

DECIDING WHAT IS NEWS *NOW*:
THE INTERNET'S IMPACT ON LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS
EDITORIAL DECISION PROCESS

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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presented by Heather Bailey, a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to all of my family and friends that supported me through this adventure. First, thank you to my mom and dad who provided a support system that always allowed me to better myself both personally and academically. Second, I would like to thank my cousin Dr. Amy Zerba. She was my constant cheerleader who planted the seed to further my education and nurtured that seed to the bloom it is today. Plus, I love talking journalism theory with her. Third, I would like to thank Scott Andrew Fais. He continues to encourage and challenge me both personally and professionally. He was always readily available to lighten the mood when the stress levels increased. And lastly, I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my Grandma, Mary Zerba. Her love and support shaped me into the person I am today.

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INTRODUCTION

Are stories appearing in local newscasts selected because the topics are popular online? The editorial team of local newsrooms has a fairly new resource on hand, web analytics, which offers instant information as to which stories on the website are the most clicked, most shared via email and most shared via social media sites. By using these web analytics to decide which stories will be produced for broadcast, the audience which played the role of receiver is now inadvertently involved in deciding what stories or topics will appear in the broadcast. A case study conducted in 1949 analyzed how a single editor at a newspaper, over a period of one week, narrowed down his selection of wire copy stories to be published for his subscribers. The researcher found the editor only published one-tenth of those stories he had access to in those seven days. The reasons as to why certain stories were published or discarded provided insight into how subjective the story selection process is based on the person making the decisions (White, 1950).

While the case study by White focused solely on the decision-making at a newspaper, a similar process is used in story selection for a newscast. A study done in the 1970s compared the story selection process of items for newscasts, newspapers and magazines. This researcher found that several factors affected the decision making process of journalists involved with a newscast including the professional news judgments of the journalists (Gans, 1979). Gans found that the news judgments could be subjective in nature similar to the decision by the editor in White's case study. In addition to news judgment, Gans' study found the story selection process at newspapers,

magazines, and broadcast news was also impacted by various technological restraints that take place dependent on the medium of choice. A newspaper's limitation on content is based on printing space and similarly a television newscast's limitation is based on time. For example, a journalist working for a newspaper can only cover a determined amount of stories according to the publication's available space and a journalist working in a news television station can only cover stories that can fit into a predetermined length of time. Not all stories or topics can be covered, and the media consumers of the newspaper or television station are presented with the content those making the decisions deemed the most important.

Prior to new media, a consumer was informed primarily through newspapers, radio and/or television (Maier, 2010). New media, most notably the Internet, do not face the same limitation challenges that traditional media has of space and time. A news organization is limited online by how many stories their staff can post during a work shift. With the ease of news aggregation in the virtual realm, a newspaper's online site or a news station's online site can offer their audience a multitude of stories that the traditional media cannot because of their limitations. Those limitations include the length of an article written for a newspaper, or the amount of time dedicated to a topic in a newscast. The online media consumers have a plethora of topics to choose from and read, but researchers have questioned if this new media is affecting the agenda setting power of the journalists that make up the editorial teams deciding which stories or topics are covered and for what length of time and space each topic is allotted. Agenda setting is an important aspect of story selection because traditionally, the stories that are a priority to the audience are found on the front page of a newspaper or at the beginning of a

newscast. In Gans' study of newscast structure, he found that the structure was similar to a newspaper in that the lead stories are at the top and the first several sections are devoted to other important hard news topics of the day (Gans, 1979).

Importance of new study

Understanding the news selection process directly impacts the role of broadcast journalists today. A local news station's main source of income is the airtime they can sell to advertisers on their channel. The more viewers a newscast has, the more valuable the real estate to those looking to buy advertising time. While informing the audience is highly important, gaining and maintaining viewers is just as important to keep the station viable. Journalists want autonomy in their story selection, but are overseen by executives who are concerned with profit. If the corporate economy of the news organization begins to decrease, the executives may begin to insist news organizations make changes editorially to increase profits (Gans, 1979). In a study conducted on local news viewership between 1994 and 1998, average audience shares for morning, evening and late-night local newscasts dropped by at least 15 percent. In an attempt to retain viewers, stations made changes based on viewing habits by offering an earlier morning broadcast and gave viewers the news they wanted (Ault, 1999). A viewer will tune in to a newscast if he/she knows that the topics they want to know more about are going to be made available to them. Today, to gain immediate access to what an audience is interested in, those involved in the editorial process of a newscast can look at the web analytics of their website to see which stories or topics are the most popular among their audience.

In 2003, Tribune owned several newspaper and television stations and was one of the first companies to utilize SageMetrics. SageMetrics' analytics provided information

about each individual visiting their news websites (Business Editors/High-Tech Writers, 2003). Once the editorial team at Tribune television stations knew which topics are generating the most clicks, would they not put them in their newscast to guarantee more viewers? Companies such as SageMetrics offer their clients the ability to better understand what their audience interests are so their clients can generate increased profits by meeting their audience needs (Business Editors/High-Tech Writers, 2003). If the most popular stories on a news website are impacting the decision of what stories are put in a newscast, then the role of the editorial team as the sole decision maker has changed. In essence, the audience is now participating in the decision process as well. While the editor of the newspaper in the case study by White (1950) and the editors studied by Gans (1979) both were somewhat subjective, their decisions were based on news values and news judgments of trained journalists. The stories chosen by the audience on the Internet are subjective too, but will have a different sense of what stories they consider to be important.

One study by Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) compared issue importance of readers of *The New York Times* paper and online versions. They studied the effect of reading *The New York Times* over a five-day period on the consumers' idea of important issues versus those that were readers of the online version. They found newspaper readers had different impressions of what problems faced the country than their online readers, especially the importance of international affairs. The researchers attributed this finding to the exposure of those stories by the newspaper. They predicted that as the Internet allowed for more content and story choices for the consumers, they essentially would be

creating their own news environment and not subject to the agenda setting flow of information from the news media (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

A newspaper, such as *The New York Times* is more linear with its agenda setting with the most important topics being on the front page. Similarly a newscast is linear in that the most important stories will begin a newscast. A study by Maier (2010) found that newspapers and network televisions covered the same story topics as the online news sites. In the year-and-a-half long study, 60 percent of the 3,900 online stories were of the same topics as the stories covered in the newspaper, network television, cable television and radio. The priorities of those stories among the various media outlets however differed. For example the topic of the 2008 campaign ranked as the top story for web news, network television, cable television and radio while it was the second highest ranked story in that time period for the newspaper. Each media outlet had similar top stories, but were not aligned in which topics were the top priority for each (Maier, 2010). Although Maier (2010) found that the different news media covered the same topics, Althaus and Tewksbury found it impacted not only exposure, but also which issues or topics were important to the audience (Maier, 2010; Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). Newspaper readers were exposed to more public affairs and also showed more concern about international topics than their online counterparts (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). Both of these studies showed a difference in the agenda setting based on the story selection among newspapers and online, but neither directly focused on the difference between online news sites and television newscasts.

The space and time limitations newspapers and newscasts face is not as constrained as news organizations' Internet sites. Story selection is more of an issue for a

television station's newscast than it is in deciding what stories will be published on their online site and the same is true for the newspaper. However the story selection process for television is a group process, much like a committee as opposed to a newspaper where the decisions are made by a single person, the editor (Berkowitz, 1990). Journalists have to decide what is news and what is not with a consensus. Not everyone will agree, as the process is still subjective. Deciding what is important for the audience to know is a big part of the decision making for a journalist. However in the past, making story selections based on the audience interests was not common practice. In fact, during Gans' observations in a television newsroom journalists exhibited a fear of the audience. The journalists he studied felt if they considered what the audience wants, the journalistic news judgment would go to the wayside and they also feared the audience would prefer what they described as "attractive" or "cheerful" news (Gans, 1979).

By conducting interviews with local television news editorial members in various markets, information can be gathered to determine how web analytics are being used in the story selection process of local newscasts. The information collected will help determine if the editorial process has changed with the introduction of the Internet in the news process and if the audience is playing a larger role in determining what is deemed as news. By conducting interviews in various markets of varying sizes, the study should show any significant shift in the story selection process and how the role of the journalist as the gatekeeper has changed due to the Internet and the ability for those on editorial members to receive real time feedback from their audience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Story selection is most directly associated with the theory of Gatekeeping, where ideas or topics flow towards the audience and journalists play a role of gatekeeper deciding when to open and close a gate allowing or blocking stories from passing through them to the audience. Kurt Lewin is credited with creating the idea of a gatekeeping, which has since been applied to describe the process of story selection of news by journalists. News is a flowing channel of information containing several gates along the way controlled by gatekeepers. Each gatekeeper decides if the news item continues along the way until it made its way to the audience (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). Gans (1979) stated that journalists almost always have more news than they can use. This is due primarily to the limitation of time that is available in a newscast. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) and Singer (2014) agreed that traditional gatekeepers sift through endless amount of information and narrow it down into a few topics to be passed on to the audience. This process is multi-layered decision by journalists and their organizations (Kim, 2002). Much like the study by White (1950), Cassidy (2006) found that the decision making process is a repeated practice by journalists who learn to view and judge stories based on their experience and commonly held views. The decisions are also influenced by the individual journalist's personal background, their attitudes, values and beliefs. Gans (1979) determined journalists must distinguish if stories are interesting, important, or both. Can this really be determined without knowing the audience? Different people find different topics interesting or important.

As the mass communication environment continues to grow and evolve, so does the need to understand the relationship between the media and their audience. If identifying the most popular stories on a broadcast channel's website as indicated by the most clicks or the most shares is being used to decide what stories or topics are being covered in a newscast, then the audience is playing a large role in story selection, or gatekeeping. The audience makes the story popular on the website and then the editorial staff for the newscast selects the stories based on their popularity. When it comes to measuring the size of the audience and length of time spent on a news topic, news websites offer immediate results compared to the time it takes to get the same info for traditional media such as a newscast. These web analytics are considered to be objective and be measured as close as possible with what content the audience is reading or interacting with (Knobloch-Westerwick, Sharma, Hansen & Alter, 2005). In contrast, a common challenge when studying the ratings of a television station is the subjective matter in which the audience, knowing that their viewing habits are being tracked, can sometimes be influenced by what they believe others think they should or should not be watching (Knobloch-Westerwick, Sharma, Hansen & Alter, 2005).

Media roles and gatekeeping

Lazaroiu (2010) outlined three main roles the media plays in society including acting as a watchdog, agenda setter and a gatekeeper. The watchdog provides a checks and balances to the most powerful people in society in an effort to protect democracy, an agenda setter prioritizes what problems and issues the mass audience needs to be aware of, while a gatekeeper controls which information is communicated to the mass audience

(Lazaroiu, 2010). In television news, it is impossible to report on every subject matter it is exposed to and must make continual decisions as to which topics are most important and most relevant to the audience it is serving based on the amount of resources the organization has. The news organization has limitations based on its resources and time available to cover topics. To narrow down the topics, local newscast gatekeepers decide what information makes it through the gate and is seen and what doesn't make it through is not seen. A multitude of researchers have focused on this process. One of the most extensive studies was conducted by Herbert J. Gans (1979) who observed major newsrooms and conducted interviews with those responsible for making news decisions. He outlined four stages or "gates" of the gatekeeping process. The first is the story suggesters. These are primarily the reporters, but can also be a wire story or an anticipated event. The next gate is the story selector who makes final decisions as to which stories will be assigned to reporters to be covered. The third gate is the story designer who decides the angle of the story and how it will be framed. The final stage is repeating the above steps throughout the day as more stories and topics come into the newsroom (Gans, 1979). Needless to say, as story goes through several gates or individuals from story inception before it gets to the audience (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). During this process the topic may stay the same, but the story may change. Part of this is due to how the various perspectives the different gatekeepers have of the story. Reporters primarily see the story from the perspective of the source and the producer sees it from the viewpoint of the audience and as such a story can change (Gans, 1979).

A newscast has a predetermined length, which dictates how many stories and for how long a story can be covered. The news value of a story can be used as a guideline as

to which story will pass through the gate (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). The selection or rejection of stories is based on personal judgment, their news organization's restraints and socio-cultural influences (Kim, 2002). When Gans (1979) conducted his study, the ranking of story importance was based on government and other hierarchies, impact on the nation and national interests, the impact on a large number of people affected, and the story's significance for the past and the future. The journalists in his study argue that their purpose was to inform and they were opposed to sensationalism or what they called yellow journalism, which they felt, was used to attract a larger audience. People or feature stories were used to either balance out a heavy newscast that had a lot of bad or unhappy news, or because they were usually timeless they could be used as last minute replacements when time is needed to be filled in the newscast. In contrast, a study by Berkowitz (1991) found that story topics that were event-related such as press conferences were the most favorable to journalists due to the fact that these events allowed journalists to accomplish their job in the time amount they were allotted. The study also found a journalist's news judgment could be trumped by the ability to cover the story. Unanticipated events labeled breaking news trumped all others in the decision making process.

Even after the stories are selected, the decision making process is not over. Producers must decide which stories will be the lead stories at the top of the newscast and in what order the stories will follow. Just like a newspaper puts stories on its front page, newscasts followed suit and put their most important stories at the top of their newscasts. These stories that are presented as the lead stories tend to mean more in the audience perspective (Gans, 1979). Gans noted in his observation that the lead story was usually

one of importance that affected the largest amount of people. While observing one of the newsrooms he saw a top producer upset about a rival's news judgment in their lead story selection. The lead story is important to both the newscast and the audience. During his observation he found each newscast is a balance of story types both good and bad, subject matter, geographical location, demographics and political balance. Feature type stories fill the remaining pieces of the newscast and are usually social interest topics such as health pieces. Producers like to end the newscast with a story that is light and more entertaining in nature (Gans, 1979).

Gans (1979) study was conducted over 30 years ago before the invention of the Internet and at the time he noted that journalists almost always have more news than they can broadcast or print. But is that still true today with the Internet that isn't faced with the same limitations of time and space like traditional media? Today, however, stories can make it through the gate, but the audience can chose not to receive it (Singer 2014). Prior to the Internet, the only outlets in which to receive news was radio, newspaper, or television. The ability of the audience to pick topics on their own was introduced with the Internet.

Internet role in news

The audience selecting topics is a unique characteristic to the Internet that is not readily found in traditional media use. The Internet allows the reader a control of what topics they choose to read where a newspaper in contrast presents the topics in an order in which newspaper editors decide. A newspaper reader might buy their local paper to get topical news such as what could be found in the sports section, but as they doing so, they are being exposed to other topics such as those found on the front page or other sections

of the paper that are organized before sports. The stories selected, as well as where they are located, what emphasis they should be given and how much space is given to the topic in the newspaper are decisions made by the editor. There are no objective rules to determine these factors (Lippmann, 1922). As documented in the case study by White (1950) of a newspaper's editor, the decisions made in regards to story selection for a newspaper can at times be subjective and based on their prejudices and experiences in life. In contrast the Internet offers freedom from some of the limitations a newspaper faces. As far as space and length, the content could continue inevitably on the Internet. A online news webpage is not restricted to the physical space or number of pages that constrains a newspaper. In addition, a news website can feed aggregated news topics such as international news, entertainment and sports to their pages automatically whereas a newspaper requires journalists to provide content, even if it is aggregated from another source.

The same contrast is found between the Internet and the editorial team of a television newscast. Where the newspaper finds topic constraints based on physical space, the editorial team of a newscast faces time challenges. Their newscast is based on a predetermined length of time and therefore only a certain number of stories can be covered and each can only be allowed a certain amount of time. As far as news aggregation, a journalist is still needed as a resource to put the topic in the newscast. As in the comparison with the newspaper, the online news website once again does not face the same restrictions as a newscast. However, just like a newspaper puts its top stories on the front page, and a broadcaster puts its most important story as a lead, a television

station would put stories most important to their audience on the home page of their website (Chan-Olmsted & Park 2000).

Maxwell McCombs (2000) determined with the introduction of the Internet, mass communication has significantly changed due to fragmenting the audience by offering many more news options than previously available. With so many different online news websites being visited by one person, researchers hypothesized that the days of the public focused on a small number of issues would disappear. The concern was the media user would spread their attention over various online news website as well as blogs, exposing them to a multitude of topics (McCombs 2000). At one time television was considered the media giant when it came to news, but today both cable TV and the Internet have greatly fragmented the environment (Iyenger & Kinder 2010). At the time traditional media as a whole was fairly consistent in calling attention to the significant topics and issues in society as well the priority of each, which is also however the concern was the new media (the Internet) would change this responsibility, however a study by Heeter, Brown, Soffin, Stanley, and Salwen (1989) of electronic text agenda setting shows that web users still searched other news websites and not just using one source. The constant use of the online is explained because websites can be updated with new information more immediately and more often than newspapers or even television, especially in the instances of breaking news (Heeter et al., 1989).

The introduction of the Internet as a new source does not mean it replaces traditional media outlets in the gatekeeping process. Broadcast organizations these days also have online news sites, thus they are still in control to some degree in what is available to be seen online and what is not. Because of this they can still apply their

newsworthy judgment to what their audience is exposed to (Cohen, 2002). While broadcast is still a big part of media gatekeeping and still relevant in magnifying topics, it can be influenced by sources outside of their own news judgment (Graeff, Stempeck, & Zuckerman, 2014). A recent example of this is the story of the shooting of Trayvon Martin. The day after the shooting, one local television station in Orlando aired a story and one local newspaper wrote an article. Both reports lacked many of the details that became important to the story. Ten days later the story was covered in the national media as a result of a direct effort to publicize the story (Graeff et al., 2014). It was only after national attention and Internet circulation that the story became more newsworthy for the local media where the event occurred. As another example, the story of the scandal involving Monica Lewinsky and President Clinton broke on the Internet. Within 72 hours it went from *The Drudge Report* on the Internet to the headlines and newscasts. In regards to the reporting of the scandal, Mohan Sawhney an Internet Marketing expert at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Business said:

This business of letting anybody say anything seemed really hip when the Internet was brand new...but now we start to see that we have an awful lot to learn about how to make the new media work in our world without tearing apart some of our institutions that have worked for a long time (Coates, 1998, p. A-6).

The online format provides an opportunity for journalists to develop a more complex and complete story because it doesn't have the same constraints of space or length or time they may face in a newspaper or broadcast (Cohen, 2002). A recent study by Cleary and Bloom (2011) however found that of local television station, 95 percent of

the station websites featured video found in the newscast. Only four percent of the websites had video such as raw or outtakes not found in the newscast (Cleary & Bloom, 2011). This suggests the news organizations aren't taking advantage of the minimal restrictions the Internet places on their news sharing. One area that differs is the aggregation of Associated Press stories. Prior to the Internet, an editorial decision would be made in regards to the coverage of an AP story, but now with a direct feed online, the stories are automatically accessible via the website and the audience can decide to read or not read the story (Singer, 2001).

Journalists working inside a newsroom are only a fraction of those who publish news these days (Singer, 2014). The Internet also allows for the citizen journalist to conduct fact checking and hold traditional media accountable for any errors in factual information. Bloggers and citizen journalists fulfill a need in supply and demand. Stories and topics the audience wants to know about but can't get through traditional media outlets can be reported on and found fairly quickly via the bloggers and citizen journalists on the Internet (Gant, 2007). If journalists see bloggers and citizen journalists as competitors, the need to monitor what they are reporting would be inline for their behavior already occurring with competing traditional media outlets.

A study by Boczkowski and Peer (2011) found a gap between the story topic selection of journalists and what their audience felt were the stories that needed to be reported. Most notably is that more public affairs related topics are chosen by journalists than their audience (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011). Public affairs stories included news addressing politics, government, economics, business, international affairs, and "war on terror" topics. The nonpublic affairs stories that the audience chose more regularly were

those topics that included sports, crime, entertainment, technology and weather (Bockowski & Peer, 2011). If stories on a news website are not the topics the audience is looking for, they can continue to search on the web to find a site has those stories. Furthermore, if television broadcast topics match their online website stories, with the content the audience is not interested in, a decline in viewership could be predicted. In fact, the same percentage of journalists that obtain story leads from traditional news wire services get their story leads from mailing lists, email, the Internet and Usenet Newsgroups (Novack, 1998).

