Tapping into Community Conversations: How Broadcast Journalists’ Social Media Routines Influence Content and Sourcing

Method

This research seeks to better understand how today’s broadcast news reporters use social media and, further, how those routines are a byproduct of managerial expectations, brand values and of a developed work flow over the course of reporters’ careers. To understand this, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and observations at five commercial television stations for two days each. During the recruitment stage of this project, some interviewees expressed concern over strategic secrets being revealed in this report, so the researcher decided to leave names, stations and identifying elements out of the final report.

Each station is unique to its market, which means there are no direct competitors in the sample. The stations range in Designated Market Area (DMA) rankings from a top five ranking to one that is outside the top 125. The Nielsen Company groups geographic areas to form DMAs. These rankings are used for research and commercial purposes. These rankings are reflective of population size and community watching habits (DMA® Regions). For example, Columbia, Missouri received a DMA ranking of 138 for 2014-2015.

During each visit, the researcher interviewed at least two reporters, the news director and the web director. The recruitment process began with the researcher reaching out to personal industry contacts. The final participants derive from a network of professionals with the majority of those contacts having no previous relationship with the researcher. Due to scheduling issues, some stations had other positions at the same level or higher substitute for one of these positions. Some stations provided additional interviews with positions such as general managers, news anchors, digital producers and other newsroom staff. The researcher asked the reporters and
station managers two different sets of questions and the conversations ranged from 15 to 40
minutes. For a full list of the guiding questions, see the original proposal included in the
appendix. The participating reporters ranged in age and level of experience. The reporter with the
most experience said he had been reporting for television for 41 years. The reporter with the least
experience said he was in his second job and was in his second year of television reporting.

All of the interviews took place in March and April of 2015. After completing these
interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio clips and then coded them for reoccurring
themes.

**Results**

Digital and social media have opened many doors throughout the years for television
news reporters. They can help journalists generate story ideas, find stakeholders and spread news
beyond geographic regions. Reporters say digital and social tools can bolster the sanctified
practices of yesterday’s broadcasters, but they also say these aids are not without drawbacks. In
this study, many reporters expressed concerns about an increasing workload, unclear
expectations and uncertainty about how to maintain a personal identity on social media that will
not compromise their work. These concerns must be addressed, because managers are
increasingly shifting focus from the television broadcast to digital offerings.

This research shows how reporters utilize digital and social media throughout their entire
reporting process, both on and off shift. Through a series of semi-structured interviews and
observing the newsrooms, it also became evident television news reporters’ social content is
influenced by their stations’ values and overarching brands. These individual brands sometimes
are put at odds with the digital brands on-air personalities are making for themselves. Television
news reporters take on many tasks, but what continues to make them who they are is the care
they take for their television content. With rapidly changing technology and a 24-hour news cycle, reporters and news teams are using these tools in their fight to stay relevant.

**The packaging**

Many reporters say digital and social media enter their workday long before they reach the newsroom. All the stations observed had editorial meetings at the beginning of their employees’ shifts; this held true for dayside and nightside news teams. Broadcast reporters said it is routine to scan social media in preparation for this meeting. Several also said they check other media outlets as well as what their own station has covered since they last worked. A longtime reporter who typically works dayside from early morning through the five and six o’clock newscast, explained his day in a few short sentences:

“We have an editorial meeting at 9:15 in the morning. We pitch our stories, get assigned and then we generally leave, do research throughout the day, get interviews and then we're generally on two shows … And we try and make the stories different.”

Another reporter, who typically works from the early afternoon through the 10 and 11 o’clock newscasts (known as nightside), shared a similar breakdown:

“We’re all kind of pitching our stories and put our heads together to figure out what we can lead with that night… Then we’re out the door so we just see how the day goes. Every day is different. [Station name] is really big on breaking news stories so if there’s something else that’s pressing that might be happening — a fire, a shooting, a stand off — we would just hold on to the elements that we’ve gathered for the day and then we’d go to the next assignment.”

