporate audience interaction into their news product could learn from your experiences?

18. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

1.) Allow Failure

Almost every person I interviewed talked about working in a newsroom where it's ok to fail. Management sets the tone by establishing it is more important to try innovative things than it is to know something will be a ratings success before you ever try it. Many people mentioned with new technologies often trying things doesn't have to be monetarily expensive, so your greatest cost is people's time. Low monetary costs help justify trying things that may not work in the end. While these stations were all willing to give a long leash to employees who wanted to try things they also watched and measured participation to determine success and worked to change or end efforts that did not seem to reach a large number of people.

2.) Measuring success

Stations must balance how they measure ratings success with defining success just by being new and innovative. For example, 5-10 years ago Facebook was not considered an important part of a station's news effort. Today, it is seen as a valuable way to reach the audience. While many new digital platforms may not reach large numbers now sometimes the station still considers it a success because they are the first in their market to try something, and they feel they will be ready to use the tool well when it does become more mainstream with audiences. Overall, stations are trying to measure success of their interactive efforts, but often find it difficult to do in a tangible way. Many noted that it is difficult to measure success on digital platforms (easier to do with TV because there's an established ratings system), but most mentioned a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to try and gauge success along with trusting a "gut feel".

3.) Pushing the limits without leaving your audience behind

Stations are also working to find how they can make new platforms and technologies easy for their audiences to use because employees feel if they never try new things they won't continue to innovate, but it is important to meet the audience where they feel comfortable. Audiences can sometimes be intimidated by new technology.

4.) Understand the Platform

Part of finding a balance is also understanding the platform you're using. One station tried to put audience members on television as reporters (using smart phone video) and found the low quality was a turn off to others watching the show. On the flip side, when they tried to produce high quality videos (similar to

what they would create for TV) as part of their digital content they didn't get as many views as something taken quickly on a smart phone or web cam often did. They have come to the conclusion that on TV the audience expects higher quality video and a more polished performance. On digital platforms the audience is more forgiving of lower quality video and off the cuff content, and in fact often seems to prefer it.

5.) Training

Most of the people I talked to felt the age of journalists pushing back against interaction has passed. While they may complain about not having the time to get everything done, most now understand interaction at some level is a part of their job. Station managers expect it and make it a part of the hiring process. Many interviewees noted training was an important part of helping those journalists to be successful on those platforms. Station managers also noted they are more likely to hire younger journalists or people with little journalism experience if they are good at social media and connecting with people because they bring a skill set TV stations need.

6.) Flexibility

When stations use new technology just because they can interactive programming can feel forced, and then it often doesn't work as well. Instead, interviewees suggest allowing for flexibility in how stations use new technology and interactive tools. Use the tools when it makes sense with the content you're providing instead of trying to meet quota of how often you want to use the interactivity.

Two of the three stations I interviewed employees at originally tried to have a show or live chat every day and eventually ended up only choosing to use the interactive tools when they thought they had a story where the audience would want to interact around. Multiple interviewees noted breaking news, controversial topics, elections, sports and weather often encourage interaction while much of the news of the day (like city council meetings) does not. The station I talked to that has made an interactive newscast work on a daily basis noted the people in its market are very tech savvy, and even then they have to leave a lot of flexibility in the way they produce that program to allow for more interaction some days than others depending on the content.

Those interviewed said when using interactivity on TV it is also important to ask if the interactive content help further the story. If it does, use it. If not it will likely alienate parts of your more traditional audience. Online, you have more leniencies and can interact just for the sake of interacting or getting audience involvement and opinions.

7.) Show Personality and Connect

Many of the interviewees, especially the anchors, spoke in depth about the importance of showing personality and sharing part of your personal life in addition to news content. Often anchors got the most interaction when they talked about their kids or things not related to the news. Many mentioned that they felt building up trust and relationship over personal matters made the audience more likely to trust and turn to them and their station for their news.

8.) Shifting Role of the Gate Keeper

The traditional role of journalists as gatekeepers who ultimately make the decisions about what is news has certainly shifted in these newsrooms that value audience interaction. They use their interactions to help drive content decisions and coverage on a daily basis. Those interviewed did still feel there is a need for the gatekeeper, though. They feel journalists are needed to sift through user-generated content (UGC) and make sure it is relevant and accurate. At times the gatekeepers must sift through comments and UGC to make sure it is appropriate. Many found the most important role of the journalist in a realm of interactivity is to give context to UGC and weave it into the larger story. It is easier to moderate and be the gatekeeper for TV content. Digital content can be much more difficult to filter.

Many also noted it is important to respond and allow for two-way communication between the journalists and the audience instead of a one-way flow of information.

Appendix C: Coding Diagrams

Each shows an overarching theme with corresponding interpretive and descriptive codes used during the interview coding process.

C1

```
                        Newsroom
                         Culture
        ┌──────────────────┼──────────────────┐
   Allow Failure        Training          Flexibility
    ┌──────┴──────┐   ┌─────┴─────┐      ┌─────┴─────┐
 Need to    Experience  Expectation  Constant   Topics that  Let Content
Innovate/      as           of      Individualize  Change    work well      Lead
Experiment  Important   Interaction
            as Ratings
```

Newsroom Culture
- Allow Failure
  - Need to Innovate/Experiment
  - Experience as Important as Ratings
- Training
  - Expectation of Interaction
  - Individualize
  - Constant Change
- Flexibility
  - Topics that work well
  - Let Content Lead

C2

Audience Focused
- Show Personality and Connect
  - Respond to Audience
  - Post personal content in addition to news
  - Build Trust
- Understand the Platform
  - TV vs. Web
  - Different social mediums do different things
  - What is the audience willing to do?

C3

Find Balance
- Push Limits Without Leaving Audience Behind
  - Want to Innovate
  - Lack of Audience
  - Technical Barriers
- Measuring Success
  - Effort to Measure Quantitatively
  - Use of Qualitative "Gut Feel"
  - Being First as Measure of Success
- Shifting Role of the Gatekeeper
  - Interactions drive content decisions
  - Accuracy
  - Give Context