A “blog”, as defined by Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2014) is a “Web site on which someone writes about personal opinions, activities, and experiences”. Blogs may be defined as being personal in nature, but that doesn’t mean that the topics covered are not newsworthy or of interest to their audience. Professional journalists and the public tend to disagree on who can be defined as a journalist. In 2005, over 81 percent of professional journalists refused to accept bloggers as journalists compared to the public in which over 50 percent polled defined bloggers as such (Gant, 2007). It’s hard to argue that nontraditional news organizations on the Internet are not impacting traditional media especially when looking at breaking news. It’s common nowadays for television news viewers to see stories attributed in a newscast to *TMZ* or *The Drudge Report*. Bloggers are unique in that they operate as gatekeepers much like an editor at a traditional media organization. They can choose to discuss topics that are of interest to them or can aggregate news that support their viewpoints or beliefs (Meraz 2011).

A longitudinal study by Stempell, Hargrove, and Bernt (2000) measured the changes in media use from the year 1995 to 1999 and found a decrease in traditional

media, but not because of the Internet. In their four-year study, they documented a significant increase of those who had access to the Internet equating to almost ten times the amount of those at the beginning of the study. In the same time frame, they observed a decrease in the audience of newspapers and television. At first they thought the decrease could be attributed to the increase in the availability of the Internet, however further research showed otherwise. While there was a correlation between those who use the Internet and those who read the newspaper, they found that those who use the Internet are more likely to also read the newspaper. In addition, those with no access to the Internet were less likely to read the newspaper. They also found that those who used the Internet did not have a measurable impact on watching network news, but they did measure a loss of audience of local news although it was not significant (Stempell III et al., 2000). What the study was not able to determine, is why there was a decline in the audience for local traditional media. If newsrooms of local television are noticing a decline in viewers, they may also attribute the loss to the Internet like many of those researchers that set out to conduct these studies suspected.

The public and the press are heading in two different directions when it comes to the audience's expectations of their media. One of the roles of a journalist is to be a watchdog for the public (Lazaroiu, 2010), but a survey by Heider, McCombs, and Poindexter (2005) found the respondents were no longer interested in the journalist's role as a government watchdog. Respondents wanted journalists to offer suggestions on how to solve public issue problems. According to the study, they look more to the journalists as a tool to be used to help with their dilemmas and less concerned with the traditional roles of the media (Lazaroiu, 2010) and also longed for a better relationship (Heider et

al., 2005). The Internet does allow the audience access to newsmakers more easily than traditional media. This interaction leads them to a role in gatekeeping as well (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). Previously, access to the journalist was dependent on the source's incentives, power, ability to provide suitable information and their geographical and social proximity to the journalist (Gans, 1979). Studies conducted during the 1970s found that journalists were surprised when they received feedback from the audience, which was usually phone calls or letter. Compared to today when the journalist expects feedback because of the ease allowed by the Internet (Anderson, 2011).

The journalist and audience relationship

When Gans (1979) conducted his study, he found that at the time the journalists had little knowledge, if any about the audience. Top producers saw ratings but the journalists reporting stories did not. Furthermore, the journalists did not seem to care to know details about their audience. They felt if the story they worked on was of interest to themselves and to their managers, then it would be what their audience would want to know as well. They were not concerned with looking at audience research because they were reluctant to accept any process that would place doubt in their news judgment. Journalists were upset when they were presented with audience research that showed preference to stories they deemed low quality because the audience felt the topics were relevant to them. The journalists felt their job was to give the audience what it needs and not what it wants. Their argument was based on their feelings that the audience doesn't know what it wants because they are not out at the location where and when the journalists are covering the stories (Gans, 1979).

Traditional news media such as newspapers, radio and television are a linear form of communication by transmitting a message to an audience who receives it. Outside of specific examples, the media does not offer an opportunity of the audience to interact with the journalist or the transmitters. This situation forces the audience to be exposed to the topics or subjects selected solely by the journalists. For example, take the consumer who buys a newspaper for the stories found in the sports section. That reader is forced to see the top story on the front page, and other potential topics as they sift through searching for the section of the paper they are interested in reading. The same is true in the case study where the newspaper editor rejected stories because of the simple fact that he did not care for certain subject matters (White, 1950). Just because topics were not covered in the newspaper does not mean that the topics were not relevant to the newspaper's audience. However, it does show how subjective the story selection can be and how much control the media organizations and journalists had at that point in time in regards to informing their public audience. Today, Internet users can search for topics that interest them and are less likely to be exposed accidentally to other topics in the process such as the case of the newspaper consumer looking for the sports section.

Scott Althaus and David Tewksbury conducted various studies examining the Internet and news media from different perspectives of how they interact with each other, the agenda setting of the new media and to the behavior of the Internet newsreaders. Their study in 2000 focused on addressing the concerns that Internet users would abandon traditional news media in lieu of the newer media. They concluded that the audience chose different forms of news media to suit their different needs but also determined that for the most part, the Internet was more of a source for entertainment

than newsgathering. They predicted only a small amount of the audience would leave traditional media for Internet news sites. In fact, they found a positive correlation between online websites and newspaper readership that they could not find between the online news sites and television news (Althaus & Tewksbury 2000). While this study sounds promising as coexistence of traditional and new media, at the point of this literature review, this study is over a decade old. At the time, the Internet was still fairly new and one would have to take into account the availability of personal computers in society, the familiarity of the Internet to the audience as well as the familiarity of the Internet to the news organizations.

The Internet offers the audience more control in how they chose to inform themselves. The online news websites allows the audience to search for topics of interest, therefore taking an active role in informing themselves compared to simply receiving what the mass media was communicating to them. With the audience now searching topics, they can easily avoid other topics that do not interest them. While it may seem beneficial to the audience, not having to wade through unwanted material, they also run the risk of not being exposed to public information that is important for them to know about in their society (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002). The same occurs among groups who may not search out any information from news outlets. If they are content with the information shared with them among family and friends they will chose not to seek out any additional information from a news source. By not seeking out information through traditional media or the Internet, they run the risk of missing important information that could possibly affect them (McCombs, 2014). With less chance of exposure to other topics as it previously occurred with the traditional news, the audience runs the risk of

being under-informed in topics that relate to them. In a later study by Althaus and Tewksbury (2002), they found that with the audience having more control over their news exposure they focused on different topics than their newspaper counterparts. Because of this, each group also had different perceptions of the important issues. They also found that Internet news and how it was being delivered was altering how the news media was setting the public agenda. At the time of the study, they were unable to determine if this shift meant the online sites were empowering the audience or creating a barrier (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002).

In 2003, Tewksbury conducted a study to gain better insight into what kind of content newsreaders selected on the Internet. In contrast to the study published a year earlier with Althaus, the newsreaders topic selections in this study very closely mirrored the topics consumed in traditional media. The respondents who were online newsreaders reported going online to get international news, public affairs, sports and entertainment at the same rates that they were using traditional media to obtain information about the same subject matters (Tewksbury, 2003). This shows online newsreaders were still using traditional media and were not replacing it with their online use. If newsreaders are still using traditional media in conjunction with their online news consumption, they will still be exposed to public affairs content provided in newspapers and on radio and television. Even with the research data showing online newsreaders were still using traditional news media, the fear that the traditional media would eventually be replaced by online still existed, but it was too early in the transition to be measured. The fear was not unfounded because at the time of this study, television use had risen while newspaper reading was falling (Tewksbury, 2003). If the trend of declining awareness of public affairs issues

continues on the Internet, and newscasts select stories based on web analytics, the audience may lack exposure to important topics directly impacting them.

Taking into account dissemination of information, in the case of online news, the audience can now disseminate information outstretching the original audience the news website was targeting. The potential for the information to become viral with the help of the audience exists, and now the audience serves as a gatekeeper of the information and agenda setting for their audience. When the audience chooses whether to share or not to share the information they read online they are in essence very similar to the editor in the case study conducted by White (1950). In addition to the dissemination, the Internet also very easily allows the audience to create their own content and disseminate that to the masses, just as easily as the news organizations online (Lazaroiu, 2010). The audience picks-up as a gatekeeper where the story selectors left off. The story selectors out stories on a website, but the audience then chooses from the stories available to them in which they will read, watch online or share via their email or social media accounts to their ‘audience’ (Lee, Lewis & Powers, 2012; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

One way the audience is empowered is through the “most popular” stories feature on news websites. Based on the stories that are read the most by other readers, consumers on that site are motivated to read those same stories as it shows interest and approval from their peers. In addition to the “most popular” feature, online users can also email stories to others (Lee, 2011). Those stories emailed or shared by other means such as social media, are now reaching a greater audience than originally targeted by the news organizations. By searching for news online, the audience is avoiding the traditional gatekeepers of the older media. With gatekeepers playing such an important role of

agenda setting, not having to go through them to get information, revokes the power of the traditional media and empowers the audience (Lee, 2011). The audience moved from a passive role to an active one. Traditional media was providing information and now that audience chooses the messages they will receive (Anderson, 2011).

This newfound freedom for the audience to play a role in gatekeeping is also beneficial to newsrooms. News organizations can now see what types of stories are most popular without having to rely on focus groups or self-reports (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). A study conducted by the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute found that nine out of ten daily community newspapers receive web analytics on the length of the visit to the online site, the page view count and traffic information. Of the 529 papers studied, 41 percent of the editors received the analytical data on a daily basis (Yang, 2012). Click counts show the content the audience wants to consume (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). These website numbers are similar to traditional media newspaper's circulation figures and viewer numbers for television (MacGregor, 2007). However this electronic data or web analytic garners both a positive and a negative reaction from journalists. A study by Lowrey and Woo (2010) found editors closely monitor the audience by tracking online metrics and found managers discussed the metrics frequently in their news meetings. However, the study found that the editors used the analytics to analyze behaviors online and no correlation was found that it changed any professional practices. Managers were watching and learning from the online preferences, but not altering their news decisions based on the audience behavior (Lowrey & Woo 2010). In contrast, an ethnological study by Anderson (2011) and a study by MacGregor (2007) found the opposite to be true. The ethnological study found a shift of news practices based on

relationship changes between journalists and the audience. The web analytics provided real-time information of audience needs. Evidence was found that in cases where there was real-time data, decisions were made to either further develop the story or abandon it based on the web analytic popularity (MacGregor, 2007). Journalists showed interest in the audience interests (Anderson, 2011). A consistent trend in the various studies is that journalists are concerned with how heavily newsrooms rely on web analytics. Editors are trying to hold onto their autonomy in an effort to protect their news judgment over what the audience usually select which is “soft news”. However, researchers agree that audience analytics are here to stay and aren’t going away in the near future (Lee, Lewis & Powers, 2012).

Journalists used to have minimal interaction with the audience when choosing what the best stories were, but now the audience provides immediate information and feedback to the newsroom via the web analytics. And it’s not just the journalist that sees the information, as other online audience members can see which stories are the most popular or most shared (Singer, 2014). Journalists are fearful analytics will replace news values and question if the newsroom should be reactive to the information. Although there is concern surrounding the data, it is still seen as useful. To ignore this new information or knowledge about the audience would also be an attempt to ignore or resist change (MacGregor, 2007). Although Gans (1979) found that journalists were not interested in knowing the audience needs, a study by Berkowitz (1990) found that audience needs is a factor in deciding what is used. Web analytics were not available at the time, but they used market research along with perceived audience interests (Berkowitz, 1990).

Television news, the internet, and profits

When Gans (1979) observed the newsrooms, he noted that editorial and business departments operated separately. Even when business was bad, newsrooms were free from any business department intervention. However he did state that the corporate side could have influence on the news through its budget, major personnel decisions, their policy making and the occasional meeting with the producers or editors to stay informed on the story selection (Gans, 1979). Television serves a dual purpose of informing the audience and providing access to that audience for advertisers. Building the audience is a goal (Chan-Olmsted & Park, 2000). Revenue is increased by growing the audience. With a larger audience, the station can then charge more for advertising (Gans, 1979). Gans' study showed that neither journalists nor business departments knew how to grow their audience. They could not prove that sensationalized stories would help and felt that anchor's popularity seemed to have the most pull on the audience. Gans (1979) theorized the audience could grow by choosing the stories that would attract the audience, but that was something the newsrooms did not believe in doing.

With a decreased number of viewers for television news, the fear of profit loss motivated local broadcast stations to venture into the world of online news. Chan-Olmsted and Park (2000) found that most news stations were using their online sites as a tool to serve the audience and not as much for the advertiser. In addition to having access to news when it's convenient to them, the audience likes using news websites because of the interactivity the online world allows. By visiting a station's online website, the audience can now take part in surveys, trivia quizzes, vote on their favorite stories, take online studio tours, and interact with other audience members and members of the news

team through online chats, message boards and email (Gregson, 2008). This online interactivity has circumvented physical barriers between the audience and journalists that previously existed in traditional media (Martin, 2009).

A study by Martin (2009) looked at how agenda setting changed the landscape for the newspaper by comparing the issues in the print version, the online version and the feedback from the audience online. The researcher noted that the media organization did not post very many wire-generated stories that would include national or foreign news. He stated it was an editorial decision based on audience feedback (Martin, 2009). In essence the editor made subjective decisions based on the feedback from the audience. With the Internet providing immediate click data or web analytics to the newsrooms, editorial decisions can be made based on this information. If a story were experiencing a high click count, would the editor not want to provide more stories on the same subject? To go even further, what if a journalist's salary was directly tied to how well their story performed online?

Research opportunities

Kosicki (1993) identified several problems and opportunities for research in the media's role of agenda setting. One of the areas he felt were open for further study was focusing on news construction and how stories are selected (Kosicki, 1993). By testing where web analytics are used in newsrooms to make story selections for newscasts, this data will directly represent news construction in the broadcast realm of traditional media.

Another area offering an opportunity for more research is analyzing the space and time devoted to an issue. These factors act as an indicator of how much attention is given to the topic (Kosicki, 1993). The data collected in this study will include the placement of

the popular online stories, particularly if the popular story online is then made the lead story of the newscast. The placement of the story in the newscast is a strong indicator of the topic importance by the editorial team and can help determine the decisions made during the news construction. This reversed pyramid approach to a newscast started with the early productions of radio and carried into the television newscast in the early years (White, 1996). Although not all producers in a market will have the same lead stories in their newscasts because of differing of opinions, the most important and strongest stories will be found at the top of the newscast. Is deciding what is news today based on information provided by web analytics?

Research questions

Previous research has revealed both audience fragmentation and a decrease in the size of television news' audience. With reaching a smaller amount of the mass audience, and fear that the Internet will further fragment the audience as television news had done to the newspaper industry, broadcast newsroom managers have become increasingly concerned about profitability of their product. This fear of profitability, combined with the direct access to the audience the Internet allows, one can begin to question if there is a shift in content of a newscast away from the cultural stories on air to the stories the audience makes popular. This shift in editorial content decision making, if supported by this study, would show the audience is playing a larger role in deciding what is news for local television stations. The following research questions attempt to answer that question.

RQ1: How do the most popular stories on a local television station's website impact the story selection for a newscast?

RQ2: How do local television news stations use their most popular online stories in selecting the lead stories for its newscasts?

METHODS

Many factors come into play in the story selection process such as news judgment, news values, topics deemed breaking news, and the news audience. This study focused on if and how web analytics are used by the editorial team to decide what stories will be selected for a local newscast and if the placement of those stories in the newscast is affected by the web analytics. While the websites contain news that is aggregated from other sources, the measurements will be based on the information they have on their own website. The purpose of this study is to determine if the story selection process in deciding what is news is related to the most popular stories online. An exception to this study would need to be made for any story that is branded as 'breaking news'. Breaking news stories alter the typical story selection process. To clarify, a few definitions of terms are needed to frame the research focus. The most popular stories on a news station's website are those that are the most clicked. The majority of news stations use Chartbeat or Google Analytics to monitor their website data; a few use their content management system and one uses comScore. Which newsroom employees have access to those figures varied, from only managers only to everyone employed at the station. The most popular stories on the station's social media are those posted by the station with the most likes, shares, retweets, etc. The newscast is a regularly programmed show that is topical and news-oriented. Those with editorial control of the newscast consist of newsroom

managers such as news directors, assistant news directors or executive producers and newscast producers. While editorial is in the hands of journalists, this research looks to prove the audience is playing a bigger role in the story selection for newscasts.

Interviews

The researcher identified several local television news stations and contacted them via email explaining the study and answered questions regarding the proposed research. The various news stations were representative of three different market sizes: small, medium and large. Large-market stations were of top 20 markets, medium-market stations were in markets 21-100 and small-market stations were in markets 100-210. Market numbers were determined by the ranking published by Nielsen (<http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/public%20factsheets/tv/2014-2015%20DMA%20RANKS.pdf>) for the 2014-2015 television season. The interviews used in this study consisted of three newsroom managers from three different small markets, four newsroom managers from four different medium markets, and three newsroom managers from three different large markets. Two newscast producers were also interviewed. One producer from a large-market-station and another producer from a small-market-station. To keep the sample consistent of only news managers, the researcher did not use the information provided by the producers in the research findings. The producers' answers did however offer internal validity as their responses matched the answer of the news managers at their stations. All the interviewees are referenced by the position title and market size of their station. Neither their names, station call letters, nor affiliation is referenced. Anonymity was promised to the interviewees to protect their station's news philosophy and work product.

The researcher purposefully did not select newsrooms she had worked in prior and did not interview any news managers that previously employed the researcher. The newsroom managers worked in the following markets listed from smallest to largest: Gainesville, FL; Monroe, LA; Augusta, GA; Greenville, NC; Champaign, IL; Harrisburg, PA; Milwaukee, WI; Cleveland, Ohio; Phoenix, AZ; and Atlanta, GA. The interviews took place between January 30 and May 20, 2015. For financial reasons the interviews were conducted over the phone as opposed to in person. The interview audio was recorded while the researcher took notes and then transcribed. The duration of the interviews ranged from nine minutes to 42 minutes. All the news managers were asked the same questions, although follow-up questions were asked as the interview was conducted. Here are the standard questions news managers were asked:

1. Describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts.
2. Describe the process in the decision-making as to what are your lead stories for your newscasts.
3. Who decides what stories will broadcast?
4. Who decides what the lead stories will be for each newscast?
5. What type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories from your website?
6. How often do you receive ratings reports on your newscasts?
7. How often do you receive information about page views or unique visitors to your station's website?
8. What tools do you use to monitor ratings and website data?
9. Which employees have access to ratings reports?
10. Which employees have access to website data?

11. How do station employees find out about the rating reports?
12. How do station employees find out about page views or unique visitors to your station's website?
13. Who monitors your station's social media accounts?
14. Are ratings reports discussed in your editorial meetings and if so, to what degree?
15. Is web data discussed in your editorial meetings and if so, to what degree?

FINDINGS

When the news managers were asked about their story selection process at the start of the interviews, their responses included a set of traditional news values when evaluating stories: Is the story compelling? Does it have good visuals? Is there good sound? Does it affect a lot of people? Where is the story? Does it reflect our brand? Does the story balance the tone of the newscast? Does the story serve the community? Is it timely? Does it evoke emotion? Will it engage viewers? Is it new? And is there public interest? In those same discussions of how a news story is chosen for a newscast, some news managers included the role of popularity of online stories as a factor, while others did not mention web data until directly asked. The findings in the following research questions demonstrate how web data has become an additional component when evaluating stories, but how news stations use the data varies greatly.

RQ1: How do the most popular stories on a local television station's website impact the story selection for a newscast?

Of the newsroom managers who were interviewed for this study, all of them, regardless of the market size, indicated that what is popular online, on their website or on their social media accounts or both, is discussed during the decision making for story selection. But the role online popularity plays varies. For a couple of newsrooms, the popularity of a story was an important factor in choosing stories for newscasts. But on the opposite end, information about popular online stories discussed in and outside editorial meetings was not regularly used as way to decide which stories would be in the newscast.

A majority of those interviewed fell in the middle. For them, the popularity of a story was an additional resource for generating possible story ideas for a newscast. A news director in a medium-size market said:

What [we] do is we'll drive traffic to our website through the use of social media. So we'll put up something on our Facebook page and we're able to monitor, also on Facebook, if people are clicking on that and what kind of views we're getting on that and how many shares we're getting on Facebook and people retweeting our content. So we look at all of that and the stories that seem to trend really high are the ones that again we'll find a home in our newscasts (Anonymous News Director, March 12, 2015).