The morning editorial meeting looked different at each station, but was comprised of similar goals. At each station, managers expected the reporters to pitch two to three ideas for content that could be gathered and published that day. Reporters say the presence of digital and
social media influences their process for tracking down stories to pitch. Common practices include aggregating Twitter accounts into TweetDeck for easy observation, searching trending hashtags or hashtags with a city name and sifting through viewer tips submitted by message, email or direct message — Twitter’s messaging system.

A reporter who works in a market with the highest DMA ranking and who has extensive experience marrying social media and broadcast news uses specific strategies when using Twitter for sourcing:

“I’ve built in lists of communities of people that I know are impactful to certain things. I have strong lists of decision makers in politics, decision makers in government. They are on social in ways that they have never been before and they are giving you information that you would normally have to go through nine people to get.”

The reporter searches Twitter for sub-communities within his community and attempts to identify people with digital followings within their respective neighborhoods. When a story breaks in a particular city, he will search for that city’s name in Twitter and see whose tweets are trending. He also searches by zip code to determine who is most active in that area. From there, he said, he will tag the users in his own tweets about their neighborhoods in hopes that those users will share the tweet with their own followers — thus expanding his content’s reach.

This reporter reports for his station’s noon, five and six o’clock televised newscasts, but stays focused on his digital reporting throughout his shift. “I start with social. I end my day on social,” he said. “I feel like social for me is not a mechanism to draw audiences to my original platform essentially, it really is to have consistent conversation throughout the day, a relationship.” He thinks many journalists could benefit from taking the time to more aggressively understand the platforms they are working on.
“Here's the weird thing: I think journalists ... are solely focused on how to be better storytellers or better writers or better journalists when they forget sometimes how to be a better communicators. Communicating is not just how to tell your story right, but it's also understanding the platform people are consuming your story on."

In addition to Twitter, other journalists shared different ways they track down story ideas and sources. One reporter said he regularly checks his town’s “subreddit” on Reddit, a social networking platform with many topical discussion boards. Another said he uses Banjo — a Twitter and Instagram aggregator — to track to user-generated content. The same reporter said that when news breaks, social media is especially helpful for finding images to use on-air and witnesses to comment on unfolding events. He said typically sources are very “receptive” when contacted over social media platforms.

But despite access to these tools, many reporters said they still find value in building relationships face-to-face, off of digital platforms, by immersing themselves in their communities.

“I get interesting stories just having conversations with people out and about on my days off type of things.” a mid-market reporter/anchor said. “When you're out in the community is when you get the real enterprise stuff. I think that's the best thing is building relationships outside of work and just seeing what's going on in the community.”

Another reporter/anchor — this one from a larger market — agreed.

“I really like to go out in the communities and see what they're all about,” she said. “It's fun because we have so many different communities. I'll go out and see what they are doing. How are they different from another community? What's going on in theirs that is totally
different from maybe a community that's right next door…it's just being engaged. Being a part of it. Being aware.”

News directors said that there is a push in the industry today to saturate the newscast with more community members. These non-official sources are a direct comparison to the Public Information Officers (PIO) and agency spokespeople journalists historically rely on for information. Research shows that regardless of the type of story, official sources continue to dominant the narrative (Livingston and Bennett, 2003). “When an unpredicted, non-scripted, spontaneous event is covered in the news, the one predictable component of the coverage is the presence of official sources.” (p. 376). Sources share information in accordance to their own paradigm, perspective or agenda, which can leave some journalists questioning the soundness of the information they are collecting. One news director recalled tuning into a weekend evening newscast and writing to her producer in delight after the first block of the show.

“I was floored. I was excited,” she said. She wrote to her producer, “Do you know why I loved your first block, your A block? I loved it because I didn't see a single official.”

She said the more than a dozen sound bites in the segment all came from community members, which are the people she feels her audiences connect with best. “I think people respond to people. People connect with people and that you don't always have to see the PIO. You don't always have to see the cop. They respond and connect with the mom who lost their kid, the person who is looking for a job, the guy who is pumping gas and wow, can't believe prices are going down. The real people.”

Social media opens doors for reaching non-official sources. Reporters say that including everyday people in their story “humanizes” the piece and often leads to stronger narratives and better overall journalism.
Researchers have recognized that there is a deficiency in literature about the way community members can become more involved in the reporting process (Kurpius, 2000) (Moon and Hadley, 2014). Kurpius suggests community involvement can provoke new conversations and help ensure an accurate depiction of reality in coverage. And for many journalists, social media has become an efficient way to track them down.

Crowdsourcing is a strategy used at many stations to find sources who are not officials. This strategy of reaching out to a following can be done on various platforms, but many reporters primarily use Facebook for this. Crowdsourcing is the idea that individuals can obtain information or content by putting out a call to a large group for what is needed. Many reporters said they’ve done this to find a source in their daily work. One reporter said he and his web manager crafted a post together early in the day asking anyone with experience using payday loans to share their contact information. Within an hour of the post going up, the reporter said he reached someone who ultimately ended up being a character in his television story.

“I kind of gave him the gist of the story and said, ‘Would you be up for it?’ There’s a lot of people affected by payday loans…would you be up for being that voice today?” He remarked that it’s often difficult to find people to talk about sensitive issues, such as finances, and that the crowdsourcing over Facebook technique helps narrow the search more efficiently than cold calling or approaching strangers. He said including this source humanized his story, in his opinion, making it stronger.

But not everyone interviewed supports using this strategy for sourcing over social media. One digital media manager said that because of Facebook’s algorithms, all of a station’s followers do not see the same information on their timeline in real time — like they would on Twitter. He said that the station would use the technique for lighter stories. He gave the example
of a post asking followers to give their favorite breakfast spot for a feature without a pressing deadline. For him, the goal is to create shareable content on the Facebook page and in his opinion crowdsourcing posts don’t evoke users to share.

Social media tools are helpful for tracking down information, especially in breaking news situations when information is sparse and reporters rely on witness accounts to piece together what might have happened. Once a reporter receives his or her assignment, news directors say they are expected to start reporting for the web until airtime. Reporters shared varied requirements in terms of the broadcast and web versions of their stories. Some reporters said they do multiple stories a day while others had one. Some reporters are required to submit web versions for the website, while others were encouraged—but not required—to write their own web stories. This is an example of the variance in expectation across the different stations.

“They expect that we're on it all the time. Certainly tweeting out things, letting people know what stories are going to air, breaking news as fast as we can,” a reporter said.

Consistent reporting is something that news directors said they not only expect, but also look for when recruiting new members for their teams. A news director from a large market station said it’s been difficult to get reporters to consider digital reporting as an equal to the legacy newscast.

“We really have to change the mentality that it's not this extra thing you have to do — that it's part of the job as much as reporting on TV,” she said. “It's the same level of importance.”

Before hiring someone, she will scan his or her activity on Facebook and Twitter. The candidate might have a solid resume and look great on television, but if a social media presence is lacking, it could cost that candidate the job. News directors pointed out that news happens throughout the day — not just when TV stations go on air.
Regardless of the platform, journalists both in and out of the newsroom have incorporated digital and social tools into their routine. As seen in this research, this practice does influence editorial content by revealing story leads and identifying sources.

But once a story is in motion — with sources confirmed and an angle determined — reporters’ social use begins to gear up. Their activity from here can be classified as brand promotion both for themselves and for the station as a whole.

“We want a way to not just promote our talent but show that our talent are storytellers and that in this area there are a lot of people who do a lot of good things and we're the station that tells those stories, inspiring stories, good news stories. I think in general local news gets a bad rap for doing too much crime, too much negative.”

The content ultimately chosen is thought to be a representation of the values a station and its team holds. And these values manifest across platforms — 24/7.

**Station Branding**

Consumers recognize brands by “names, terms, signs, symbols” and other distinctive qualities. Like other businesses, news companies use branding to reinforce their principles and remain relevant in a highly competitive market. Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) studied specifically how news organizations are borrowing practices from strategic management to improve their brand and further promote their product: the news. “The intricacy of the competitive media landscape has also made it more difficult to attract audiences solely on the basis of functional attributes such as the content of the news. In an environment where different organizations often offer news that is similar, differentiating media brands is necessary for survival,” they wrote.

News brands exemplify traits such as trustworthiness, sincerity, sophistication and
toughness (Kim, Baek and Martin, 2010). The use of social and digital tools has impacted the way these traits are exemplified and promoted to audiences. News managers said this is increasingly important due to the fact that many stations cover similar newsworthy events. Newsworthy topics often include matters of public safety, education and government.