Two newsroom managers at medium-market stations further explained how web managers discussed popular online stories in their afternoon editorial meetings. One assistant news director explained how the assignment desk editor will discuss what's going on that day, reporters will pitch stories and website managers will talk about "what is hot on the Internet and what's trending" on the station's Facebook page. The group will then decide what to cover from that process. At another station, the news director said a digital media manager will talk about what's trending on social media and the station's website, but the popularity of stories is not a deciding factor.

While all the news stations monitored their web analytics, individual access to the information ranged from only newsrooms managers to all employees. All the large-market stations had a monitor in the newsroom or editorial meeting room allowing any employee at any time during the day to monitor their station's website analytics. In the

other stations, just because an employee did not have individual access they were not denied the same information. One medium market news director said it best:

There are no secrets, if somebody does not have the access, we can get them the access (Anonymous News Director, March 12, 2015).

Regardless if employees had individual access or not, some newsrooms found the information on their social media accounts was a good indicator of a web story's popularity. When asked if those individual employees who did not have direct access to the website were denied access, one small-market news director said:

They're not denied access. They can go into, if they really want to go and look and see what their story's doing, they can go and see. Honestly a lot of times you look at Facebook to see as an indicator because if a story's blowing up on Facebook it's blowing up on the website (Anonymous News Director, April 9, 2015).

When discussing online popularity, news managers would identify the various online resources available to them such as their social media accounts and their website analytics. However they consistently refer to the information jointly, lumping the online popularity information together. None made a distinction between their web analytics and their social media information as a more reliable source. When one medium-market assistant news director was asked what information they had available to them in regards to their stations website as far as what the most popular stories are, he responded:

What we have [is], what's the most read and most shared stories both on our website and our Facebook page. I mean weekdays we have those managers and they tell us what stories are ultimately trending on our website [and] also which stories are generating the most shares, the most comments on our Facebook page (Anonymous Assistant News Director, January 31, 2015).

The stations received a daily report on web data, but ratings, a traditional way of noting viewership, were not always available to stations across all market sizes. All of the news managers at the medium- and large-market stations received daily station ratings, with the exception of one, who received daily ratings but not until two weeks after the fact. A couple of smaller market stations only received daily ratings four times a year, during sweeps. The other station in a small market did not receive daily ratings.

With regard to the web data, most of the newsroom managers, regardless of market size, looked at the popularity of their online stories on a daily basis. A news director at a small market station located in a diary market, meaning viewers self report the shows they watched, described web data as “real data” and simple to understand.

Even at the three stations in large markets, where someone is dedicated to monitoring data on their online platforms, the use of popular data varies in the editorial decision-making process. For example, the morning executive producer at one large market station said with a news story that broke after her shift and subsequently aired in the remaining newscasts for the day, she generally would not air that story in her next newscast. However, she said, if the story “still got a lot of interest online, then we say we really should probably include something on this or look for some way to further that

story, because there's still so many hundreds of people in that story as we're making our decisions.”

The news managers at the other two large market stations also discuss their website's traffic and social sharing numbers in their editorial meetings, but they mostly think of popular online stories on their websites as old news, or news stories that people have already seen. Said one senior executive producer:

What's really driving the editorial meetings is what are the new stories that people bring to the table. Whereas what's on the web, what's doing well on the web, to some degree is yesterday's news. Though obviously if it has a follow-up, we might do it. But we're constantly looking for the next great story (Anonymous Senior Executive Producer, March 12, 2015).

The executive producer at another large station said, “our thinking tends to be if it's going viral online most people probably have already seen it. So it's not something we're typically going to put a reporter on.”

The medium-sized markets were similar to the large markets in that all four stations receive information about which stories are popular on their websites and their social media platforms. Similarly, these stations also have a staff person reporting online popularity numbers daily, with the exception of one station. That station received online data monthly versus daily figures and the online data was more to learn from, not necessarily to use:

The idea behind that is we want to educate our staff on what makes for a successful web story and what our viewers are interested in from a web story and

so if we determine that you know hey there's this really great image that is proving to be very attractive to our viewers, or web consumers then ok we can learn from that (Anonymous News Director, January 30, 2015).

Like the stations in the large- and medium-size markets, discussions about the popularity of online stories occur daily or "regularly" for the three smaller-market stations, but how those popular stories play role in the story selection process is almost like an afterthought at two of those stations. In other words, the shows are already stacked, but if there is a story that is doing well in likes, shares or retweets online, that might direct additional resources to a story.

A news director a small market gave the example of a story where pools at state parks were going to be closed over the summer. The station's original plan was to do a 15- to 20-second story, also called a reader. But that changed after noticing how well the story was doing on the website and social media platforms. He said:

It kind of just took off, like a wildfire on Facebook. People talking and sharing. Clicks on the website. So of course something like that, you might just do a 15- to 20-second reader in the newscast, but now it's gotten too much attention. It's worth us doing a little bit more. We knew in that instance we would use that as a measuring tool to say this story's will get some attention (Anonymous News Director, April 9, 2015).

At another small station, web analytics is used as a tool in deciding whether to give a story airtime that the news manager is on the fence about, or what he calls a "50-50"

story. With the big story, he said, he already knows it will do well on their digital platforms.

The decisions we have in the newsroom are, we can do this or we can do that. And sometimes the analytics will pull you one way. Sometimes the topic, the demographic or the fact that we haven't been in a certain portion of the market will pull us another. I mean that's what the 50-50 in me is (Anonymous News Director, April 17, 2015).

For the third small station, which has a dedicated web producer, the news manager's philosophy is to pay less attention to the popularity of stories on websites and social media and focus on serving the community and "doing your job." He tells reporters, "If you do your job well enough those people will come."

While the findings showed a range in the use of online popularity data in story selection, the role did not vary when determining what the lead story would be for a newscast.

RQ2: How do local television news stations use their most popular online stories in selecting the lead stories for its newscasts?

When asked, "Can you describe the process in decision-making as to what your lead stories would be for your newscast?", none of the 10 news managers mentioned online popularity or web analytics as a factor. But almost all of them, regardless of market size, described a lead story as one with the greatest impact on the audience and one with compelling elements, such as good video and sound. One medium-size news director summed the thought process up best with what makes a strong lead story:

We are real deliberate about selecting a lead story and assigning it with some forethought into making sure that it's compelling and dynamic and interesting and reflective of our brand. Certainly with the lead story, you want it to be something that is incredibly compelling and is interesting as it can possibly be. We want it to be a hard news piece not a feature story. And have broad appeal to our viewers.

We consider visual components. When we have strong video to use. Will there be compelling sound from people affected by the particular story (Anonymous News Director, January 30, 2015).

Two of the newsroom managers, one at a large market and one at a medium size, indicated that weather almost always leads their newscasts, but stated different reasons as to why. An executive producer at a large market station, who leads the morning show, said weather impacts all viewers so therefore the station leads with it, unless there is breaking news. She said:

It would be really hard to lead with anything but weather, because weather is the most important thing to people. And it's the one thing that unites everybody.

Everybody cares about the weather. Weather has an impact on every single person's day. So we always lead with that unless there is something so crazy that would have to trump weather (Anonymous Executive Producer, February 5, 2015).

The news director at a medium-size station explained how the geographic location of the market is the reason why weather is often the lead story.

The meteorologist always leads the editorial meetings um because we're in a very volatile part of the country here. We get hurricanes, thunderstorms, tornadoes. So we always let the meteorologist go first and they will tell us if it's a severe weather day. They will be the lead in all newscasts (Anonymous News Director, April 23, 2015).

The newsroom managers in this study defer to producers to select lead stories for their newscasts. However, on occasion, the news managers will intervene if they feel the wrong story is the lead. All of them recognized they are accountable for what airs in the newscast.

A news director at a medium-size market gave the example of how his station is the affiliate that airs the games of an N.F.L. team. The team's roster additions have been making a lot of news in the off-season, which led to discussion among the editorial team members on the importance of sports as a possible lead story.

We made a conscience decision today to add sports within our news coverage, early in our newscast, about what the [team is] doing, and that, that became a pretty, I want to say, healthy and heated discussion about the importance of sports. So what we had decided to put it in because of the fact that we air so many [team] games. So ultimately it comes down to everybody contributes, and when I say everybody I mean story ideas come from anybody in our newsroom but ultimately it comes down to the managers and the producers who are directing coverage throughout the day (Anonymous News Director, March 12, 2015).

The news managers' responses regarding a lead story showed that they have strong sense of what should be the first story in a newscast, some going as far as even the subject matter.

DISCUSSION

In the study conducted by Gans (1979), he found that the newsroom managers would provide input on the story selection for the newscasts, but the decisions were made by the show producers. Similarly, this study found this story selection process is still in practice today in the local newsrooms. While the newsroom managers identified themselves as the ultimately responsible for the stories chosen to air in the broadcast and the order in which they air, all the managers also allowed the newscast producer to make various decisions. Producers decide which stories will be in the newscast, how much time each story will be allotted, and which story will lead the newscast. News managers are the ultimate gatekeepers, but they allow producers to be gatekeepers as well.

Gatekeeping theory addresses how the media decide what topics or events to cover for their audience. With the new managers in this study indicating online popularity plays a role the story selection process, online popularity is therefore part of the gatekeeping process. Some of the news managers use online popularity to dictate if a story will be put in a newscast or not. To those managers, if it is popular online, that story finds a place in the newscast. In those newsrooms the audience is an additional gatekeeper.

These news stations story selection process for the web is less limited. The web does not hold the same restrictions of time that a newscast is bound by. If online popularity plays a role in the story selection for their newscasts, it indicates these newsrooms are posting stories to their digital media for their audience prior to the airing

of their newscast. Although they may identify as a television station, the online product is equally important as the newscast. The journalists are still the ultimate gatekeepers when choosing stories to put on their website and to put in their newscast, but the audience sometimes impact the story selection for the newscasts because the stories are posted on the web first.

In contrast, White (1950) found the gatekeeper to be the sole editor of the newspaper and the process was subjective based on that editor's perception of what stories were newsworthy. While Gans (1970) observed the editorial process was more of a group effort, much like this study did, he also noted journalists did not like to receive feedback from the audience regarding their stories. They feared audience input would affect what they considered their independent news judgment. With online popularity now being discussed in editorial meetings and newsrooms, the clear separation between the audience and the journalist as gatekeepers no longer exists.

The clear separation may not exist, but the role of a journalist as a gatekeeper when compared to the role of the audience as a gatekeeper is not of equal value when it comes to the selection of stories. Someone from the newsroom decides to put the story on the station's website or chooses to post the story on one of the station's social media platforms. The information newsroom managers are looking at to determine a story's online popularity is based on information that has already made its way through a gatekeeper that has determined to post it on a digital platform. More stories might be available to the audience to choose from on the station's website than the station's social media pages, but the newsroom managers did not make a distinction as to their website or their social media as a more reliable source. When looking at online popularity the flow

of the story seems to originate with a journalist, who can be a reporter, website manager, or another newsroom employee, who decides to put the story online. The audience in their gatekeeping role will choose whether to click on the story online, then will choose whether to share the story via email or on their social media accounts. The newsrooms then receive information such as how many people have clicked on a story, how many times that story has been shared or retweeted, etc. This online information received is used to judge a story's popularity. The gatekeepers responsible for constructing a newscast in the various newsrooms use the popularity information differently during the story selection process. As Shoemaker and Vos (2009) noted, the story goes through several gates or individuals from the start to where it ends with the audience.

All of the news managers interviewed mentioned using online popularity in the story selection process and used it in discussion. But not all of them indicated how it was used. With the exception of a couple news managers that said if it is popular online it goes in their newscasts, online popularity is discussed, but there was no clear indicator on how that information was used when making story decisions. It seemed the information was used as more of a tool to bring stories to the discussion where traditional news values were then applied. For these newsrooms, what is popular on their website or what is popular on social media, is a resource to find stories to bring into the editorial meeting, but not necessarily allotted time in a newscast. It is important to note, none of the news managers in the sample quantified what the threshold is for a story to be popular online. Popularity could be different day to day or relative to the other stories available online that day, that week or at a certain time when the data is acquired.

In addition to the identification of the role of the audience as a gatekeeper, this study also found a story's attributes could be gatekeeping factors used to determine if a story will be placed in a newscast. One of the factors taken into consideration is the aesthetics of the story. News managers want to know if they have good video or good sound that can be used. Another factor is the geography of the story. News managers want to know how many people are affected by the story as well as the geographical location of the story. For example, if the story occurs in a geographical location of the viewing audience where they have no other story pitches, the decision would be to include the story in the newscast so news relevant to that area is included. Geographical location as a gatekeeping factor could be considered another way the audience plays a role in the decision making, albeit indirectly. Regardless of online popularity, of the managers interviewed in this study, audience interest is a factor when determining which stories to pursue for a newscast. During the story selection process questions are asked if the story pitched serves the community, if it engages viewers, or if it will evoke emotion. These attributes focused on audience interest are applied to all the stories pitched, not just those stories generated by online popularity. This audience interest is another layer of gatekeeping which is in contrast to the earlier studies by Gans (1979) and White (1950), but similar to the thoughts found in the article by Ault (1999) where stations give viewers the news they wanted in an earlier morning broadcast.

This study also found when it came to deciding which stories would be lead stories for a newscast online popularity did not play a part in the process. When deciding what makes a lead story, no mention was made as to where the story originated, such as popularity online or web data, as a factor. The focus was placed more on the story being

the one that has the greatest impact on the audience and also had compelling elements such as good visuals and good sound.

A geographical factor also was mentioned at a couple of the stations when determining the lead story. For one station, the geographical location of the station itself in an area prone to severe weather events, will always lead their newscast with weather related stories when there is an item to mention. Weather in this viewing area will have the greatest impact on their viewers, therefore it's the lead story. Another newsroom manager also leads with weather almost daily for the reason that it has the greatest impact on all of their viewers, regardless if there is a weather event or not. The consistent theme when selecting the lead story across all the newsrooms in this study is they know what is the lead. For all of them, it's the story that has the greatest impact on their audience. The responses in this study support Cassidy (2006) in that the journalists learn the decision making process by repeated practice and commonly held views. For a broadcast, producers are making these decisions every day for each of their newscasts.

With online popularity playing a role in the story selection process, it was odd not one newsroom manager mentioned it when asked about the lead story. One explanation is the online popularity could have already be used in the decision making when deciding whether to cover a story and does not come into effect when choosing lead stories or which ones will follow. This suggests the lead story decision is just another gate the story must travel through before reaching the audience. Another possibility could be the order in which the questions were asked of the news managers. After they were asked about the story selection process, and popular stories online were mentioned as a factor at that point, they did not mention it as a factor again when asked about the lead story process.

They could have felt it was repetitive since they had mentioned it in the previous question. Online popularity might be one gate the story passes through, but not again when determining the lead. It is important to note, breaking news was not included in this study when discussing both story selection and decisions on a broadcast's lead story. Berkowitz (1991) found when breaking news occurs, the usual steps in the decision-making process changes to accommodate this unplanned story or event. Therefore in an attempt to focus on the decision-making, breaking news was excluded.

The different newsrooms in this study identified different programs used to measure their web analytics including Chartbeat, Google Analytics, comScore, or a function of their Content Management System (CMS). Some stations displayed the web analytics on a monitor in their newsrooms, others employees had access to it, but at some only newsroom managers were able to access the information. One would presume that a newsroom that had a monitor allowing access to all employees would be more likely to use the web analytics when making story selections. In contrary, two of the three large market stations, which had these monitors, did not rely heavily on the web analytics. The two news managers felt if it was popular online, the audience was already aware of the story and it was old news. They would on rare occasion consider a follow-up or another angle of the story if it tracked well online.

Whether the web data was used daily or available to all employees, the consensus was social media information was easier to understand. In those newsrooms where they have no monitor, or a specific person whose job it is to monitor website data, they found social media was a good tool to gauge popularity and easy to understand. Social media platforms such as Facebook allow any newsroom employee to see how many times a

story is shared, commented on or liked. Similarly, Twitter allows employees to see how many times a post is retweeted, liked or mentioned. When the audience chooses to comment, like, share, retweet, etc. they are acting much like the editor White (1950) featured. They are gatekeepers deciding which information to share with their audience on their social media sites. When newsroom managers were asked about online popularity, social media platforms were organically introduced as a way to see if a story was doing well online. They are looking at the information, but once again there's not a clear threshold of popularity. No indication of how many likes, comments, or shares equal online popularity. This seems to be another example of the journalists developing a judgment by repeating the process and developing a sense of popularity through that process. This in turn impacts the individual's news judgment when acting as a gatekeeper for their broadcast.

In an effort to see if ratings are used during story selection, one news manager compared the web data to traditional ratings reports. In that comparison he identified web data as a more reliable resource than ratings. Web data is immediate compared to ratings which vary in their availability from only during sweeps periods to one a day. This study may have inadvertently shown that web data is a new way to measure success, especially for those stations that do not receive daily ratings or in those markets that rely on diaries which could be altered by the audience in an attempt to please the researcher.

Applying web analytic information to newscasts

How can a newsroom utilize the findings of this study? A news organization cannot be successful without knowing their audience and their interests. If a newscast is produced containing stories the audience is not interested in, they are less likely to watch,

directly impacting the station's profitability. Prior to web data, newsrooms obtained ratings reports indicating which newscasts were successful based on viewership. Similar to ratings, web analytics is a way to gain pertinent information on the audience. All the newsrooms in this study have access to some form of web data whether provided by their CMS, Chartbeat, comScore or Google Analytics. News managers should use this web data during story selection for their newscasts. If a story is popular online, it is more likely that audience will watch the newscast to see more on that topic. First, find a place in the newscast for the story. Follow this by teasing the newscast on the online sites or social media where the story is trending. Second, consider making it the lead story. The lead in a newscast is generally chosen to grab the viewer's attention. What better way to grab their attention, than by starting the newscast with a story that is resonating with the audience online? Third, if the story will not work as a lead, it could be placed later in the broadcast and teased earlier in the show. Use the teases to hold the audience's attention throughout the broadcast.

Web analytics is more than just what story is popular online or trending on social media. The analytic programs also offer information on who the online audience is such as demographic information, where they are geographically, is this the first time they are visiting the site and how much time they spend on the website. Newsroom employees that have access to the website data should be trained in using these programs so they can gain a better understanding of their audience and the community they are trying to serve. The information is available through these applications, but journalists need to be properly trained in how to read and interpret the information beyond what stories are popular online.

Limitations

The news managers interviewed combined web analytics with the information from their social media platforms. One of the limitations of this study is the interviewees may not have made the distinction of popular stories on their website, stories they wrote, versus stories that were trending online overall. The lines kept blurring throughout the interview. The study was focused on information available to them on their own website and not most popular stories trending at a national news organization. It is also possible that a news station might have online stories aggregated from other stations' websites that are owned by the same media company. Stories originating in other markets, that are aggregated could also have click counts based on the other locations that also have the story on their website. The possibility exists that those stories could have more clicks because the potential audience is larger than other stories only available on the one local website.

Another limitation related to this, was the reference to social media popularity. While they were asked about stories popular on their station's social media platforms, it was not clear if they only considered stories that were popular on their social media platforms or if they referred to stories that trended on social media overall. Both Facebook and Twitter offer a listing of stories or topics that are trending on their respective platforms. These lists are generated independently by the social media platforms and do not directly reflect what is popular on the station's social media page.

News managers responsible for content for different newscasts could impact the results of this study. Stories selected for a morning newscasts, may not be the same type of content that would be selected for a late-night newscast. Being responsible for the

content of a particular newscast could also impact the days and hours the news managers work. For example a morning executive producer would start their shift the night before, so when determining what stories to select for the broadcast, they may not have as much activity on their website or social media platforms as a manager overseeing the story selection for an early evening newscast. The same would be true for a news manager of a late-night newscast. Their story selection meeting would take place later in the afternoon with an opportunity of more online data to consider.