“Everyone covers the same stories pretty much and that's the reason why we have the [brand removed]. We're going to give you the extra information. We're going to investigate that nugget that nobody is going to think about,” an executive producer said. He said his reporters must push themselves to pitch and develop unique stories, but must also remember to consistently promote the brand across the available platforms. He said the goal is to consistently remind audiences the news team is working to not only bring them the news of the day, but to engage with them in pertinent community conversations.

“It (digital branding) is just like a camera. It's your camera. It's your script. And it's social media. It's all one now, incorporated all in your coverage. Do not see it as something that's secondary or extra work,” he said.

Because the party no longer starts at five o’clock.

Regardless of where the news is coming from, station managers know the brands they’ve built must come through across platforms. Appointment viewing has declined across markets big and small, which has forced news companies to come up with new ways to attract and hold on to their consumer base. Appointment viewing refers to the idea that audiences will schedule their days around consuming news at a predetermined time of day. This largely describes the habits of viewers who rely on the legacy, television newscast for their content. One New York Times author describes this pattern of appointment viewing of specifically network newscasts as “the punctuation that ends the work day for close to 23 million people (Vavreck, 2015).”
“Gone are the days where we tell the world, ‘We are on at five o'clock meet us there! Everybody gather round at five o'clock! We throw the party at five! Come to our party at five o'clock!’” one news director said. “The party is 24/7…It is arrogant to ask people to come to us at five. We have to be where they are.”

All of the surveyed news directors said that their news production must be available to viewers when and where they want it and it must continue to reflect the station’s values, mission and basic tenants.

“Ideally we'd like it to be a seamless user experience where our audience can engage with, interact with us, consume what we're offering on any platform and feel like it all makes sense and it's all part of the same news experience,” a vice president of digital news said. “That they can send us things and then they might see something on TV or we can respond to them via email, Twitter or Facebook and they can feel like we are sort of living and breathing along with them in their lives.”

Another news director compared the branding of her news station to that of an iconic soft drink.

“A Coke is a Coke no matter where you go in the world,” she said. “It’s because Coke is a brand.” She said this holds true with her station’s brand. No matter where the audience goes to get it, it must reflect the same principles, voice and values.

To do this and to keep up with the demands of cross-platform reporting, reporters have always been expected to represent themselves sincerely when on the air or in person. Now, they must be mindful of their audience when posting anything digitally — from Facebook photos to personal tweets.
New applications and digital tools enter the digital landscape every day. Stations are consistently experimenting with new ways to use them to both report the news and share it with audiences. As more tools enter the newsroom, managers say that they understand not every journalist will use or excel on every platform. One manager said she helps her team customize its digital toolkit to better find the team’s voice and identify its social preferences. In turn, this — she believes — makes her station’s content more sincere, journalistically stronger and ultimately enhances the station’s brand. This same news manager, who leads a department of dozens of digital producers and oversees reporters’ digital content, said that audiences detect when a journalist is simply going through the motions and is not invested.

“Even if someone is trying to be a trouper and deliver, it's going to feel artificial. It's not going to feel genuine in their voice. It needs to have an authenticity. If that authenticity is missing, that bullshit meter is going to detect that pretty quickly and they're going to move on.”

Several news managers said that a way to combat this is to understand that journalists will use tools differently and to not expect exactly the same output from an entire news team.

**Personal branding**

But part of what makes television news unique is the face-to-face experience viewers have with the news team, even if separated by a screen. Television reporters use conversational and inviting gestures to be more relatable to their audiences. Many reporters have created professional accounts on social platforms — like Facebook and Twitter — to continue this online. Only a small handful of the reporters sampled in this report did not have a professional Facebook profile that they maintained.

Researchers began studying the relationship between on-air television journalists and their at-home audiences back in the 1950s. Rubin, Perse and Well (1985) contributed to this
literature by explaining how the perceived intimacy is strengthened by the consistent appearance of this person, coached on-air behavior and skewed perception of proximity (55-56). Reporters’ social accounts follow similar patterns. Many of them use those accounts to share their stories and behind the scenes photos, start conversations and give the audience a better sense of who they are off screen. Some reporters said they post photographs of meals, pets and outdoor adventures.