This study sampled newsrooms across small, medium and large markets in attempt to show results are not specific to market size. As result, the study does not take into account that smaller markets may have smaller budgets and less resources such as dedicated web staff to monitor social media and web analytics. Not having similar resources can directly impact how much digital platform information is available and how often it is checked prior to the story selection for the newscast. Although the differences were not wholly tied to the market size, this could explain some of the differences in the data across various market sizes. By having various markets, none of the newsroom managers were of the same market/city. News judgment on what stories are newsworthy could be impacted by the market in which the stations serve. Some markets could have audiences that are more active online and/or social media offering more data that can be used during the story selection process.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to determine if the audience is playing a role in the story selection process for newscasts due to the Internet and therefore changing the journalist's gatekeeping role. The most significant finding of this study is online popularity plays some role in the story selection process for newscasts. White (1950) noted the story selection process for the editor of a newspaper was subjective and independent of the audience. Gans (1979) found in his study the story selection process to be a group effort by the broadcasters, but based on news judgment independent of any audience influence. The findings in this study were similar to the ethnography conducted by Anderson (2011) which noted the impact of online popularity in the newspaper newsrooms observed in Philadelphia.

With the addition of audience input, the question is raised if the news value of the newscast has shifted. It is true the Internet has allowed newsrooms to gain audience feedback quicker and easier. But does access mean you have to utilize the information? The editorial managers 50 years ago could get audience input on their newscasts, but chose to keep a separation from their audience and the editorial decisions made in their newsrooms. With the audience now involved to some degree, the journalist of today not only needs to develop a good news judgment as a gatekeeper, but also needs to know their audience's interests.

Web analytics and social media can help journalists get to know their audience, and it can help determine what stories to put in a newscast, but the information can also help determine what stories should be put on their website and social media platforms. If a newsroom identifies the demographics of their website, they can gear specific stories and topics to their websites and do the same with their various social media platforms.

The research in this thesis is a pilot study for a larger study. Only ten stations in ten markets were interviewed out of the 210 markets in the United States. A larger sample would provide a more full picture of how web data and social media are used in the story selection for newscasts. The study could also be replicated with network broadcasters to see if similar processes occur during their story selection process. Looking at 24-hour news stations and their story selection process with having more hours to fill, would be an interesting comparison as well to see if the audience plays a similar, expanded, or smaller role in story selection. If a similar study was conducted a few years from now, it would be an interesting comparison to see if more stations decide popular online stories must have a place in the newscast, or if online popularity is used less in the editorial meetings.

An additional study that would be complimentary to this one, is a look at the story selection process for stories chosen to be published on the website. While the website can accommodate more stories than a broadcast, not every story is published or aggregated from another news site. Do similar news values apply when journalists make those story selections?

Another interesting point that surfaced during this research was the use of the information from the website analytics and social media versus the traditional ratings

system. For a majority of the stations interviewed, the managers more regularly received the web analytics and social media information and noted that information was easier to understand and digest. Ratings are the traditional way stations measure their success. A new study could be focused on whether web analytics is a new way to measure success and whether ratings may become an outdated measurement.

While broadcasters are still the main gatekeepers when it comes to story selection, the role of the audience has shifted. They now not only receive the information broadcasted to them, but also provide direct feedback to the newsrooms through the website and social media. Any shift in journalism practices warrants more research so we can gain a better understanding of an evolving institution. If a longitudinal study showed using popular stories online in a newscast increased the success of a station, more stations would adopt that strategy. At this point, most newsrooms are still experimenting with how to use the information they have and how much of it to use in their editorial decisions.

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Appendix

The following are the transcribed interviews of the newsroom managers in this study.

Anonymous News Director, Phone Interview. January 30, 2015

Researcher: ok, my first question is, could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

News Director: yes, uh. So, our, we have an assignment editor, who is also our assistant news director. He is responsible for fielding all of the, uh incoming um, story opportunities. Uh, whether they're submitted via a telephone call. Um email, social media post, snail mail letter, anything. He coordinates those things together. Puts together a daybook. We meet at 10 a.m each day. And during that meeting uh the first thing we do is entertain story pitches from our reporting staff, producer staff. Um, balance those then into [name], er our Assistant News Director's daybook uh and make a determination on what the um the best stories to cover for that day might be. Um, that's at 10 a.m. That is geared largely toward our five and six o'clock newscasts. We meet together again as a team at 2 p.m. um, go through a similar process uh, identifying um stories that may be appropriate for our 10 p.m. newscast and it's the same general process, but with a different batch of uh reporters and uh stories that have emerged throughout the day.

R: ok. Can you describe the process in the decision-making as to what your lead stories will be for your newscasts?

ND: Well, we are real deliberate about uh selecting a lead story. Um and assigning it with uh you know some forethought into making sure that it's um compelling and dynamic and interesting and in um reflective of our brand. Uh certainly with the lead story you want it to be something that is um uh incredibly compelling, uh is interesting as it can possibly be, uh we want it to be uh you know hard news piece not a, uh feature story. Um have broad appeal uh to our viewers. We consider, um you know um visual, visual components. Uh, you know we're when we have strong video to, to uh use, will there be compelling sound uh from people affected by the particular story. What types of um format should we be looking at in terms of uh you know vo/sot versus package. Uh live uh live considerations. What might we do to make it a compelling live shot, uh those types of things?

R: ok. And who decides what stories will broadcast?

ND: Um at the end of the day, I mean eh, truly it's a team decision. We brainstorm. We um share our um you know our personal judgments and considerations. At the end of the day I'd say it's a combination of me, when I'm in the room, as well as our assistant news

director and assignment editor when he's uh, he's always in the room. So consistently it's him. When I'm able to make those meetings, um certainly my voice is um given additional consideration.

R: ok. And who decides what the lead stories would be for each newscast?

ND: The same. Uh the producers are in that meeting and and they generally, you know we generally group think it. Um to the point where we're all on the same page. Um but you know [name], our, our assistant news director leads that meeting and so and the end of the day it probably falls onto his um his scope.

R: ok. Uh, what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as you know, what the most popular stories are or what the most emailed stories are for your website?

ND: uh, we do monitor web matrix reasonably closely. Um, usually it's more on a month to month um reporting uh scale. So we don't, we look at the metrics of our webpage and determine which pieces got the most hits and the most traffic and um generated the most uh action. Uh but we will certainly look back month to month and determine uh you know what types of things are generating response from our viewers. What types of things are um very invitational in terms of you know clicking on them. Um, monitoring traffic flow and you know who's coming in, where they're coming from and uh what they're doing while they're on our site.

R: ok. Uh, how often do you receive ratings reports for your newscasts?

ND: Newscasts? Um we subscribe to a program called Rentrak. And Rentrak is uh online database that is ever-present so any time I'm uh interested to know how our newscast are um connecting, I can log into Rentrak and look.

R: And how often..

ND: So it's not a reporting process. It's always there.

R: ok. How often do you receive information about pay, page views or unique visitors to your station's website?

ND: Um..It's always there as well. I would say we're, we're deliberate about working it into our kinda our monthly reporting mechanisms. Um so even though it's it's and ongoing data flow, um we're cognoscente of um examining it once a month.

R: ok and so what tools do you use to monitor the ratings and website data?

ND: uh the ratings and the traffic on the website. Is that what you said?

R: Yeah, I'm thinking the question, the program that you use to do the, the ratings for the newscast, are there any tools that you use to do the website data, or is that something that's built into like the CMS that you have, or..

ND: Yeah, it's built into the CMS, um it's uh you know, it, it we use a program called Energize Media. I think it's actually a subsidiary company of our parent company [name]. And we can you know basically just set up a reporting mechanism to track the number of um hits, individual stories received, um the number of visitors, the website as a whole has received. The number of unique visitors. Those visitors who have um, you know come to our page. How many things they clicked on and and what um you know how long they lasted on our page. Uh where they came from. So its uh from a social media post that um that uh lists a the visit to our website we can tell if it's coming from Facebook or from Twitter um or if its from something else all together.

R: ok. And which employees in the station have access to ratings reports?

ND: Um, the management team. So myself, and our general manager our director of sales and um our, our creative services/promotions director and uh I thinks that's it. It's mostly upper level station management.

R: um ok, and which, um employees have access to the website data?

ND: Hmm. That's a good question. I uh. I uh believe more uh people have access to that data information that data than uh TV ratings. Um again because I think it's a function of our CMS. No largely it's, we do have a Internet um you know and Emedia uh coordinator uh who's probably a little more responsible for the um you know looking through those reports and bringing things of, of interest to our attention. Um so I think more people have access to it, but I think fewer people actually stare at it.

R: ok, then I know you said like the management usually are, are the ones in your station that get the uh ratings and you know maybe a few more people with the website data, do you, do you then in turn share those with the rest of the employees or does it stay more with the managerial team?

ND: We handle that on a case-by-case basis. I um you know we don't, we don't routinely share that information with the full staff, however if there's um a breaking news situation uh that elicits a whole lot of traffic or you know a weather situation for example when there's a huge weather uh issue that, that drives a lot of people to our website, we'll share that information. The, the idea behind that is we want to educate our staff on what makes for a successful web story and what our viewers are interested in a web from a web story and so if we determine that you know hey there's this really great image that is um you know proving to be very attractive to our viewers, or web, web consumers then ok we can learn from that. We can say let's, let's keep the visual nature of our medium in mind. Uh or if it's the breaking news situation we want to kinda showcase to our staff how a powerful tool breaking news is to establish our brand and get emergency

information out to the public. And then we can kinda trump it that a way a little bit and uh educate our staff on best practices.

R: Ok, so you're not, just to clarify, you don't post the ratings anywhere in the newsroom or something like that?

ND: That's correct.

R: ok. Um then uh who monitors your station's social media accounts?

ND: um largely it's our assistant news director as well as the same fella who runs the assignment desk. Um he keeps a pretty close watch on it. And uh engages with our social media uh people.

Anonymous Assistant News Director. Phone Interview. January 31, 2015.

Researcher: ok, Ah could you describe for me the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts.

Assistant News Director: Ah, sure. Um, we have an editorial meeting, um two of them. One in the morning. One in the afternoon. And in that meeting um the assignment desk editor will talk about what's going on. Um Reporters will pitch stories. And we will also hear about what uh is hot on the Internet and uh what's how uh trending on our page. What's trending on our Facebook page? Um and that's uh then we decides what to cover from, from that process.

R: ok. And then can you describe the process in uh decision-making as far as what uh your lead stories will be for each newscasts?

AND: Um, Once those, well as the assistant news director, I'll say this. Once we discuss the stories we will have a kind of a split meeting and we will discuss what's the lead in each time period. So then we kind of assign the leads. Um. For example. Uh we do an hour at ten o'clock. So after we discuss what stories we are going to cover uh, the reporters will leave, the rest will leave and I will, I'll have a separate split meeting with the producers and where we will actually uh strategize what to put where, uh for example at 10, 10:15, 10:30 and 10:45. And from there is where we kinda discuss what's our lead. Does that make any sense?

R: Yeah. Absolutley. So if you had to pick, who decides what what stories will broadcast if it was a responsibility of you know someone in the news station? Who would that kinda lie on?

AND: Uh what stories we're gonna broadcast?

R: yeah. Once you decide..

AND: Probably. I would say the news managers. I mean, I, you know I'm night side and I'm... Our News Director will step in, but a lot of times it's the news managers, our managing editor and our, our EP's uh in the morning and during the day. And then me at night.

R: ok. And then

AND: The news managers. Go ahead.

R: Yeah and who decides the lead stories?

AND: Um.

R: I guess you said it's in your side meeting...

AND: Yeah in the side meeting, but I would say it's ultimately the decision comes down to the news managers.

R: ok. Uh, what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's uh website as far as what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories are for your website?

AND: Uh, what we have, what's the most read and most shared stories both on our website and our Facebook page. I mean weekdays we have the uh those managers are in the and they tell us what stories are trending, ultimately trending on our website. Also which stories are generating the most shares, the most comments on our Facebook page?

R: Are those managers, are you saying are website managers or are those more of like the editorial managers?

AND: Those are the website managers.

R: Ok, so they bring that information to those meetings?

AND: Yes they do.

R: Um and, how often do you receive uh the traditional ratings reports on your newscasts?

AND: Uh we get traditional, uh household ratings every day. Uh at at at this station. I do. Uh in [City] we got household ratings and demos every day. We don't get the demos until the end of the month.

R: ok. How often do you receive information about page views or unique visitors?

AND: Uh daily.

R: Daily. Ok. And what tools do you use to monitor the ratings and website data?

AND: um. I don't know the specific kind of tools. I know they're up, they're on, we can watch them in a monitor in real time.

R: Yeah

AND: Does that make sense?

R: Yeah, is that monitor, like, like in your office or like do you guys have that um..

AND: It's in the newsroom.

R: Ok so..

AND: We, we, we yeah we also do um uh notificational works, on your smart phone.

R: ok

AND: You know what I mean? Push this notification. Push this. Because we'll do that on big stories. And you can, you know for example once you do that, you can watch the numbers pop in n mobile and on, on the website. So we have those separated. You can watch the mobile hits in real time and the website hits in real time. Unique visitors

R: Is that for, and is that for your staff or is that for viewers?

AND: Staff.

R: Staff. Ok.

AND: The viewers don't see.

R: So they actually get notifications to their smart phones, the staff?

AND: Yeah the staff. Yeah we're we're same with the viewer. I mean we're all just you know downloaded our app. Our [Call Letters] app. And, um obviously all of us have push notifications on in the settings. So we always get the news alerts that are pushed through the app.

R: Ok.

AND: Does that make sense?

R: Yeah I was looking like uh, I was thinking more like in the ratings reports you might, some stations might post ratings reports, are in a break room or in a newsroom. And So I was just wondering like if you guys had something similar to that as far as to website data that like producers or other you know people in the, in the newsroom can see you know, uh numbers rising on a particular story.

AND: They do. They can in the newsroom see it. In real time.

R: ok

AND: And it's posted, the data is posted there in one of the monitors. Everyone can see it in real time.

R: ok. So, um I would say which employees have access to like ratings reports. Who would those employees be? The title wise.

AND: um. The news managers. You know what, I think the news producers see them as well.

R: ok

AND: I know our ten o'clock sees them and he's not a news manager.

R: ok. Um and which employees have access to that website data you were talking about?

AND: All of them. All of the newsroom employees do. Yeah.

R: Ok, And how do, how do the employees find out about the ratings reports?

AND: How does the station found out about them?

R: Oh, no, no like how do your employees find out about the ratings? What's your way of, um of them, is it like emailed them or?

AND: Yeah, they're emailed out every morning. In an excel spreadsheet.

R: ok. And um who monitors your station's social media account?

AND: Ah, our website managers, and everyone. Um I'm looking at our Facebook page all the time and monitoring twitter and what not.

R: So would uh producers have the same access to see like, if a story is getting a lot of comments or isn't getting a lot of comments?

AND: Yeah. Yes.

R: So they have the same access to it as you do.

AND: Our producers? Yes they do.

Anonymous Executive Producer. Phone Interview. February 5, 2015.

Researcher: ok, Ah first up could you describe for me the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

Executive Producer: Hmm. Ok. Well, I'm an overnight executive producer so our process is a little bit different than the dayside process. Want me to talk about what I do, or what a typical shift would be like?

R: Uh, you can talk to the effect of what you do then, you know I'm sure if you, yeah

EP: ok. Sure. So um, so our, we start planning like the um newscast 24 hours in advance. So, I start by when it comes to actually picking the stories, I mean it's really a group process. I mean we all kinda come to the table with different story ideas, um that we see out in the community and of course with social media, things that we have seen on Facebook, on Twitter, on um online. It's funny because even though most of our stuff comes from you know seriously from legitimate news sources, we usually see it first on Twitter or Facebook. And that's how what leads us to those sites because social media's a great tool to have aggregate all of the different websites in, in one place. Uh so we start planning our stories a day in advance and send out a note before I leave which I like to send out a note where I'm talking about what's, what's going to be happening the day before. We look at um reporters stories which have more stories which are better storytelling stories that can actually tell a story and engage viewers. We look at um the big sports stories obviously, um and then actually we even have in our notes..um sorry about that. In our note we even have a little thing that says social media, like what can we do to engage viewers, um in the morning um story in the newscast. So different stories that we'll find throughout the week that we save uh you know we call them like talker stories that will generate buzz and feedback online. Throughout our morning show. But that's kinda how we pick the stories. I mean uh yeah everybody has different ideas and so you know we talk about that but uh *{inaudible}*

R: You mentioned everyone comes to the table with their ideas and stuff, can you kinda describe who is at that table, like who's in that meeting.. role wise?

EP: Oh yeah, so we meet once a week as far cause we're the morning show we don't have the luxury of meeting every single day. Since everybody's on different shifts. So once a week we come together, we meet and it's uh it's actually the entire team. It's um I'm the executive producer, we have three other producers, we have four reporters, two anchors um even directors, editors and production assistants all come to the meetings where we generate a lot of our story ideas. Um and then I work one on one with the reporters and the anchors to kinda develop those stories throughout the week and of

course come up with other story ideas together. Um, so that's pretty much everyone there. I kinda have the final say on what stories we do or don't do, but I mean it kinda goes me and then the producers and then the reporters and the anchors. So the reporters obviously they pick um the stories that aren't part of kinda they pre-planning. They pick more of the day-to-day stories. And so they're always looking to find unique stories that we haven't told yet.

R:ok

EP: So that's more of the day-to-day thing.

R: Ok, then what, what's the process in decide in decision making as to what your lead stories would be for your newscast?

EP: Um, Well obviously we're breaking news first. That's our mentality for everything. So if it's breaking news, now I do the morning show so it would be really hard to lead with anything but weather, because weather is the most important thing to people. And it's the one thing that unites everybody. Everybody cares about the weather. Weather has an impact on every single person's day. So um we always lead with that unless there is something so crazy that would have to trump weather. {chuckle}

R: yeah

EP: So those are the days you go, oh man that was a big story. You know?

R: Right.

EP: So, um. We um. That's how we decide the top story, but I mean the other things that we look at, we have a um, an app and a website we go to. It's called Chartbeat and that's what uh shows us what's really popular online, how many people are in a story at that time. What's the top story, so for us working an overnight shift, it's always interesting you know something happens at 10 a.m. today typically we wouldn't feel like that was newsworthy to put in a show tomorrow because it's older, you know, it's already been in all the evening shows and the late night shows. But, if it's still got a lot of interest online, then we say uh we really should probably include something on this or look for some way to further that story. Because there's still so many, you know hundreds of people in that story at as we're you know making our decisions.

R: Gotcha.

EP: So that's a tool that we used to in uh plus you know if it's a good story, it's a good story.

R: Right. I gotcha. Um and you said as an EP, would you say you're the one who would decide which stories ultimately will be broadcast?

EP: Um yeah, me along with the producers. Yes. But I would have the final say. I would be the person, I mean on a more typical shift it would be like a managing editor or a news director, but cause I'm the morning show I'm kinda the last person so I would say, no we're not running that and we have those discussions more um I have to make decisions more when it comes to uh what we're showing on the air as far as video and you know when it comes to to being gruesome or is it too gross for the morning show uh than it has to do with actually stories because you know we have a really good team so there's very rarely a story that anybody wants to run that I have to ax.

R: ok. And then when you're when you're coming.. I know you said you lead with weather you know you have, have to have a top story after that. Would you say that as executive producer, you're the one that ultimately decides or do you leave that to producers? How does that process work?

EP: Um so well, ok after I send out the note the night, the day before I send out another note um before I get into work so around 11 p.m. or 11:30 p.m I send out a note kinda of highlighting what, who will be working on what and so typically we have a very clear lead. I can't say that we have too many conversations to what we're leading with because they're so over night we don't have as much breaking news as the other markets do um, so if it's breaking that would go first. But after that it's pretty easy to tell what the top story would be. I guess. After our assignments as to which reporters are going to work on what. You know.

R: ok

EP: Um but then I have another meeting with the producers when I get in around 1 a.m. and that's where we kinda has out here's what we're gonna lead with and you know there are times where we lead with national, national news obviously like um the other day the plane that crashed into ah..it hit the bridge before landing in the water actually that was international in uh Taiwan. You know that video came out overnight so that was the newest and most interesting thing that we could have on our air. So, yeah we lead with that rather than a local story.

R: ok, um, what..what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as what's the most popular stories are or you know what are the most emailed stories for your website? Do you have that kind of information available?

EP: Yeah so that uh the app we call Chartbeat

R: ok

EP: So that tells us. In a 24-hour span what the top story is. As well as what the most popular story is at that minute.

R: ok

EP: It tells us how many people are online, how long they spend on a story um as far as emailed out I don't think it has that, I don't typically look at that, but I do look at that when it comes to Facebook as far as shared you know. That's an easy gauge because you can easily see how many people have shared something.

R: ok And would you say that you like, when you see something that is being shared a lot that you take into account to maybe try to advance that story since your viewers are talking about it?

EP: Yeah definitely because for morning news, specifically, we look at those, you know we're always trying to have new information and actually that goes for all the newscasts. I shouldn't just say the morning. Because you want the newest, the newer information, the breaking news details and so you know in the morning it's a great way to top off a story that might be old to say hey this story's been trending all night on uh our website or overnight you know 500 hundred people shared this story. You know. And it gauges how, how good of a story it is. I mean a lot of times the most shared story in the morning show is can be a story about vaccines for example. And so we share that story um on our website and all of a sudden there's 300 comments. So we've shared that all through the morning, but then I go to the morning meeting and say hey guys this is generating a lot of buzz. There's 300 comments, we should further this for later in the day. And then we'll do that.

R: Ok

EP: Because of the comments that we've received or the you know the more new how many people have reacted to that story.

R: With that app, what kind besides the analytics on your website is that something that um you have to have the app, like the employees have to have that app or do you like have a monitor somewhere in the newsroom?

EP: Yeah I have, we have a really big monitor outside of the um News Director's office and that's kinda on the wall with all the TVs that we have you know with all the different stations, we have a one that has uh that has a uh Chartbeat for our analytics for the website. We have one that's like um uh social media desk..what's that called. It combines all the twitter pages from all the different stations, uh I have it on my computer too. I forget what it's called. I'm sorry.

R: Like a Hootsuite kind of thing?

EP: Yeah. TweetDeck. TweetDeck, That's what it is. Yeah and so we have that up as well as our Facebook page and our website up all the time. On the big monitors.

R: So any employee that walks through that newsroom has access to that data, it's not just something that newsroom managers have.

EP: Nope. Anybody does. And then we've all been encouraged to download that app on our phones as well.

R: Ok. And then compared to that, how often do you receive like the standard Nielsen rating report?

EP: Every day.

R: Every day. And is that posted anywhere or sent out? Or the Nielsen Ratings?

EP: Yeah, it's sent out through an email blast. Every day to all um, to everyone in the whole building and then um then we also have a research analyst who kinda takes them numbers and then sends out another email more, I guess user friendly email, bar charts. Everything that you could want to know about that day's ratings.

R: So the research analyst kinda breaks down the Nielsen ratings for the, you guys?

EP: Yes.

R: ok. Um now who monitors...

EP: He does more of like the trends.

R: The trends

EP: You know where, right now we're in a February book, so today I got where we stand compared to last year and competitively.

R: ok. How, um who monitors your station's social media accounts?

EP: Our social media sites, or accounts, I'm sorry what?

R: Yeah, like if, like you said you see your shares and your views on Facebook or Twitter, so who monitors that? Do you all play an active role, it kinda sounds like?

EP: Yeah we all definitely play an active role. You know all of the I think all of the producers and all of the anchors all can post ads as [Station Name]. You know what I mean?

R: Gotcha

EP: We all have access. We can all post on our website and check all of the data received from that. Um and then, I'm trying to think. I'm almost positive that anyone that asks for it could get it you know what I mean. They pretty much want everyone on there sharing and posting. And then you know we have social media producers who are kinda

responsible you know ranking the stories, scheduling other stories, deleting comments that may not be appropriate.

R: Gotcha. Um in those editorial meeting you guys have, would you say the ratings reports are discussed?

EP: No. Not typically.

R: Not typically. And in the editorial meetings I think you mentioned you , you will see what's popular on social media, but would you say that the social media and like the web data is discussed in the editorial meeting?

EP: Yes definitely. And usually we uh . It's one of the first things we talk about.

Anonymous News Director, Phone Interview. March 12, 2015.

Researcher: ok, um. could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

News Director: The daily process starts uh in our morning editorial meeting, uh it is attended by myself, managers, reporters, producers, um sometimes photographers and we go over what's happening that day. We look at what we've already covered. Uh in our five-hour morning show. And and the emphasis is on of course the local news where we can try to find stories that are interests to a large portion of our audience. Um, just a quick side note the market that I work in [City] is, is a multi-city market so, so we often struggle to find stories that interest those who live in those uh different, different cities. So uh, but we spend a good portion of our editorial meetings trying to find those stories that will differentiate ourselves uh from our competition and have things that our our audience may find interesting.

R: Ok and in those meetings, you kinda told me who was in there. Is anyone from your website?

ND: Yea and also, uh we have two editorial meetings, newsroom editorial meetings. One at nine in the morning, the other at two in the afternoon.. And at the 2 p.m., that , that's where we decide what we're covering , we go over what we're doing dayside and then we decide what we're going to do for our late news. That is also not only attended by our web managers, uh but one of them goes over what's trending that day on our website. And some of the stories that are really trending we have various tools um that we use to see what's working, um we, we will insert some of those stories into our newscasts.

R: What are some of the tools that you have to monitor, is it view count or unique visitors? What information are you getting from the web?

ND: Well, I mean we use Google Analytics, plus we have um another type of analytics that we get through our company. One of them is called Chartbeat and my company is owned by [Name]. Chartbeat monitors what all 42 television stations um have on their web and how that's trending. So and a lot of times and it's local stories and national stories. And a lot of times you can look at Chartbeat and see several of the same stories really trending high and getting a lot of uh stickiness is the word you could use for a web story. So We look at that and uh We try to find a home uh for those stories inside our newscasts and we'll say you know here's a story that we have on Facebook today on our website that a lot of viewers are taking a look at and go from there.

R: ok I guess what's your process for deciding what your lead stories would be for your newscasts?

ND: Well, uh some days it's obvious. When you'll have uh a major breaking story. Uh locally on days like the Boston Marathon, obviously a no-brainer. But most days you know we do a uh we do five hours of news in the morning and we try to make it local, for example today uh we had two police officers that were shot in Ferguson, Missouri. That was breaking during our morning news, so that played a big role in our coverage. That was one of our lead stories for the 4p.m. and at 5p.m. we lead with a local story. So it's decided throughout the day um mostly because we're a local news station we will lead local. And again we go back to what our reporters are working on, what kinds of content they're able to gather and we will try to have different leads for each newscast.

R: Ok, um And you talked about the staff meeting where you all are discussing the different stories and topics for the day and of course you can't fit everything in your newscasts, uh who ultimately decides which stories will be broadcast?

ND: Hmm, I would say ultimately it comes down to me, but that you know that would mean really I can't be there 24-7 so it comes down to our producers, our executive producers and managers and we have managers on each shift throughout the day and they work closely with our news producers and reporters to make sure ok this is a story worth running. Today, today they had a pretty good conversation um we are we're a fox affiliate that and we're about an hour a little over an hour outside of [City] and so we air, we are the [Team Name] station and they, they've been making a lot of news the last few days uh about what they're doing in the off season by adding all these players so you know sometimes we, we made a conscience decision today to add sports within our news coverage early in our newscast about what the [team is] doing. And that, that became a pretty I want to say healthy and heated discussion about the importance of sports, so when we decided to put it in because of the fact that we air so many [team] games. So ultimately it comes down to everybody contributes, and when I say everybody I mean story ideas come from anybody in our newsroom but ultimately it comes down to the managers and the producers who who are directing coverage throughout the day.

R: OK would you say those same people the managers and the producers are the ones that are deciding uh the lead stories for each newscast or would that be someone different?

ND: yes. Yes. It's all dependant on content. It's content driven and that content can come from again from anywhere from within our newsroom or what our reporters are producing from outside and it can come from the web.

R: OK and you talked about the tool that the [company] has for you guys as far as like the website data. Um what specifically are you getting in those meetings? Hey this story was clicked on a lot, this story was a lot of people spent time on it or we're getting a lot of different unique people attracted to this story. Like what kind of information do you get from your website as far as about your audience?

ND: We get all of that and we're able to dig down and get into some of the demographics and sometimes, but on a daily basis it's you know people watching the videos that we're posting and what's trending in those videos. And um, and what we do is we'll drive traffic to our website through the use of social media so we'll put up something on our Facebook page and we're able to monitor also on Facebook if people are clicking on that and what kind of views we're getting on that. And how many shares we're getting on Facebook and people retweeting our content, so we look at all of that and the stories that seem to trend really high are the ones that um again we'll find a home in our newscasts.

R: Ok, so you talked about Facebook and Twitter, are there any other social media sites that you use like that?

ND: Uh, we recently added Instagram and um the um newsroom is getting

{Signal Lost} Called ND back

R: Ok where you left off I heard that you guys instituted some Instagram?

ND: Right. We recently added Instagram. It's been Facebook and Twitter for the most part for the last several years. Instagram is something that the newsroom is also using and a great example is I haven't seen it yet, but before I left work a little while ago, uh somehow a bird got into our studio and I think one of our anchors got video of that and she's putting it up on Facebook and I have a feeling that generally video of the bird is going to do really well. And the reason why that will do well is people love the behind the scenes look at how news is produced and so hey, here's a look at our studio and look what happened a bird got in and someone will click on that.

R: How often do you get the traditional ratings reports on your newscasts?

ND: Uh, we are now able to get them every day.

R: So do you guys talk about those in the meeting or not as much?

ND: Uh we're talking more, the ratings are changing. Um but the bottom line is we're..there are days that we're able to see for example during a sweeps period um you know when we have a really important sweeps story that we have money that we spend on outside medium promoting our self like for example in February we'll push out on Pandora or you know besides our own social platforms , we'll we'll buy media time on a radio station or Pandora, cable and based on the ratings we are able to see if those stories got traction and did well, so yes we talk about the ratings every day now.

R: And the ratings are once a day? When you say daily? You get them once?

ND: Yes. Correct.

R: And so compare that to how often do you get information about your page views or your website. Is that every meeting or is that constant updated?

ND: That's at every afternoon meeting we talk about what stories are doing well on our web and how we can incorporate that into our newscasts. And they may not get a ton of time in the newscasts but they certainly will get time.

R: OK, which employees have access to your traditional ratings reports?

ND: Everybody

R: Do you post them or email them?

ND: We email it to everybody in the building.

R: Ok what about which employees, which station employees find out about that website data that we talked about like the page views or the unique visitors and like which employees get to find out that information?

ND: Well, everybody who attends the afternoon meeting will know. Um I don't think..not every employee has access to the demographics and the clicks and stuff just because we have to be careful about that information, you know somebody hacking us. Um, but we readily share that information with everyone in the newsroom. There are no secrets, if somebody does not have the access, we can get them the access.

R: ok , so it's not posted anywhere, but and correct me if I'm wrong there's a couple employees that have access to it, but that information is shared in those meetings and it's not secretive.

ND: Right. Right. But like the web managers and myself, I can access it but we, we're just careful about who we give passwords to because we don't want people to, you know TV stations have been hacked before. So but, but as far as the information and the demographics we will share that with everybody in the newsroom.

R: ok and who monitors your station's social media accounts so you know when we talked about the shares, and the likes and the comments on there..who , is there someone in charge of like monitoring that audience?

ND: We had. Yes. We have some we have two people who are web managers who monitor it but, but I look at it and some of my managers will look at it because we want to..you know I check it out almost every day. Uh sometimes we'll get a lot more likes on Facebook and, and I like to know why. And it's usually I would say 99% of the time its attributed to some sort of story that we posted it may even be a national story but its usually involving great video, something really bizarre and people will start to like us. Ana, and you get Facebook will actually chart, you know you'll see a graph and its like wow, we we got 400 likes today and that's kind of bizarre, but when I say likes, I mean you follow us on our page. That's what I meant and then the next day we may only get 100 new followers so that's something that's a big part of what we look at and uh. We have stories that trend on our website that were posted in November and so we can still see them trending now.

R: ok. Do you um, is there any kind of uh push to post things on the website first or have them in the broadcast first or is that uh..

ND: That's a great question. Great question. Um. I think everything now is focused more on digital. And uh I am now asking our reporters to post their stories before they air. Um and I will ask them again to update it before they leave. But there's no reason unless it's a major exclusive to not put the story out there before our news hits air just because it just shows that we're on top of every platform.

R: ok, so then would you, like if you have a reporter that um posts a story online , then it airs and you guys get a lot of traffic or trends as what you said, uh do you discuss advancing that story you know the next day?

ND: Absolutely. Another good question. Yes. We'll discuss it and I have to say that we're at fault where sometimes we will see a story and we we could update it more and we need to do that more. And that's something we're working on.

Anonymous Senior Executive Producer. Phone Interview. March 30, 2015.

Researcher: ok, could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

Senior Executive Producer: Well our daily process is much like it has been for many, many years at uh stations all around the country. Which is reporters come in with stories that we hope are, you know stories that can be in the newscast. Original ideas Um that they pitch in our morning editorial meeting and a large group of people and uh

everybody weighs in and we as a group decide what we like, what we don't like and um and then there's a continuing stories, trials that we may be on and other things that are sorta must cover stories. And then we decide who's the best for that based on the pitches that come in in the morning meeting.

R: Ok and could you describe the process in the decision making as to what your lead stories for your newscast will be?

SEP: Well, preferably the lead story is something that's exclusive to us, you know no one else will have uh this compelling and attention getting and um uh has some broad appeal uh that's not too narrow. Um and you know by narrow I mean both in interest, you know it only affects a few people and then also in terms of where it's happening you know. They've really.. a compelling story can actually happen anywhere and become a lead story, but it's really got a meet a high threshold if it's you out in the hinterlands where very few people are.

R: ok. Um you kinda talked about the morning meeting or the editorial meeting um in the process of choosing stories. Who all is invited to those meetings or who attend them regularly? Like which of your employees?

SEP: ok. Yeah the managers attend, the special project manager among them, um you know all the reporters all of the producers, uh the promotions people, um the web people. Everybody who works on our web desk, uh the assignment editors uh it's a large you know group of people that spills out of a conference room into the general newsroom.

R: ok and in those editorial meetings who would you say decides which stories will be broadcast?

SEP: Well, I think you know probably the dominant voice is you know is probably the news director or the managing editor. But the producers are really called on to weigh in and decide what they want on their newscasts. So it's manager driven but it's very much producer driven. If the producers are not interested in the stories and can't effectively push or promote them within their newscast, or they have a lot of the same kind of story then they may pass on a given story. Uh it may be a better story for another day. So really you know to some degree the ownness is on the producers what what what they want. What they feel can effectively uh work on the newscasts on a given day.

R: Ok then who would decide, would it be the same people, ,who would decide what the lead stories for each newscast would be?

SEP: Well what we do is we decide in the morning tentatively. It's and because we are doing hours of news in the afternoon uh we're looking for lead in different newscasts. And we're looking at you know whether you know, we try not to repeat a lead. Sometimes it's unavoidable particularly when you have late breaking news. You know. The late afternoon but um generally speaking you know as a group we sort of look through our list of reporter and what we assign them to at the end of that morning

meeting. I'd say three quarters through the way of that morning meeting, then we say what are the possible leads for these various newscasts. And that's what you're looking for. That and do you have a good second story. You know. Do you have a good story in your next block that you can tease effectively and hold viewer interest. You know so a string story. And then as you go throughout the hour you're really looking for you know obviously strong compelling content that will you know entice viewers to stick around.

R: Ok. Uh what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories from your website?

SEP: Well the web producers..the web producers participate and we have a thing called Chartbeat which shows what are the popular stories on the web, you know. It ranks them. What's getting the most interest and then we have a meeting uh well in the morning meetings we talk about what's doing well on the web, you know what's doing well on mobile , what's doing well on social and um so everyone's aware of you know what the popular stories are as well as the day before. So really, some of those conversations are looking backward, then there's stories looking forward where we might say a certain story might work on the web, but it's not necessarily for our newscast.

R: So is that something that kind of information I know you said you had Chartbeat, is that the kind of information that your web producers bring in to you , uh into the

SEP: No, it's up on the screen in our morning meeting. It's just up there, but but the web producers bring in a daily sheet that lists what's popular, what's really resonating with people who are going to our website and to our apps. You know how many Twitter followers a week do we have and any given day how many Facebook uh followers do we have on any given day. That kind of thing.

R: Um so kinda comparing it to the older way of tracking things, how often do you, um or do you how often do you receive ratings reports on your newscasts?

SEP: Oh, every morning we receive the previous days ratings.

R: And then I'm just guessing, but you guys probably have more than one editorial meeting throughout the day?

SEP: Yes. We have our morning meeting and then we have, you know we have an afternoon meeting where we fine tune you know the newscasts and then if that's ending then the evening editorial meeting begins at about you know 2:30 or so where they're talking about what they're gonna do for the evening news.

R: Ok, um

SEP: You know late, late night. You know 11 o'clock.

R: OK and you mentioned that you guys have that monitor in your editorial meeting. Do all employees have access to how well your ..what stories are doing well on the website? Or is it just show in the meeting?

SEP: well I would say pretty much. I mean we're not secretive about it with our employees. We're not hiding information. Um so you know. Yeah I would say for the most part people who are interested can see how we're doing. And that just, that empowers the web team I think to see what's working and what doesn't, you know.

R: With the reports that the web producers bring and then the information that you have on the screen um in the editorial meetings would it ever be you see a topic there that's doing well on the web , maybe you want to advance in another show or is it used like that?

SEP: uh, you know. Sometimes. Um we might see something's resonating on the web and pick it up for the newscast and take it further because we see there's a lot of interest. But I don't think it's the main driver. You know what's really driving the editorial meetings is what are the new stories that people bring to the table. Whereas what's on the web, what's doing well in the web, to some degree is yesterdays news. Though obviously if it has a follow-up, you know we might do it. But we're constantly looking for the next great story.

R: ok and the web's kinda like stuff that's already out there and you're looking for something fresher.

SEP: Well, we're putting up a lot of what we've done on the air. You know a lot of our content that we've put up on the air. Plus original content. A lot of our producers, I'm sorry I mean a lot of our reporters are filing you know uh for the web uh stories. Some are web only exclusives. Some are you know just original content on the web uh that they file. Any given day it might be behind the scenes on a story or um yeah I don't know. Uh something that doesn't work on the air because it can work on the web. Does that make sense?

R: Yeah, um are your ratings reports discussed in the editorial meetings?

SEP: Ah, they're discussed um you know pretty much. We have a meeting before the editorial meeting with the managers in which we talk about just you know different technical issues, what's going on and then the ratings in a little more depth. But then in the actual editorial meeting that everyone's a part of uh you know the ratings are up on a board where everyone can see them. Day by day how we're doing and they're discussed. You know. But um they don't dominate the meeting if that makes sense.

R: Yeah. Absolutely.

SEP: There's too much else to get to.

R: Yeah. Absolutely. So I know you said the ratings are posted for people to see and then is that only in that room or is it out in the newsroom?

SEP: Well, anyone can go in to that room. It's an open room. You know, so it's available to anyone in the newsroom to go and see how we're doing. We're not keeping it a secret.

R: Ok, who monitors your stations social media accounts?

SEP: Uh well we have a social media manager. Um you know who is relatively new. He replaced someone else who was our social media manager um does that answer your question?

R: Yeah. Do they come to the editorial meeting too?

SEP: Yes.

R: Do they talk about stories..

SEP: They talk about what's doing well. Yep on social.

R: And is it the same kinda philosophy? It's not really something that you look and see that it's doing well then decide to go do the story. It's more of what did well in the past?

SEP: I think. You know I think it's. Let me see how I could put this. You know it's like when you look at the ratings. You're seeing yesterday's ratings. And when the social media manager tells us what resonated well with people on social they're saying well that was yesterday and what did really really well.

R: Ok.

SEP: Now does that mean it's a you know a guidepost for what you're going to do today? Not necessarily, not specifically, but it may be that there's some kind of a takeaway from it for social for the next day. You know? Something that was effective. It may not be the same story, but the um strategy let's..may be effective for the next day and the next day. Does that make sense?

Anonymous News Director. Phone Interview. April 9, 2015.