But like other users, reporters must adhere to Facebook’s own agenda. Some reporters said they’ve been automatically switched over from friend accounts to page accounts, which has disrupted some of their plans for the page. Facebook explains that friend accounts are for personal use while its page accounts are tailored to be suited for “businesses, brands and organizations.” Facebook caps a personal account at 5,000 friends (Page Basics). Several journalists shared they regularly added sources and fans on their personal accounts, which drove up their friend counts to the maximum. They said the platform switched their account to a Page after reaching that limit.

Additionally, some of the reporters said how it’s not their reporting that’s attracting the most engagement:

“When I do post I’ll get several hundred likes if it's something like a picture of me, which sounds horrible, but if it’s a picture of a little boy I’m doing a story on and I write a blurb about the story then I’ll get like 20 likes. So I’ve been very frustrated with that,” a young woman who works as a reporter and anchor in a mid-size station said.

A quick scan of the reporter’s Facebook page confirmed her observation. Photos of her on her own or working performed much better than links to her stories, if measuring in numbers
of “likes.” Another reporter, an older man who works in a large market, shared similar experiences. When the researcher asked what does well for him on his Facebook page, he said:

“Very personal things. Things where I pull something out of my old file — my old photo files — and I find something from 10, 20, 30 years ago. I just speculate, ‘Where's that person now?’ or ‘Here's what I did back then.’ People tend to enjoy that because it shows a different side of you then they see on a day-to-day basis. It's original content. It's something they can’t find anywhere else.”

But one station had strict policy against quick, look-at-me snapshots.

“I'm really anti-selfie,” the social media manager said. “We have found through pretty extensive market research over the years that our region really doesn't respond well with people who they feel are bragging, which selfies are very much that. We really try to make sure that when these reporters are promoting their stories they're promoting it with a really awesome, cool picture, not a picture of themselves.”

In almost every interview, reporters expressed some sort of uncertainty over when and how to use personal and professional accounts. Some reporters shared a variety of combinations of private and professional accounts across platforms.

Like others, reporters are at the mercy of the Facebook algorithm and its searching nuances and because of this, one reporter said he’s scrapped his private Facebook account altogether. That is something, he said, that is hurtful to maintaining relationships with long-distance friends and family.

“I guess the bottom line is I can't have a personal page anymore. If I really want to drive social media, if I want people to find me I just have to one page. And I have to be public about it, which means I have to pull back on personal stuff on it… I'm held back because you want to be
professional, but then it's the personal stuff that people seem to like too. I have to draw that fine line. Where is that line where I can be myself, but not too much myself?"

Others, however, seem more optimistic about integrating their accounts:

“It's very industry,” a reporter with a professional account that blends together work and personal life said. “While it's personal, this is a work event. I think in television you're mixing journalism with brand, right, your own brand. You're mixing journalism with your own identify in the market.” He said his feed commonly shows food he’s eating and pictures of his dog, in addition to industry events and content directly related to his reporting.

But the majority of those surveyed continue to maintain both professional and personal accounts in an effort to maintain a private life while still building relationships with the community.

Engagement can be measured by likes, comments and interactions between the user and audience member. And while news managers reported they are pushing towards increased interaction, maintaining boundaries is still top of mind for reporters.

“I've been sort of timid in the past,” a reporter/anchor shared. “You do get the random crazy person who either starts stalking you or I've interacted with people who might say 'Oh, great show today,' whatever and I'll write back 'thank you,' 'thanks for watching' and then pretty soon they're messaging you every single day, writing you every day and if you don't respond they get angry. I've had some bad experiences that have kept me from doing it. Also people can be mean. I have had good experiences, but I've been a little leery of stepping in sometimes.”

Regardless of the public face they put forward, these reporters said they need social media for its other functions. Many said they use social media to tease to their stories through
video updates, links and Facebook posts. Digital and social tools commonly assist with the reporting process, and also remain integral throughout the publication and sharing process.

Television news teams have long built their brands around enterprising journalism, breaking news and investigative digging.