Researcher: ok, could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

News Director: Uh wow. Uh I guess it's, we, well I guess at first we look at stories that we need to follow-up from the night before. Uh if there aren't any we'll, we'll move on. We try to get the reporters to have an enterprise ideas and we'll go around the room and

they'll pitch their ideas. Uh their one or two ideas and if it's something that any of those ideas are something that we think that it makes a good story we will try to flush it out a bit and tell them to start making some calls. Um make their calls if they hadn't already. Hopefully they have. At times they come in with stories already set up from the day before. And it also depends on what we have uh what we called timed events. Um that are scheduled throughout the day and those events are um warranted enough to send a reporter out to it we may do that or if its something we just send a photographer out to. Uh Sometimes those timed events can be flushed out into a little but more than just a vo or a vo/sot uh um it may end up being a package. It just depends on the story and what the um. What the event is. Uh so that's how we do that.

R: ok

ND: Heather can I stop you for one minute? I need to run and grab something.

R: ok

{Interview pick-up}

R: You were describing the editorial meeting. Could you tell me which employees are in the editorial meeting?

ND: Uh myself. Assignment Manager, Photogs and whichever reporter's working that afternoon or that morning.

R: Ok can you describe the process in decision-making as to what your lead..your lead stories for your newscast will be?

ND: Well it depends, that depends on the story. Uh if it's you have like the governor or U.S. Senator or somebody like that in town, that could be a lead story. If it's a crime related story uh spot news type of thing uh those usually end up being a lead story. So it just depends on that depends on the day, it never really set in stone. Uh if it's a uh um a meeting that night or a community meeting or council meeting or something like that police jury meeting at night tends are to be a lead story. Um that night , for the night, for the night newscast, uh so that, that's pretty how much something like that will work.

R: Ok, who would you say decides, ultimately decides what stories uh will make it to the broadcast? 'Cause obviously you have more stories than you can fit into the times you have for your stories, so who is ultimately responsible for deciding which stories would make it into one of the newscasts?

ND: Yeah, well you give us too much credit. There's days when we have more time than stories, there's days when you have more stories than time. On the days where there's more stories than time, that's usually the discretion of the uh producer of the newscast, um and he or she uh cause we unlike in [City] where the producers are producing stuff like that, we uh most of our shows are anchor produced so they produce it how they want

it, uh but also listen if there's a story that I want to make sure we run, I'll say that I want us to run that and get it in. And that sort of thing but um most of the times it's uh the discretion of the producer.

R: ok. Would you say that goes as well for who decides what the lead stories for each newscast will be?

ND: Yes, yeah, yeah. We give that. Again it's that that that whole, you know you're leading your producer's leading with a ribbon cutting at the top and then we got a double shooting then I'll say, you're not going to lead with that? And something like that, but you know you give it time, a lot of times the newscast comes together within the final half hour. That's when you know what you're really gonna have or not gonna have, so uh uh we'll do it like that.

R: ok. What type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as you know what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories from your website?

ND: Repeat that for me one more time..

R: What kind of information do you have available, like do you have any kind of analytics or are you told like uh what the most popular news story is or what's the most emailed story from your website is for the day? Do you get that information?

ND: Yeah, it's not sent to me, but I can, you can get it. You just go to our, our CMS and you can look and see the man, the dog bites man story and the top story of the day type thing. Or the crime of the day story, well not the local story, but the uh, yeah I can see that information. It's not technically sent to me by anybody, but I can get that. I can go to it right now and look and see, ok the story uh Shots fired after vehicle crashes in ditch-Suspect in custody is our top story for the day. So far from midnight to 10:44 that story's the top story on our website. It's had over 13-hundred hits. So I can look at that and see that. And I can go back through the week, like today's Thursday. I can go back through Sunday and look and see, ok from Sunday to right now, uh uh that same story's the top story and has over 63-hundred hits so that's our top story for the week so far.

R: Ok, how do you have, like do you check it regularly? Um is it something you guys talk about in your editorial meeting?

ND: We don't talk about it so much in our editorial meetings, but what I do do if, what I do if it's a story we put on the website and we put on Facebook and we technically hadn't really done a you know a reporter story or you know a photographer video type story, uh I will send that out to reporters to anchors and say hey this story is garnering is gaining a lot of attention on Facebook. On the website. It'd be worth us putting it on our newscast. Or even uh making it uh going out and doing more on the story. Uh we had something like that recently. Uh story put on the website about some local state parks not being open. Not the parks themselves the pools inside the state parks. Not being open over the

summer and it kinda just took off like, like a wildfire uh on Facebook. People talking, sharing. Clicks on the website, so of course something like that you might just do uh a 15-20 second reader in the newscast, but now it's gotten too much attention, it's worth us doing a little bit more, so we, we knew in that instance we do, we would use that as a measuring tool to say see this story's gonna get..will get some attention.

R: ok. Um how often do you receive ratings reports on your newscasts?

ND: We don't subscribe to Nielsen so we are not, we don't, we don't get ratings. Uh as a company. Uh as a, we don't subscribe, we don't get them at all.

R: ok, um How often..going back to the website.. how often do you receive information about page views or unique visitors?

ND: Again, that's something I can do on a daily basis, it's not something that's sent to me, uh, but I can get it and I know how to get it and I go to it regularly to look and see again that's something I can go and look at right now and see this is what our website is uh, uh, uh I say that and I can't find it. Uh.

R: Is that something that's part of your CMS?

ND: Yeah. We can look at it through our CMS uh and we can look and see uh.. Look in the CMS and see what we're doing..uh so On a monthly basis. I can look and see, uh but what I, what I have, I can't get on the CMS is mobile hits. So I can, uh I can get that if I need to through the digital media department and he, he tells me occasionally uh what we're doing and stuff like that. Uh, but I can look and see uh what we've done for the month, so this month's only been ten days, but what we've done for the month, but that's just on the website, the desktop website. Obviously we get a big chunk from mobile and, and, and tablets and all that stuff as well.

R: Ok, so you called them your digital. What did you call your team again? Digital

ND: The team is called digital media.

R: Digital media. Do they come to the editorial meetings?

ND: No.

R: So they just give that information to you?

ND: Yes.

R: ok. Uh, who else, like, position wise in your station can go into the CMS and see that information as far as like your popular stories and stuff. Is it like your popular stories and stuff. Is it just like your, is it something that's just for the editorial managers or..

ND: Uh technically again because of our size and we don't have uh you know like at [station] we had the whole web department and then [names] you know all constantly putting stuff on the website. Uh, uh I can't recall if reporters were responsible for putting stuff on the website, but but here it's ah I say the rule but not a hard fast rule, but basically if you write it you web it rule. So reporters are responsible for putting their stuff on the website. We do have a digital media reporter. She posts stories. Uh a lot of times their press releases, things from other affiliates. Uh national stories that, that we need to put on recall stuff like that. She also posts to Facebook and stuff like that. Everybody posts. Reporters post their stories, we have a schedule for social media that they post to and so in essence everybody who can go who has access to the CMS can look and see what's what their story is doing. No whether or not they do that. That, that'd be, that's a whole 'nother question.

R: But they're not denied access to it.

ND: They're not denied access. They can go into...if they really want to go and look and see what their story's doing, they can go and see. Honestly a lot of times you look at Facebook to see as an indicator because if a story's blowing up on Facebook it's blowing up on the website. If it's only had one or two likes on Facebook, you know, no shares, that's probably you go and look on the CMS to see what the story's doing, it probably has 40-50 hits.

R: ok

ND: Then go back to the Facebook and a story has 5-600 likes. You know a 100 plus shares you know 20-30 plus comments the story's probably doing you can go look at the CMS the story's doing pretty good, you know. 800, a thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand you know whatever uh clicks or hits like that so uh Facebook is a good indicator for us, for me to see how well stories are doing on the website or what stories are not doing on a website.

R: So as far as your social media, again it's the reporters posting to your station's social media and your producers? I know you said you schedule social media posts, do you have a dedicated person that does that or is it kinda a team effort?

ND: That does what, posts?

R: Yeah posts on your station's social media. So I don't know if you..

ND: This digital media reporter posts to Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, The reporters just post their stories at certain times of the day. Like if you're a reporter here Heather you're responsible for posting at 6:30 and 7. Or 8 and 9 or 10 and 11. Whatever and then your story will pop up on Facebook at that designated time. Now that being said, that doesn't mean you can't post whenever. If it's breaking news, post your story. If it's...are you going to wait till 7 o'clock to post the crash on the Interstate? Of course not. So you just post whenever and everybody can post. Everybody is not as tech savvy, uh they'll

don't know how to maneuver through Facebook and Twitter and social media, you know stuff like that. I had to have people you know, I've kinda had to pulling teeth from a crocodile to get them to be more socially active on Facebook and things like that. Uh and then um follow the rules and how we do things and stuff like that. I have to have some people uh they're, they're they're not on Twitter. They're on Facebook, but they're not on Twitter and you know it's trying to get them to understand this new wave of uh media and telling the stories and communication and it's not about uh, uh, it's not about waiting until 6 and 10 anymore. It's just not uh. It stopped being that a long time ago and it's never going back to that. If it's happening, you have to get it out there right now. Now granted, you want to get it on your website first, then get it out there so when you drive people back, you're driving them back to your website and stuff like that. You don't want to give it away on Facebook for free You don't want to give it away on Twitter for free. You do want to send them to the website. Uh and to get information to and stuff like that.

R: And do you guys have a general rule, I know you build the content on the website, but do you break a story on the web before you go on air?

ND: Yes I mean listen. We..we're not on TV 24-7, so uh if there's a story that needs to go out there, we put it out there. And if the story's big enough that we need to break-in, we'll break-in, but most of the time it's gonna be, uh it's gonna be uh us uh us putting it on the website and all that stuff first.

R: Um my last question I have for you and I know you talked about um that the CMS is where that data is kept, and that your employees can go and look at that..um but and I don't know if you when you are at 13 we had it or not, we had a monitor in the newsroom that you could kinda see those analytics of the website. Is it posted anywhere or is it something where you have to be in the CMS?

ND: You have to get into the CMS. It's not just posted or posted anywhere like that.

Anonymous News Director. Phone Interview. April 17, 2015.

Researcher: ok, could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

ND: Uh the daily process it depends upon what we've done before and then there's a look from myself to balance out the newscast in the sense that some issues, some personalities, some um harder news. Some of the easier news or lighter news and quite frankly just whatever's the buzz. You know within certain demographics. If Facebook's exploding, that might be worth exploring, if uh, um you know if it's something else that seems to be...if Twitter seems to be alive with something, then that may be worth exploring. But the process of gathering the news and determining the news happens uh to be able to strike a balance between personality pieces, uh people pieces and issue pieces.

R: And that takes place in a editorial meeting?

ND: It usually takes place in the editorial meeting in the morning every day. Um prior to that my news, my assistant news director, myself, um, we'll go around, yesterday for example to find out you know just what do we really need to cover, what we need to watch and then the editorial meeting is such uh we take account just of what's going on in the moment, what kind of resources we have and where do we want to deploy them.

R: Uh and in general, what, what employees are um attend the editorial meeting?

ND: Um, well all my producers, all my reporters. Assistant News Director and Myself.

R: OK and Can you describe the process in the decision making as to what your lead stories for your newscast will be?

ND: Uh lead story for the newscast is most probably greatest impact. And impact is, it can be either from an editorial standpoint or just from a curiosity standpoint. Um elements determine the lead story a lot of times. If we've got tremendous pictures, then ah then, it's weighted a little more heavily than, than a very very strong issue. If we've got um, um strong personality then um that one could be weighed in. Mostly it's a market..it's a decision is the impact to the market at large, the seven or eight counties that we serve is determining just to what the lead will be.

R: ok and who decides, is there a person that would ultimately decide what stories would be broadcast?

ND: Um. Yes. And no. I mean yes the idea is we'd like to have this in here, I'd like to have that in there my anchor, my main anchor's more of a managing editor when it comes to that. Um I work closely with my producers to sit down and to present uh um a balance and well rounded show. Um it's just not necessarily every story you know just every story that comes, comes across our assignment desk goes into the shows. We're looking for um. We're looking for balanced television presentation. Much of the other stuff will go on the web.

R: Ok and who, who decides what the lead stories for each newscast would be?

ND: Uh the lead story's in conjunction with the producers and the managing editor.

R: Ok. What type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories from your website?

ND: Uh we use Google Analytics for a lot of it. And our CMS sits down and tracks quite a bit of that stuff.

R: Uh so what are you guys uh. I guess with that are you tracking, are you tracking what the most popular stories are on your website and what's emailed? Do you guys track that?

ND: We usually track that. We're using, we're using um, it's, it's very easy, but we do track a lot of that, but um mostly because the uh we use Facebook and Twitter a lot to drive people to our websites and I know that the bounce rate on those are pretty high, but the um, the analytics are almost instantaneous, so we can put something up and then in an hour see that five thousand people have hit it and looked at it any way. And some of that just kinda tempers um, you know some of our decision-making.

R: Will you guys discuss that in editorial meetings if you've got a story that's tracking well on your analytics?

ND: That. Yes. Yes we do. And it's mostly, you know obviously a big story will track well then that's no surprise to anyone. Uh a lot of times it comes down to the 50-50 stories and if you're gonna sit down um I call them 50 -50 stories any way. It's uh you can, the decisions we have in the newsroom are we can do this or we can do that. And sometimes you know the uh, the um analytics will pull you one-way. Sometimes the topic, the demographic or the fact that we haven't been in a certain portion of the market will pull us another...uh I mean those, that's what the 50-50 in me um is.

R: ok. And you talked about how immediate the analytics from your website, you know how you can get those more immediate. How often do you receive the ratings reports for your newscast?

ND: uh Ratings..we're in a small market. It's not metered so we get them four times a year.

R: OK and so how often do you receive information about page views, unique visitors to your station's website?

ND: Uh Google Analytics is available just right now, so those are daily.

R: How often would you say on average you guys uh check those?

ND: How often do we check them?

R: yeah,

ND: I'm uh let me see. Our promotions department checks them on a regular basis. And regular might be once every couple of days. Um I track the stories themselves and um just as it works into the station philosophy from a marketing standpoint and everything else, they're checked routinely by a lot of folks in the sales department, um I tend to sit down and look at the specific pages um I would say every day or every other day.

R: ok, is it, is it something um you know ratings do you post your ratings. I know you said you get them four times a year..do you post them anywhere?

ND: For my employees, yeah. I make them available and and um I'm open to discussion. Yeah, but they do know.

R: ok and about the uh web analytics, are they, uh do all your employees have access to them? I know you talked about the promotions and the sales team, but do those get posted anywhere? Do you have a monitor in your newsroom where you can track stories?

ND: No I don't, but we do sit down and we do all tend to track our own stories. I do tend to make a point to um call out you just the somebody's story's doing really well or just to something like that. Um I don't necessarily expect them to get into the data of the whole thing. They're..especially my reporters or my producers are usually responsible for just one day part or one story so they don't have much impact on the rest of it and um, you know if it's something that seems to be doing exceedingly well then they know it. They track it as well.

R: So which employees would you say have access to that data? Is it just newsroom managers?

ND: I. The employees, the employees have access to the Facebook data and that's pretty much the, that's pretty much our benchmark here.

R: Ok um so then my next question is, who monitors your..the station's social media accounts?

ND: Who monitors them? My assistant News Director, myself

R: Ok, do you have like a web producer or is it..

ND: no we don't. Assistant News Director, myself, there's a morning anchor that gets involved in it, and then there are a every, every reporter's responsible for their own stuff.

R: But the reporters, they post their own stories on social media?

ND: Reporters post their own. They tweet themselves and we'll just retweet on behalf of the station a lot of times, um very active Twitter wise, um on certain stories.

R: OK and uh my last two questions are, we can kinda combine them, but um they're talking about the editorial meetings. And if you could discuss briefly um how ratings reports are discussed in there and how you know the web data is discussed.

ND: um yeah, you know, we're doing ok. I'm just in general Nielsen puts out a book that's got a hundred and something pages in it and I don't necessarily uh newsrooms are not full of data mongers for example math tends to be something that newsrooms um , they don't we just don't have math professors running around. We're doing better, we're doing worse. We can do better with this group, we cannot, but just mostly in general terms. Um also just because it's only, because ratings are charted only four times a year,

um its just like it would be like playing football and only posting the score at the end of the quarter, um there' still a lot that has to be done and it's it's beyond the ratings. I mean the ratings sit down and are kinda an affirmation to the path that we've chosen and it's been a good one in our competitive market, but um you know the game goes on every day. And the scores' not posted but four time a year.

Anonymous News Director. Phone Interview. April 23, 2015.

Researcher: ok. First question. Could you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

News Director: Um ,well complicated um. Complicated question. Um I guess the simplest way to do that is um, we start every day with uh an editorial meting at 9:15. We have another editorial meeting at 2:45 in the afternoon. Um and we go through all the reporter pitches at that time and we discuss who's covering what. And um, and um everybody is there. Any anchor on staff at the time. The reporters, producers, and then collectively we decide what we think is going to be the biggest story for the day at um noon, five, five-thirty and six at the morning editorial meeting. It could be weather. The meteorologist always leads the editorial meetings um because we're in a uh very volatile part of the country here. We get hurricanes, thunderstorms, tornadoes. So we always let the meteorologist go first and they will tell us if it's a severe weather day. They will be the lead in all newscasts. If not, then we talk amongst ourselves what we think is going to be the biggest story, that the most, delivers the biggest impact to our viewers that they would care about um for today there's a hug warehouse fire going on in one of our cities right now and so that's our lead at noon and probably the five and the six o'clock today.

R: ok and in those editorial meetings I know you said everyone attends those, could you just go through the positions of the newsroom that would be attending the editorial meetings?

ND: Um, the news director, assistant news director, um executive producer, digital content manager, right now that position is open for us, I've been recruiting for that um and that person weighs in in the afternoon editorial meeting. Uh reporters, producers, uh photographers if they haven't already run out of the building to go shoot something. Uh we usually have uh um director from production um on hand in case we need any special uh um graphics uh created. And often our general manger joins us for the meetings.

R: Um and you talked about the lead an how you decide um the lead stories, um when it comes to the decisions, you'll have more stories obviously pitched in your meetings than you can fill in your shows. Who ultimately decides you know which stories make the cut and which ones may not make it for the day?

ND: Um I guess. I have the ultimate decision, but I like a newsroom that people weigh in because um I can be swayed one way or another. There's somewhere there's an obvious.

You know if we're gonna have tornado warnings today, weather is going to be our lead no matter what. That's even over if we have you know a crime like a murder or something like that because weather and tornado warnings affect everybody. Because of the um possibility of damage to property and life. Um, but I like to hear um pitches from the reporters too and sometimes in the and this comes in in the afternoon editorial meeting where we can change our mind based in what stories are trending on um you know social media and the website. Um it doesn't always make the decision for us, but we introduce that into the conversation. Or sometimes it may be what reporter came back with that elements. Um suppose there was story we thought was going to be deep in the A block that a reporter happened to get a great people angle and has great video um and is really passionate about the story and has all the elements to put together a great story we may bump that one up as our lead.

R: Ok so the same philosophy applies to deciding what the lead story for each newscast will be. will be.

ND: Yes.

R: Ok what type..you talked a little bit about the information, using that information you gained digitally. What type of information do you have in regards to your station's website? Is it what the most popular stories are? What's the most emailed stories?

ND: Yep. We um go through Google Analytics and we look at all the different you know factors of it. What one has the most interaction from our viewers, what are people commenting on. Shares. Likes. Um for um for our website it's just simply clicks. You know which story's really gaining traction.

R: Ok and how often would you say you guys monitor that information?

ND: Daily.

R: Um and then compare that..how often do you receive the traditional ratings reports on your newscasts?

ND: Um we're in a Rentrak market. Which um is you know a competitor to Nielsen. You know Nielsen you know you would get it um after the books. Um you know the February, May, July, and November books. Rentrak, we..it's basically we get overnights, but we get them two weeks later. So every week we're getting the ratings from two weeks ago. And it's consistent.

R: OK with the uh, with the website information, do you track page views and how many unique visitors?

ND: Uh yes we do that at our corporate level and our digital media manager does that as well. Someone from corporate um puts out a report weekly for the entire group so not

only do you get to see how um your webpage is doing but also your um sister stations across the country.

R: Ok and your digital media manager, or the content manager I think you said I think you said the title was that goes to your editorial meeting, does he generally bring that information there?

ND: Yes.

R:Ok

ND: Um [Name] was my former Digital Media manager um and what he would do is he would come to the afternoon editorial meeting and we had him work more of a kinda swing shift. He wasn't there in time for the morning meeting. He would come in shortly after that. But by the afternoon meeting he would um get us the report of what's trending on Facebook and clicks and share with us just what the popular stories are and then we had him work through 8 o'clock at night because that's when um you know social interaction and um clicks peaks. You know people start getting on their mobile phones and their tablets um between um seven and eight thirty so we wanted to make sure he was um on staff during then just to make sure we're putting new content on uh all of our platforms at that time.

R: OK And I know you mentioned briefly Google Analytics. Um tools do you use to monitor ratings and website data?

ND: Um as far as the website data? It's just a website password for Google Analytics. It's through Google.

R: It's through Google. There's nothing through the CMS itself, its more you guys are looking at the Google analytics.

ND: That's what we look through. I think there might be something more as far as in use at the corporate level, but that, that's not something we look at here. And they get that report and send it to us.

R:OK and so which employees have access to that website data?

ND: Um as far as Google Analytics, probably just them managers and the operations manager.

R: So it's not something..you wouldn't for example have a monitor posted in the newsroom that would show the traffic on the website?

ND: You know it's funny you say that. Right now we are actually talking about that right now as a way to do that. We have a new General Manager here who came from a station in [State] and they did that there and thought that was a great idea so um you know I'm

trying to find money in my budget to buy a new monitor. And a new computer so we can do that. So that is in the works.

R: Ok so right now, as far as the employees, besides the managers getting that website information, that's coming from your digital media manager in an editorial meeting?

ND: Yes.

R: Ok. Um and then uh I know you talked about the Rentrak, how often would the employees find out about the ratings reports? How do they find out about those?

ND Um, you know that's a good question because um we used to have um quarterly staff meetings when we had Nielsen and then um this year um so far we've only had one staff meeting so it's really at the discretion of the General Manager and we had one General Manager leave and another one just arrived so we just haven't had that meeting scheduled yet so it's just coincidence that we switched from Nielson to Rentrak um back in January.

R: ok so are they discussed more in a staff meeting and not so much in the editorial meeting?

ND: Yes. Yeah, no um our company's very open about the ratings so any time we would get a Nielsen book we would have staff meetings and the General Manager would present our ratings um for everybody. Everybody would be there. Commercial production, the directors, master control operators, receptionists, accounting, everybody.

R: ok. Um and who monitors your station's social media accounts...assuming that you have social media accounts?

ND: Um who runs it? Are you talking about who runs our Facebook page?

R: Yeah do you have a specific person or are the reporters responsible for posting on there..

ND: Um, well it's a group effort but it's really our Digital Media Manager and without that one right now it's our Assistant News Director who are in charge of it and monitoring it um but we have all of our anchors um we have a schedule throughout the day where they post um to Facebook and to uh and hopefully to drive people back to our website or a um another newscast so there is group participation but there is one person who oversees it just to make sure someone forget..someone didn't forget to do it doing their shift.

R: Ok. Do you have any other social media besides Facebook?

ND: Um we have Twitter and Instagram.

R: ok Do you guys um, is any of that information brought up in an editorial meeting? This story's getting a lot of shares on Facebook or a lot of comments, there or do you stick more to what the traction is to your website?

ND: No Facebook as I said earlier it's Facebook as well. He goes through our website and Facebook data. In that afternoon editorial meeting. Just so we have everything he may say, oh my gosh we had 100 comments on this one story. You know so and then we decide does it merit bumping up that story or if it's a feature story it may be just you know tease it a little bit more, but you really can't bump up a feature higher up in your newscast.

R: Do you guys ever run into a situation where you do a story on the air and you share it on Facebook and it does really well and that pushes you to advance that story the next day?

ND: Oh no absolutely. I mean we will bring that up and especially if we do one story and that really explodes. We will talk about is there a way we can follow-up on this today. Obviously people are interested in it so what else can we do with this story to give them more information.

R: um ok, did you have anything else you wanted to add? Those were all the questions that I had..

ND: Um no. Not really. I guess the only other thing is I now you're talking about websites and Facebook um this part of [Location] really isn't big for Twitter. Um it uh it just looking at our numbers ...it just..not as um advanced as it is in a lot of other markets. We still do have a Twitter page, um we have it set up right now where if you post something on Facebook it will automatically post for Twitter. Um we understand that's not the best way to do it because you know there's a different way to writing things on Facebook and Twitter and it's part of our plan as soon as we get a new Digital Media Manager to try an you know start pushing Twitter more. But as of right now we have a Twitter page but it's in the you know the other stations don't have a big twitter following on there's as well. It's just not big here in [Location] for some reason. And every market's different.

Anonymous News Director. Phone Interview. April 24, 2015.

Researcher: ok. First could you describe for me the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

News Director: Uh, well we have two editorials a day. One is in the morning, one is in the afternoon. At that time the journalists who are hired as either reporters or journalists, a fancy name they use now, uh are brought in along with an assignment desk manger, uh and then we... we go over that which has occurred. What may or may not be considered

news is determined in the meeting. In other words, if there is a crime overnight or if there's a fire overnight or an accident overnight, these things that occur uh that news organizations tend to at least look into. So we go over what's happened. We also go over what's scheduled for the day. If there's an event for example that is worthy of you know attention. Like a meeting for example, uh public hearing or the like. At that point then we have the reporters who we hope over time uh get to know different people and different parts of the community. For us, we focus on geographic locations so there's let say three main counties and a reporter can say in [Location], here's what I'm working on and would be something hopefully of the public interest. Uh we have a rule in our newsroom that whatever story ideas our brought up, we have to do what I call the 10, 100, or 1,000 rule. Uh goes it affect 10 people or fewer, 100 people or fewer, or 1,000 people or fewer. And that's what we sorta held, that's sorta how shape our you know story, we'll ask that question. So is this story going to be of interest to a lot of people? Uh does it have an impact for a lot of people? Which is sorta where we go. Once we, you know hammer out what serves our community, what would be of not just interest, but of service to them, um that's how we sort of lay out the day. And them same goes for nighttime.

R: Ok and what would be the process to decide once you narrow down the stories that you are going to cover for the day for the different newscasts, what's the process to decode what's the lead story for the newscast will be?

ND: Well, different newsrooms have different approaches. I started out as a producer, years ago. And I didn't have any news judgment. I had a degree in English and a minor in broadcasting, but at the time I was able to let, and this was a long time ago, but in the old days the associated press was filled with a bunch of older journalists, so I would use their news agendas to help me sorta figure out what's important in the world and then over time I got used to determining what was important in my community where I was working and so forth. That's as a young producer, so unfortunately the generation of kids coming out and starting in the producer role, uh is they don't have those resources. The associated press is cut. They don't have the same members of experienced journalists as they did in the old days, so what we do is, uh producer that are in markets from medium to small generally are in you know, they haven't been in the field, uh been on the job as long as say somebody in Atlanta or Charlotte, LA so we try to coach them. You know. We let them pick, they build their rundown based on uh the simple methodology which is what serves the largest number of people in terms, how can we benefit, what's a reason to watch, uh and uh then we huddle up and talk about it during the day. Usually midday. Uh or late evening uh the executive producer will talk with them. And say hey- here's why I think you should move this. Um you know then they followed up with the explanation. Hopefully the younger producer will figure that out. You know over time spit it right back at ya. You ask them hey why did you do this and they say well because it has the largest number of people, uh you know it's both of interest and value etc, etc, etc. It's sorta like, I like them to fail upwards. That's probably not the right phrase, but uh you know I like them to rather them do it on their own, than me tell them or the executive producer tell them what to do. So my newsroom it's a little different. You know, we're the number three station in the market so it's an opportunity to grow and to be different. Uh the pressure is not so much to beat the bad guys, uh every day because it's not going

to happen. It takes time for that to happen. It takes years for that to happen, so what I'm trying to do is shape a culture so for me, producers build their newscasts and we discuss it and sometimes I'll lean over and say let them lead with that, let them watch the competition if they like at 6 o'clock in the control room and realize, hmm maybe I made the wrong choice. You know and that's just sorta how I roll. It's a little different, but it's more of a teaching.

R: ok so you give producers. ah

ND: They have autonomy. Yeah. They have the autonomy to uh to make those decisions and the best newsrooms have the diversity of producers. You know some who..and I'm not just talking about you know race or gender, I'm talking about background. Because what that does is, it gives a voice, You know. For example. It's not the best example, but I've got a young African American male, who's a producer. Senior producer. I've got a young lady who I think was a cheerleader in college. Ok, she's Caucasian. Now when you have shootings, police shootings that the media, especially the 24-hour media make a big deal out of, of course you hear about that..what..it makes for great discussion when you have two different backgrounds you know determining what's of importance in regards to those stories or you know those instances. So it's the best way to allow for producers to uh uh grow and learn and give them that autonomy is to surround them to different voices so it leads to healthy debate. You know what I mean? You know one might lean over and say hey why are you leading with this, well this is why. You know I live in this part of the community and this is a big issue. Oh, ok. You know for me it doesn't mean anything. I'm uh, what is it, you know here..I hate to pick on the national media, but if I'm a white girl, cheerleader from the [University Name], I don't know what it's like to be in that situation. I may not get that attention. So it opens up their works as well. So it's like, it goes back to what I said, I give them the autonomy to chose on certain occasions we'll the EP and I chime in and say nah, you really need to do this, but I've seen over time and it's really a rare occasion when someone doesn't get it. Does that make sense? So, now when you talk to News Directors in different markets it's gonna be different. EP's will say, no, this is what you do, and you just do this. You know some News Directors will come out and change the rundowns at 3 o'clock just to change it, so mine is a little uh more of a world thing. I look ahead. I don't look at today. I look at you know six months from now. What kind of producer are they gonna be? Where are they gonna go? You can look at somebody and say, oh there's a news director to me had in the future or somebody that's just going to say here and be a producer, who's gonna move around or quit the business or whatever so. Autonomy for producers, probably the shortest answer you were looking for and I gave you the long one.

R: No. that's ok I appreciate that. Um what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website as far as what the most popular stories are or what are the most emailed stories from your website. Do you have that kind of information available?

ND: We do. We do. We are managed..we're owned by one company and managed by another. That's the company through my work, [Company Name]. Uh and companies, the bigger the companies, the more they uh they pay for that kind of research. Uh there's a pretty popular one out there you're gonna hear a lot of in the calls you make I'm sure called comScore, uh they use the free Google Analytics which are available to anybody for free. Uh and yeah, we look at that stuff. Yeah, I'm not gonna lie, I do look at it, but I don't really pay too much attention because you know it's weird. It's different market to market. Uh I know this market. I grew up here. I'm familiar with it, uh you know this is a market where it's not necessarily; that they want the good journalism, they want the bloody journalism or the stuff you know breaks other people or sensationalism. Yeah and you know I just don't think in my heart the majority of real people out there care for that. Or they do, they do it behind social media where it's easy to say something and kinda leave it out there. So I'm I'm on the mindset that while we know what's popular on the website, and we do share it, and and most of the good scores on the best stuff is stuff that's shared. If we just drop it on the website, nobody's gonna see it. Uh you know it's funny, you mention websites, I did something in this market that was unique and it may be unique elsewhere, yeah I was given autonomy to do whatever I wanted this company asked [Company Name] to manage their newsroom under what's call an SSA, which is weird, it's called a Shared Services Agreement. I work for the competition, but I manage this station and all of its employees work for the competition. Theoretically. You know that's what their paycheck says. But you know, we..it's uh but we focus on winning. It's a competitive environment uh in other words, one of I think the last computed research on these things I think we were one of maybe, not that we're mentioned, but I know based on the strategy, we're one of maybe a dozen SSAs in the Country that we don't simulcast, we don't share talents so when it comes to websites and such uh they had one. It was their call letters. But when I was given the keys and told do what you think is best to improve ratings even at the expense of the guys that pay your paycheck, uh I changed the name so by changing the name, I changed the website URL and the dot com part wasn't available and it had already been taken so we ended up with a dot TV so what I tell you and what we put n the website, it's taken forever to get Google to sort of get us in the mix with news.

R: Gotha

ND: But I did it for a reason that you could probably care less about, the long and the short of it is if you've heard of the store Target, which I', sure you have.

R: Yes. Mmmhmm

ND: Uh what's their website? Its target dot com. You know. So when a TV station has a certain brand name and ours is [Name]. It's the call letters of the network and uh the numeral that the local channel was on back in the old days. It's the easiest to remember, There's no news in the title. Uh nor are there call letters for the station. But the website was [Call Letters] dot com and actually Target doesn't have a different name for itself so we need to call the website [Name] dot come which of course wasn't available. They picked dot TV which I can care less as long as we say the name over and over and over

and over again hopefully you know when you're teaching in college after you've passed all of this that's when it makes a dent. It takes forever and that's what we're seeing works here. So for our website, yeah people know about it and we certainly push it, but social media is what gets people there. Those links. Those clicks. We use comeScore to measure that. Uh and like I said analytics.

R: Will you talk about, um I mean with that data that you have, will you talk about that in the editorial meetings? What stories are tracking on the web?

ND: Oh yeah. We do. We do. We use it more as a guide to better understand where people's heads are. Uh , here's a good example. If you'd like an example.

R: yeah. Absolutely.

ND: OK, well I've told you were the number 3 rated station. Alright. This is part of the reason they were spending money and it's like well we're not making money. What do we do? They could have shut it down or they could have called the competition and said hey will you manage our newsroom and sales department, which we did. So that hasn't changed anything. All the work we've put into it has approved the recognition that we've made sort of a dent ah and that's a start, but you know, these reporters you know they work really hard, uh they don't have legacy behind them so it's a challenge, so we broke a story. We've been writing a story now for the past three weeks. It's uh about uh , uh a waterpark that this guy wants to build. He didn't have the paperwork, had a little guff, and he withdrew that request. He also has another park that he runs. It runs during the holidays and its uh, its uh what you call ...lights, holiday lights and decorations and decorative lights and stuff like that. Well, on Thursday, last week, the reporter, when he went to get his license for that and was given it, the reporter said well did he complete all of the requirements as listed here. And the people there were like..uh...no he didn't and they quickly revoked his license. Now, that's real work. Nobody else had it and our kids put on social media and the website uh popular attraction's license is revoked. Ok? So the bad guys took our information and really didn't have any way to verify it other than to make a phone call and they shared that information. Now which social media..which station's social media got the most attention? Not ours. Even though she broke it. So she was disappointed and I explained to her, I said your social media and web presence and footprint is sort of indicative of you know. It is just the way it is. They've got more people. So when you share something good, bad, sensationalist, not sensational, you're going to get the most feedback. It's just the way it is. It's it's the way those things are designed you know. The more the merrier. If you and I put this funny YouTube video together and it was so off-the-wall and somebody shared it and it got a million hits, all of a sudden you and I would be pretty popular. We didn't do anything. You know and they wouldn't..it's all in how they want the traffic so she felt bad. Well, flash forward a week and we get a phone call. This lady called and she said she lives out near this attraction and she said she's recorded every news station and she really thought that our reporter did the best job and she wanted me to know that. So, I told her, I said opposite of what you felt last week, despite the fact that more people saw your story spat out of the mouths of the competition and the website and the social media you need to take solace in

knowing you're doing the right thing, This is how you make it then. This is how softball, baseball teams win. Football teams win. You just have to be consistent. You have to do it a lot and hopefully your work pays off. And it just takes time. It's incremental. So that's an example of social media win when it was also a loss. In other words we shared a unique and breaking story and the other guys just essentially, you know rode the coattails and needless to say they generated more of the hits or the you know whatever you want to call it. So it's you know, we talk about it in editorial meetings, we accept that there's some things that are going to be more popular. It's weird uh the most popular stuff in this market, the stuff that you'd share on social media and when something is shared it's obviously going to improve your clicks because those people not only like it enough to click on it but they like it enough to share it with their friends and followers. Tweet it or click it and then you add it, it's exponential. Uh usually it involves stuff like uh, uh an animal for adoption or a missing person. Something where people fill at, they can do it's actionable. Does that make sense?

R: Yeah. Like something they can be involved with.

ND: Exactly and it's an unintentional call to action. A call to action that would benefit us would be, hey uh you know we've got a new whatever, weather system, help us name it. You know. Be a part of that debate or discussion. Versus here's a missing person. You just stick it up there. People automatically feel compelled because it takes no effort to share that. So you know these guys will pepper our website, our social media with things like that, stuff that obviously has value. That serves the community and at the same time you get a bump or a benefit from it, Uh. I write editorials on the website. Uh nothing that would be Fox News slash MSNBC style, uh they're usually you know interesting local takes on something and I think I do it so infrequently, [topic of editorial], I wrote a whole but about it and kept people updated and it turned out to be one of the most popular stories, quote, unquote stories on the website. You know. I didn't do anything. I just wrote a little bit [topic of editorial]. You know. So. Obviously like sort of eluded to, sensationalists, the stuff that people you know current interest or behind the scenes or a dog or a missing person. That's the stuff that sorta generates the most feedback. But we don't necessarily put that in our newscasts. You know editorial meetings we'll discuss these things, but we don't necessarily make a TV story out of it. Does that make sense? So we kinda keep them separate. Uh the competition had a photo the other day on their Facebook, no excuse me, no yeah it was on their Facebook page and they did a story on it, uh it looked like a big python in a nearby river. It turned out to be a brown snake. Just a very big one. But of course you put the picture up and what would you do if you saw this? It's in a local river. And of course five million people underneath it. Oh my gosh I'd be scared, you know. Exactly. They're fishing, they're fishing for the hits I guess.

R: Would you in the, do you, have you ever had an instance where you might have something in the broadcast, a story, you know that fit well in the broadcast but then it did really really well on social media, did well on your website and it prompted to a talk maybe to try to advance the story the next day?

ND: Sure. Yeah Sure. Absolutely. I mean it's you know, what is it, is it the tag wagging the dog, you know or however you want to look at it. You're right. You know there are instances of that. I know that's sorta where your research is. Uh yes. The answer's yes. Let's say we do uh an interview with somebody, a newsmaker, let me think of an example. Here's an example. Ok, uh a lady goes to a grocery store with her children. Uh and she uses and expletive while talking to her child. Must have been eight. Seven. Eight. And the uh another customer in the store heard it and complained and the cops came and arrested her. Well, there's a law on the books that says you can't use profanity in public in this little community and this lady was arrested. Which begged the most amazing question. Really? You're going to take the time to arrest somebody for for doing that? So this lady is separated from her child and I'm nor saying it doesn't make it right, it's just sort of the principle. So we do this story and we get a lot of feedback. So the mother called us and said she'd like to talk to us, so we went and interviewed her, we put the entirety of the interview on line because during our interview, the lady who made the complaint called the lady who said the language in public that generated that her original complaint, so they apologized to each other on the phone while we were there. And we put that up. And and that's a follow-up to a story we did the previous day. And it both was a success on television. I had to presume..we don't get daily ratings, uh but definitely online so people were able to watch the entirety of the conversation . You know we can't out all of that on television, so. Yeah the uniqueness of the story lead to a uh web push, which led to a follow-up with the lady who then of course uh .. uh that next day video was even more of a hit socially and online. So you know. That's a story and example of the success of a story and web extending the track life.

R: And you mentioned in that, that you do nor receive uh the traditional like Nielsen ratings...