“From the moment you go to bed to the moment you wake up, you turn to [call letters removed] in whatever form. It’s there for you.”

The inclusion of digital tools has only given more outlets for upholding their promise to serve as a watchdog to their community. This means this promise must be upheld equally in television newscasts as well as digitally. Reporters, while both pushing their own brand as well as their stations’, said there is a variety of ways they can push out the stories they’ve crafted.

**Distribution**

Regardless of the platform, reporters are expected to bring the same diligence and brand values to their content.

“We want to make sure we're using the same voice,” a social media manager said. “Our website has much, much deeper content. I try to put the best of the best on our Facebook page. Things that I know people are going to click on.”

The distribution of content on both television and digital happens in two ways. First, in the actual distribution practices and secondly, with the language used throughout those activities.

Facebook is constantly revising the systems that determine what content a user sees on his or her feed. It recently made significant changes to allow for what founder Mark Zuckerberg said is a revised system that filters for the highest quality content (Chowdhry, 2015). Facebook has 1.5 billion users, many of whom are young news consumers. To share content with these
people — and ultimately spread their brand more widely — news teams are coming up with better strategies and pointed execution of posts for their station pages.

With a similar goal in mind, another station’s team holds what it calls a “digital huddle” following the morning editorial meeting. There the team looks at what the reporters have been assigned and brainstorm ways the newsroom can create tailored content to go hand-in-hand with the reporter’s television story. Examples of this include photo galleries made from video screen grabs, timelines, and full interviews. This also includes posting trending content even if it is not directly related to the geographic region.

“The direction we're trying to go is how to package the content digitally for that day. It can be something completely different, but related for your story,” he said, “How do we package that online? Maybe do some sort of graphical display as a slideshow breaking down how much rain each city got and how much snow each city got because that's going to do better in terms of getting traffic, it'll do better on social.”

News and web directors hope their reporters take the audience through their day with them and illustrate the process that leads up to the television newscast. To do this, reporters are expected to gather photos, videos and factual information to be shared throughout the day and over multiple channels.

“I like it when our reporters do what I call progressive reporting. They bring users and viewers into kind of the process of how they're building their stories. It's not always just presenting them with ‘Here's the story as I found. I gathered for hours, now here it is.’ I really like it when we bring them along.”

But the constant sharing of information has some reporters feeling uncomfortable.
“The quandary is ‘Do I tweet the story as you're told to do, right, immediately, to beat the competition?’ The whole point of tweeting in this day and age is to beat the competition on social media, but the conflict arises if you have an exclusive story. Do you sit on it, do you tweet it and if so when do you tweet it? And so that's, that's problematic with social media.’” This reporter said it has gone both ways for him. He’s been burned when a competitor breaks a story he’s working on before he posts it and he has also posted when it’s just too late for a competitor to pull something together.

A lot of the strategy rested in creating shareable content.

“I want to be sure I put out a really great picture,” a social media manager explained. “A cool picture that people are going to want to show their friends…because it makes (them) look like the person who delivered it, even though the station did.”

Jonah Berger (2013) wrote an entire book on why people share digital content. For him, it comes down to stories containing one or more of the following elements: Social currency, Triggered, Emotional, Public, Practically Valuable and Stories. Berger describes content tailored for sharing as social currency. The idea is people buy into their friends’ accounts by how valuable they find their content. He writes that digital users want to seem smart, in-the-know and trendy. He says that the way to reach these viewers is to give them content that helps them do that. News managers are tapping into this and working to help reporters create content to be shared on digital platforms that are highly shareable. This involves giving them something they can’t get from another station including from a televised newscast.

When Berger refers to triggers he writes that content that is memorable and top-of-mind is more shareable. He suggests content producers develop content that is easily triggered by
consumers’ environments to increase the likelihood it is remembered and brought up again in conversation. Content that is easily found often is more successful.

Emotional content also drove sharing. Berger found that content that was highly arousing — like anger, amusement or anxiety — was more shareable than content that evoked low arousal emotions like contentment and sadness. When people relate to the content they are more likely to engage with it. He writes, “Emotion sharing is thus a bit like social glue, maintaining and strengthening relationships. Even if we’re not in the same place, the fact that we both feel the same way bonds us together.” Lastly, he writes that helpful information and compelling stories will also attract audiences.

The book has direct applications to content created in a television newsroom. While Berger named the patterns he observed, many journalists report taking similar steps to make content more shareable. For example, some managers are emphasizing the need for photos and videos — shareable material — opposed to text or self-promoting content.

Even sales and promotions teams are cracking into this model because, at the end of the day, these are all businesses that need to continue to make revenue. A digital promotions producer said she saw great success during a morning show. The morning reporter was making his way up a mountain. Throughout the morning as he climbed, the reporter sent back short videos with messages like “We’re going to get up there!” Throughout the morning the promotions team posted these videos.

“When he got to the top and it was just total darkness, but you just see this amazing view and then when the sun's coming up and there's a silhouette of him playing.”
The story involved a mystery piano planted on top of a nearby mountain. Digital professionals said, however, there are not a lot of metrics that show how digital and social content influences viewership.

It’s understood that digital and social is a booming part of the television newsroom. This doesn’t though take away from the importance teams and stations put on their legacy product. Much of the newsroom operation budget comes from ads sold during the newscast.

“The money is still there. That's where advertisers feel safe,” a general manager said. “They (the advertisers) understand it. They still buy traditional media even though we don't have as many people.”

Even as reporters wrestle with creating content for different media, many said they still have to prioritize their television pieces.

“The top priority is — we are a television station — so the top priority is it's got to be on the air. That might not be the answer that the web team tells you, but from a reporting perspective, if you have a black hole when your story is supposed to come up that's not a good thing,” a reporter said.

The television newscast isn’t simply seen as a moneymaker either. Viewers develop relationships with on-air personalities. Xu and Feng (2014) found that audiences who believe they have established a relationships with a journalist feel they have a deeper trust in the content and have more power to affect change in their community.

“I think the biggest challenge is really getting viewers to watch television,” one news director said. “People are using their phones. They can't get warm and friendly — what they get from the anchors and interpretation, the human quality, you're not going to get from your phone, but lives are so busy now. Sitting at home and watching the news at five o'clock is not
what people really do anymore so how do we stay relevant? That's our biggest challenge is staying relevant and running a business with a decline built in basically. And being relevant on our phones and tablets and making sure we're the best option for people in this market.”

The Pew Research Center released a report in June of 2015 calling social media “the Local TV for the Next Generation.” The study’s findings showed 61 percent of Millennials — Americans born between 1980 and early 2000s — reported getting their news about politics and government from Facebook. This age bracket makes up one third of the U.S. population (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014) and is the bracket news companies want to turn into loyal consumers of their brand.

Looking to the future

The surveyed reporters seem to agree that there are boundless opportunities that arise from integrating social and digital tools into their work. But as more stations expect journalists to work as one-man-bands — writing, shooting and editing their own work without the help of a photographer — and report across platforms, there is an increasing concern for the amount of time dedicated to the fundamentals that make the industry what it is.

“Where's the journalism? Where's time for the research? The fact checking?” a reporter with decades of experience said. “All of that, you know, anything that cuts into the basic tenants of journalism, the important things like fact checking, gathering information, calling sources, corroborating leads, all of that is diminished the more tasks you have, the less time you have to do the basics. I'm talking journalism with a big J.”

“A lot of times you're just tied, your hands are tied and you're just really busy,” another reporter said. “You're just making phone calls and researching, that's a little bit of the challenge.”
Television journalists complete myriad tasks throughout their day, but regardless of what or how they collect and share information, they said it remains critical they uphold their journalistic integrity.

“First and foremost, my job is to be a solid reporter and get the facts right… You can only do so much. As a reporter, you're already busy. And to be tied up in all these other things, I think it kind of takes away from the, what it means to be a journalist.”

**Discussion and conclusion**

The researcher drew this analysis from a collection of interviews, and while this research did not seek to provide a list of best practices, there are takeaways from analyzing these conversations that can be helpful to both academics and professionals.

It appears the increasing expectations are wearing on journalists.