ND: We do, we do, it's just that in a diary market, you get them you know You know I'm kinda like a hippie, ok I'm not a fan of Nielsen. I think it is a broken system. I don't think it's anywhere near accurate and I'm not saying it as a number three-rated TV station. I managed the [affiliate name] station in this very market. The one we own as well. The company that pays my salary owns that one. It was number one forever. Not that I did anything to make it number one. It just was. It's a legacy station. I say that, I said the same ting then. The diary market..Nielsen is old school. And in the old days people would be more than happy to get paid a dollar and fill out a little crayon book, you know, accurate because they felt like they were making a difference. Now a days it's about 500 diaries, for months out of the year, they go out to people across the viewing area, the DMA, and I..it seems like the only trending I see is that..I get the impression that they are going to the same group of people that are willing to fill it out. It's very inaccurate. So, ok when I say that kind of stuff, I'm just saying you know ratings...they're a hard , you can use them, but as you know, if you're familiar with this business, it's very slow to change. You know. It always has been. Same for radio and so forth. Everybody's very slow to change. So I'll argue with a sales guy and they go over this and they'll say we need to do a sweeps stories and I'm like no we don't. Nobody cares anymore. You know, I don't know how old you are, all I know is you're a woman, ok. Now. I don't know what age group you're in, but whatever age group you're in, do I

really think for a minute, you're sitting at home and whatever time of day it is and you see a commercial and it says, you know you're local news has this tonight, watch and you're going to lean over to your spouse or your family member and say hey, don't forget to set the DVR, I really want to see that. No. It doesn't happen anymore. There's 5 million channels. There's Netflix. Nobody does that anymore, but TV stations, TV markets still or the same thing when you ask them why, they say it's cause it's what we do. You know? And always run stories, unless you have really good investigative units sand those things should be done year round. So probably not the best person to speak at the defense of ratings as a way to gauge actual viewer interest because I don't know if it's true. We've had success with our morning show since this partnership started. Number two jumped up in ratings or whatever. But do I think that's because of the work we've done? No I think it's a fluke. I think that if we were metered, where people with devices on their television those numbers would be different. So anyway, not to bore you with it , but that's why I give it such share..with a very big grain of salt

R: And so I think you said you get the traditional ratings reports about 4 times a year?

ND: Four times a year. Yes ma'am

R: And then compare it to how often you get information about your page views or unique visitors on your website?

ND: Well the good news is we get to look at that every day. That I believe. That to me is real data. That to me is great. Because let's face it, it's simple. I'm sure the computer geeks out there would tell you it's not, but there's obviously they know what they're doing. They know how to register those clicks and tell you where they're coming from. You know Google Analytics is great. I had, actually had a monitor on my computer where I could look at Google Analytics and just leave it up all day. I mean you know, at some point you know..I'm not worried about..my job is to serve the community and that's what I tell our people. Your job is to serve. Don't you worry about you know getting more attention to yourself. It's about doing your job. If you do your job well enough those people will come. So, yeah we do Google Analytics and you can have that stuff every day. I can walk out of here right now and ask our web guy, and we have one guy to let me know what the number one story was yesterday. He'd probably tell me.

R: And that follows up to my next question. Who, what employees have access to your website data like that?

ND: Oh it'd be myself and truthfully I haven't logged in in awhile so I would probably forget the password, but our web guy. We've got one web guy who works sort of the regular shift then I got another person who's a web producer and she works weekends and such, but he is the guy. He is the guy I go to. So it'd be myself, him, ah there's probably somebody in sales that has equal access to that information.

R: And which employees have access to those ratings reports that come out?

ND: I'm the only one who gets them. I get access to them, but I share that information..well myself and the sales manager of course and our GM, but I share that with....I mean once I get it, open up the PDF, I just open it up and anybody want to look at it? We'll look at it together. Let's huddle around the computer. Of course I preface it with the same speech you just heard me give you with you know I don't care what it says, don't get too excited or too upset because ...and they just go yeah, yeah, yeah

R: So you have that and then with the website data your web guy has, um I know you mentioned that you have a monitor uh in where you're at, you can see the Google Analytics and stuff is, do you guys have a monitor in the newsroom or anything like that you know your other employees can see it?

ND: We did. We did it was up where it was on my desk I actually gave the monitor to the producer who needed the bigger monitor so I can put it up on my computer and leave it there if somebody wants to see it, but no I mean you know I tell these guys that our jobs in news, if you want to be a journalist..there's a difference between journalism and making money. If you, if you start chasing, this is an opinion, this doesn't make it right..if you stat chasing what everybody's...where the hits are...our lead story will be about Justin Bieber, ok? Or it will be about something salacious. You know there's a reason why our industry is staring to tank. 24-7 is killing us. You know what's the article that CNN had the other day? Are there more cops killing people? No. they're not actually. We have a history of it in our Country that's a problem and certainly worth addressing, but no it's you know. It's the old shark. The summer of the shark. No we had the same number of sharks we had 50 years ago. It's the 24-hour news channels with nothing else to talk about. So I, I, it worries me if, if these kids start focusing, they need to think how can I serve our community. What's important. It's hard enough that they don't know what a mortgage is coming out of college or understand a tax system, uh so with those things it's already hard to get them focused on what people really care about, the say to day stuff you know a crimes story is only important if it affects a lot of people. But I don't know..what city do you live in?

R: uh, right now I live in St. Augustine, but when I worked in broadcast I worked in Orlando.

ND: Ok, so Orlando so you know somebody shoots someone at Disney World, that's kind of a big deal. Because there's a lot of people around, uh how this person got in, what prompted it, hut if ..if you go to the preppy side of Orlando or you know where the drug deals go down, Do you really think anybody cares, except for the people who were shot? The people that sort of live nearby. You know it's sort of hyper-specific..so uh I don't know..I'm I'm just weird that way. I don't let..I don't want to let our content be dictated by what is generating interest. Now, I'm not stupid enough to know, I mean I get it, we don't want to do stuff that makes us happy either. We have to do what affects the largest swamp of people. Uh sometimes it's boring. So you right, you do have to you know pepper it with content that's at least worth you know getting a reason to turn on a television. But uh you know yeah they kinda look at it. They can lean over to my computer..I do have it up from time to time but it's not something that is out there for

everybody to see. You know. I think that again, that depends on the News Directors you talk to. Large markets, they're more attuned to what the General Manager wants, you know, then they have EPs and Assistant News Directors and so forth. But in small market TV, it's me and then I go straight to one guy at the top. And uh, you know... Believe me I know how important it is to make money, TV, the industry has to come up with a better way to do it than just rely on..ok now I'm just rambling. It's it's the..I don't like the tail wagging the dog. I don't like it. There's no other way to say it. You know if we sat there and said, wow, you know this was popular, we should do a story on it, you know then, you know who was it that said Bill Mahr or somebody like that said recently about network news. Network news. 30 minutes a night. That's all they got. They have the largest number of views till this day. Still And yet what was some of the topics? Some of the topics people talk about or don't; talk about. Like..I don't know Global Warming. It's like over the past year it got four minutes. You know. Not that that's like whether you believe it or not. It's an issue or whatever. These things that these guys can address to a large audience, right or wrong and they don't take advantage of it. You know they start to see you know stories four or five minutes in that involve a celebrity. You're like you know what happened to news? Well they're fighting to get people you know to switch so that's why I think again, I think our industry, at least journalism, the heart of journalism it's really at a crossroads. You're right. You're doing a paper on a project on how social media, how web Internet influence journalism and I'm here to tell you I don't care if it means we're number three in the ratings for the rest of our lives and the few people who watch are in , you know it's worth it to maintain the sanctity of what the Edward R. Murrows, hell even Ed R. Murrow had to do a celebrity interview to get what he wanted. You know what I mean? That was his web. That was his Internet. So I don't know. I'm probably too much of a hippy for your research. But it it is something that we accept, we know, we utilize the information. We talk about it . The young people sort of nudge me in the right direction , and say hey this is kind of a big deal, this is why, but I, I do not let it get to the point where it dictates our day to day.

R: Um and my next question would be who monitors your station's social media accounts. And I know you have a web guy, but are your reporters and anchors involved in posting on social media and having access to it?

ND: They are. They are, we use a system, and again these systems that are created , this is where you wish ...I'm sure you did too, you were in the business.,uh you came up with all these neat systems by which people can do it with ease. We use a system called Social News Desk. It's basically one program and it lets you post anywhere that we own an account. So..

R: I've used that one.

ND: ok, so you're familiar. It's pretty simple. So most of the time, people who post would be the web guy or our new web employee, she works on the weekends. Uh obviously if I have time, I'll try and put something up just because it wouldn't kill me to do some work during the day, our executive producers, our producers do as well. Uh

everybody has a hand in it. I think the reporters mostly utilize it for not only sharing their story, but letting people know hey I'm working on this today if you have any insight or you'd like to share a comment or whatever. We did a story the other day about the, there's this one group, I think out of Florida they get canines for, uh service dogs for uh..

R: Canines for Warriors?

S: Right, uh yeah and they do that the 22 of every month so it stopped at 22, yeah no because 22 soldiers apparently uh commit suicide and it turns out that statistics a little off but it's sort of the easy one to remember so everyone says stop at 22. Protect. You know, help veterans You know we need to do what we can. So we did a story on..we took advantage. We're a huge military community and we saw a ..let's talk to the Wounded Warriors Project here. They've got a base here, you know. What can people do. Things that we can do to look out for our vets. And we wrote..I wrote a piece about the importance of it in the morning and put it online so we could get people talking about it in advance so, that's usually where a reporter's story is seen beyond, before it's actually is completed. We'll put pieces up if we do with an interview with somebody we may see some of it online.

R: So as a marketing tool to drive to your website?

ND :Right. We don't have a real good marketing person. Uh in fact real bad is probably the better way of putting it. It's somebody who was with the previous ownership, actually I'm sorry they own the station still. Their employee. It's their employee because they have to have somebody here, but she's not a newsperson. She doesn't really market news. That falls on us. That's uh. But everybody plays a role in utilizing because of Social News Desk. It's pretty simple and everybody can do it and they all know what to put up there. Stuff that's interesting, stuff that's relevant. You're not sure and you'll see the occasional, because the web guy is you know crazy weird guy , you know typical computer geek/ He'll still put some of those you know wacky, you know the wacky stuff that you see. What was the story the other day out of Tampa? They uh the kid who had a water moccasin in his pillow case under and it bit him on the face. I mean that made for a lot of fun. We own the station down there in Tampa so I was able, we were able to steal the story and literally just put it on our website and share it. It didn't require any hard work at all. And you know instant comments. You know. Instant shares and so forth.

R: We've got a plethora of weird stories in Florida that I'm sure all the stations can use.

ND: This is true.

R: Um which, I know you use the Social News Desk to control and post to all of your media. Which social media do you use?

ND: Uh Facebook. Twitter, We do have access and use Google Plus although I don't think it's going to be around much longer. Uh our morning show has it's own Instagram account uh because I wanted to have more of a lighter Today Show type thing since

we're an [Affiliate]. So they use that uniquely. Uh we don't use a station Instagram account for say, we just let them have that one. Uh and I can't think of anything else. You know what's funny? We were one of the first ...uh as much as I poo poo on it all I am a geek for this stuff. Um I love Periscope. When Periscope came out two weeks ago yesterday, might have been three weeks ago yesterday. Uh I read bout it, downloaded it..are you familiar with Periscope?

R: You know what, I actually got on Meerkat which is the one they had before and I did get Periscope because I saw they put that up and I had a lot of fun with Meerkat so I haven't had a chance to play with Periscope yet, but..

ND: Yeah it's really, it's a little. Meerkat's awesome, but this one lets you replay stuff so you can leave your stuff up for replay. So and it's made by Twitter, clearly they want Meerkat to no longer be part of the Twitter cause {chuckle} it's well, it's really well done, so I immediately uh when I saw the day 1 when it came out. It hadn't even had any fanfare kick in..some guy used it to shoot video at that building explosion in Manhattan. The gas explosion or whatever and he used it for that and I thought oh geez this is great for news. So I don't know I created an account with our station Twitter account because it's own by Twitter and I out something up about the show and during the show we did a live thing. I must have had 175 people in there commenting this is so cool and buh bluh buh buh awe man this is great. This is awesome. We can use this to do a Q & A during the show. Well within three days every TV station in the country was doing it and I was like ok so much for that. Guess it wasn't that great of an idea. Now you know when you open it up, I don't open up Periscope that much anymore. It lasted about, the excitement lasted about a week, uh most of this time it will be you know such and such you know affiliated at 6 o'clock to an anchor glaring down and smiling a lot..now, now we're ..you know I always joke, you know Facebook was popular until your parents got on it. Yeah. That's the end of that. So anyway. Periscope, while I think it's still interesting, you can open it up and watch some guy walking around you know the opera house in Sydney Australia and flip over to some dudes in a car smoking grass or whatever the heck. Its weird, but I don't; know if news knows how to use it yet. I thought I came up with some cool idea, but I was probably one of a million news people that out it out there during the news. It lased two minutes. So anyway we do have a periscope account and we did not create one for Meerkat, but we tried UStream We tried them all. Facebook .Twitter. Those are the two that generate the most attention if we get something in house, they immediately go to the Facebook page

Anonymous Executive Producer. Phone Interview. May 20, 2015.

Researcher: OK. First one. Can you describe the daily process of choosing stories to air in one of your newscasts?

Executive Producer: Um sure. So our process is actually a two-day process. All of our reporters are required at the end of their shift to turn in what we call and end of shift note

where they kind of summarize what they did today, um the main contact, etc. it includes any follows to the story that they did today and it also includes a pitch for tomorrow. We start the story selection process 24hours ahead of the actual story selection process. So all of those emails are aggregated into one document that we look at in the morning editorial meeting and then um at that meeting the reporters can either say ok I'm going to go back to my night notes to one of the stories that I pitched or they can go, ok so you saw my night note, here's what else I have. So the basic goal of that is to just make sure we are um creating as many stories as possible, touching as many audiences as possible. We're not just sitting around the table how it used to be old school with a paper going ok, here's what's going on today. And then we kinda go through the pitches. The reporters pitch their stuff.

R: ok

EP: And then we kinda go through the pitches. The reporters pitch their stuff, we talk about what's going on today. What we need to be covering and then we divide those stories up.

R: Ok can you tell me in the editorial meeting, who, like what, you mentioned the reporters are in there, who else is in the editorial meetings?

EP: We also have a managing editor in there. Usually an Assistant News Director, two uh Executive Producers, and three Line Producers. Uh somebody from the web typically's in there and usually the Special Projects Producer.

R: And of course you're going to get all these story pitches, can you kinda talk about the process as to what your lead stories for you newscasts will be?

EP: mmm. OK so we know um due from audience research that people in my market are interested in about five things that are near and dear to their heart. Those five things would be uh money, housing, healthcare, education and um, oh now I can't remember the other one because I'm on the spot.

R: That's ok

EP: Anyway we kind of, we go through those five, you know does this fit one of our five um five pillars. So we kinda talk about that. And we talk about what has good video. What has good sound. What do we have to be covering today to make sure it's part of our newscast? And we divide it out from there.

R: So that kinda goes into my next question. Because you can get more stories than you can get in a newscast is there someone in the meeting that ultimately decides which stories will make the cut?

EP: Uh I wouldn't say that there's a specific someone, um we kinda go through like I said like the whole pitches. Reporters do their thing and then we talk about what's important

and then the question from the managing editor typically goes like this: alright, what do you guys like? And then the Executive producers and the producers kinda weigh in just by saying ok I like A, I like B, I like C um we should probably dig on D and then lets come up with a couple of plan Bs in case we dig on this story and get nowhere um and then we divide and conquer from there. It's really a group process. It's not one person that decides what goes in those newscasts.

R: ok and along the same lines once you have your stories narrowed down, who decides what the lead stories would be for each newscast?

EP: Um that typically uh the producer. The line producer of those newscasts uh the executive producer obviously will weigh in later and say hmm I either like that or I don't like that. But often times I want something in that lead spot that is wide-reaching, it isn't crime-y and it's got either great emotion or great video.

R: Um ok, what type of information do you have available to you in regards to your station's website? AS far as what maybe the most popular stories are or what the most emailed stories are from your website?

EP: So we have um, we have a monitor in the newsroom um monitoring live metrics on that. SO we can tell at any given moment what story is being shared, being read, being shared, uh blah bluh blah it's almost real time. And that feedback is front and center in the newsroom .It is not, that board is not visible um in the room where we have our editorial meeting, but it is something that uh often times one of our anchors checks that board before he comes up and he'll say hey here's what people are talking about on social media. Or somebody from the web will come in and say hey we put this story on Facebook and it's getting a massive amount of shares or somebody posted something on our Facebook page that's going viral you guys might want to look at this?

R: And does that come into play when you're deciding what stories to do? Like if you see something that's tracking , you know getting a lot of traction on Facebook or your website that you might discuss advancing that story somehow? Or finding another angle?

EP: Um sometimes, but not as often as you might expect. It's usually up for discussion, but our thinking tends to be if it's going viral online most people probably already seen it. So it's not something we're typically going to put a reporter on. That said, just this week we had a story somebody posted on our Facebook page, a couple of pictures of some, some guys and the story basically was, these guys stole my iPhone and I still can get in through the iCloud and these are the guys who stole my iPhone. And so that story which was a social media based story I mean she posted that on our Facebook page and we went after that.

R: Ok and when you talked about the monitor, you know I asked you about um information as far as what's the most popular or what's the most emailed um what other information do you get form your website um as far as your audience? Do you get page views, unique visitors?

EP: All of that. All of that comes to my inbox on a daily basis. So I can see what everyone looked at yesterday and the day before, how many stories each individual in the newsroom uh actually produced to that website. Um, but I'll be honest with you, it's not something I spend a whole lot of time digging into. Typically look at what was the number one story yesterday, what are people talking about today before I head upstairs. I'll take a look at the monitor real quick. But that's it.

R: Ok So we talked about the monitor in the newsroom, so any of your employees have access to that to see if they're walking through there?

EP: Yes. Everyone can see it.

R: And then you said you got an email. Does everyone in the station get an email or is that more of just a newsroom manager thing?

EP: I believe that's just newsroom managers that get that email with the, with the unique user count and um the story production count.

R: OK. How often do you receive the traditional ratings reports?

EP: I'm in a metered market so I get traditional Nielsen ratings every morning.

R: And are those emailed to you or are they displayed?

EP: Those are emailed to the entire station.

R: Ok, so like comparing to the information you use in your editorial meeting that you get about the website, do you guys discuss the traditional ratings as well?

EP: Um there's typically not a lot of discussion around the table about ratings. Sometimes we'll talk about whoa what happened last night, we didn't get you know no one came in the door or uh often around the editorial table where it's a public conversation, it's either it's good job or there's no comment whatsoever about what happened with the ratings.

R: Ok and when we were talking about the editorial meeting, you said you had your five pillars and you got that from your audience information, um where do you get your audience information to determine what they're watching?

EP: So we did a research project last..I think it was last spring. We had a consultant group that did uh focus groups and um I believe phone questionnaires for people in the market and that's how we came up with those five pillars.

R: Ok so that's an independent thing, that's not anything that you're getting from like your page views

EP: Right.

R: ok. Um who monitors your station's social media accounts?

EP: Uh we don't have a traditional Social Media manager like many stations do right now. Um we divide that duty between um what we're calling like the social media team which consists of a couple of anchors, uh a bunch of people who work solely on the web and that's really it. A couple promotions people are also in on that group

R: Ok If something is getting retweeted, or getting shared a lot on Facebook kinda where does that information come into , Who is it coming from, like who is monitoring, is that something you guys all kinda watch on that main monitor in your newsroom or is that like the web?

EP: The main monitor in the newsroom is not tracking social media. It's just tracking our website. But as far as tracking our website goes, or I'm sorry, tracking our social media it's something that we're lacking quite a bit right now because um we don't, have somebody assigned to that fulltime so it's a secondary duty for quite a few people and they all kinda share the duty and um often times we'll get through the editorial meeting in the afternoon and then somebody will say hey did anyone see this on Facebook? And everyone is like no.

R: ok and like who posts on it? Are your anchors and reporters responsible for posting as well on social media?

EP: Uh there's a schedule for posting on social media and then it's those people that I mentioned before, the anchors, the promotions people the web people. They all share that duty so they all have a different scheduled time

R: Ok and then um my last question is, you mentioned the web person comes into your editorial meetings, I guess what is their role in the editorial meeting.. do they pitch stories..is it strategy of how you're going to cover stories that you're going to be broadcast are covered on the web? Kinda talk about their role in the editorial meeting.

EP: They don't have a whole lot of um..that person's actually pretty quiet most days. I think that they're more as what are we working on for the future. They're there to listen more than they are to share. And so often times they're quiet during the entire meeting.