“I think that many journalists—I won’t say all of us—but many journalists live separated from their own world. You can see from the daily work flow that we're on such a treadmill that it's hard to make the calls sometimes to receive phone calls or just to call a contact and say what's new, what's happening. Beat calls have always been a part of journalism. I find myself getting busier and busier and busier and less time to think, think, think,” a reporter said.

A place to start is by experimenting and understanding the tools available. Google Analytics, a product of Google that aggregates user experiences, can help identify strengths and weaknesses in strategy. The language of analytics is critical for all members of the news team — especially those looking to improve both station numbers and/or personal engagements.

The web managers offered expertise and pointed suggestions for not only ways to better their digital offerings, but also for ways at looking at an evolving industry. One pointed out that
the phrase “social networking” has made its way out and “social media” has taken its place. He posits that is because of an increased excitement for shareable content that sparks conversation.

Overall, the interviews show every member of the news team must realize the broadcast news industry is in a volatile state. This bolsters the need for continued education on best practices, as well as experimentation with new digital tools for both sharing and measuring content.

Despite new tools, new platforms and an abundance of connections, it is clear broadcast journalists must consider that journalism must maintain its integrity regardless of which platform it’s being reported on.

News managers can be encouraged to support their teams — with increasing workloads — by maintaining realistic expectations of them. Reporters can feel comfortable by embracing the changing nature of the industry and in appreciating how many people a story can reach using new digital tools.

Reporters interviewed in this project reiterated the importance of new journalists learning time management skills and the ability to adapt and prioritize.

Many newsrooms have gone as far as physically restructuring their workspaces to keep digital content at the forefront. This was done by putting a member of the digital team at the assignment desk to ensure information could be pushed out faster, another team moved their entire digital department next to the assignment — “prime real estate” the news director called it.

“Digital is not the other side of the room literally or figuratively,” another news director said. “It’s not that television is not important, it’s that we’re moving… It’s getting people to understand that [call letters removed] is not just [call letters removed] TV. It’s wherever you are.”
Social media allows audiences to have to contribute to their news in a setting they feel comfortable in.

The interviews show journalists must also keep in mind the rate in which technology is advancing. What was trendy one moment could be obsolete in a matter of months. Because of this, it’s important to keep an ongoing education as well as an eye on new trends.

Future research

There are several specific threads of conversation that would make for interesting further research. It’s important to note that the new application that allows users to instantly share a live stream — Periscope — was brought up at every station. There is opportunity for future research in analyzing the role live video plays in both a newscast and on digital platforms. It is unclear what impact this application will have, but its repeated mention at news stations leads one to believe there is something important happening to the industry here. There has already been a lot of excitement about this new tool, but one news director said the risk is high.

“One day it's not that I'm going to take you to a party or a concert one day I'm going to show someone getting murdered, getting beaten up,” she said.

The ability to live stream is not a new one. Stations have done this since they began doing live shots in the newscast. That being said, however, further research could dig deeper into the implications more live video could have on the industry.

There also is not research currently available diving into professional versus personal accounts and the decision-making behind the content shared on each of them. Research on the depths of para-social relationships between news audiences and their viewers dates back to the
1950s. It would be possible update this and examine how online engagement between journalists and their audiences builds relationships — real and perceived. A deeper look into this through textual analysis in combination with a deeper understanding of platforms like Facebook’s algorithms would be abundantly useful. This research would also be helpful to the journalists who appear to be struggling with determining a best practice for this.

The hope is that this research gives a look into the world of a broadcast news journalist and the pull they feel to bring sound reporting to two masters: the broadcast and its digital counterparts.

“The nexus between social media and broadcast is really still kind morphing and developing,” one reporter said. “I'm not really sure where it's going. I know that people are seeing my tweets I don’t know if that necessarily means they're going to watch my story later in the day, but its almost like your serving two different masters. I'm not sure where the train meets.”

There may not be a definitive answer or magical formula that instantly makes news go viral, but there are steps that can ease the transition and strengthen strategies.

This research also confirms it truly is time to let go of preconceived notions of what a broadcast news reporter does and what should be expected of them. Journalists can — and do — use digital tools to cultivate sources, spark curiosity, understand the community and help audiences build trust in a brand through digital.
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