

ETHICAL DILEMMAS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALISTS AND NEWS CONSUMERS

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by
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ETHICAL DILEMMAS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH JOURNALISTS AND NEWS CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

No longer are journalists the exclusive gatekeepers of information, nor are they the sole agenda setters in the public sphere. Social networking sites (SNSs), like Twitter and Facebook, have brought professional journalists and news consumers closer than ever before, both in terms of the closeness of their online interactions and the defined roles they play in the process of gathering and disseminating information (Broersma & Graham, 2013). By understanding both groups' expectations of privacy regarding information posted on these two SNSs, we can begin to create a unified understanding that will prevent emotional harm and will promote more positive online interactions.

This research study utilized focus groups with professional journalists and members of the public to better understand how these two groups interact online, as well as the potential ethical dilemmas that concern both groups.

Introduction

No longer are journalists the exclusive gatekeepers of information, nor are they the sole agenda setters in the public sphere. Social networking sites (SNSs), like Twitter and Facebook, have brought professional journalists and audience members closer than ever before, both in terms of the closeness of their online interactions and the defined roles they play in the process of gathering and disseminating information (Broersma & Graham, 2013). During Twitter's 7th birthday in 2013, the popular SNS claimed to have 200 million active users with 400 million tweets posted daily (Franklin, 2014). Five years later the number of active users on Twitter has grown to more 336 million (Twitter, 2018). Facebook has experienced similar growth in recent years. In 2013 the social network featured just over a billion active monthly users (Facebook, 2018). Five years later Facebook more than doubled its reach reporting more than two billion active users by the end of 2018 (Facebook, 2018). The amount of information, opinions, pictures and video files posted on SNSs is growing exponentially, giving journalists more access to the audiences they serve than ever before. This newfound plethora of information not only provides countless opportunities for professional journalists, but also countless ethical pitfalls.

Journalists are constantly finding new ways to use SNSs to obtain and disseminate information. Unlike past technological innovations like video newsgathering, live broadcasting, and digital editing that have been used by journalists for decades, the way journalists use social networking sites (SNSs) is still evolving and changing. These SNSs provide journalists with the unique ability to gather information, opinions and media files by simply logging onto a computer without ever contacting the original sources of this information. The potential for privacy

invasion has increased substantially as journalists have greater access to information that may or may not be intended for a mass audience outside the original author's social network. Various ethical codes encourage journalists to seek permission and verification before publishing this information (New York Times, 2018; NPR, 2017; ONA, 2018; RTDNA, 2018, & SPJ, 2014). However, each individual journalist carries his or her own unique set of standards and ethics that guide his or her use of SNSs for journalistic purposes. Therefore, there is enough reason to warrant further research into the use of SNSs in the journalistic process.

This research study focuses on the ethical implications of online interaction between professional journalists and members of the public through the use of SNSs. The study uses focus groups to gather the opinions held by news consumers regarding the ways in which journalists obtain and publish personal information, quotes pictures and video files from social media profiles on Twitter, Facebook and other SNSs. The study will also use focus groups to look at how journalists use SNSs to obtain information that is unconfirmed by official sources, such as law enforcement entities, government leaders, company spokespeople. How journalists use this information and how they verify it will also be looked at during these sessions. This unconfirmed information can include witness statements, pictures, video and quotes from non-official sources, as well as private information such as addresses, names and phone numbers that may contain sensitive personal information. In certain situations, this information may contain private details that were never meant to leave the confines of the original author's social network of friends. The act of publishing this information, and therefore sharing it with a much wider audience could lead to emotional harm to the author of this information or the individual who is the subject of that information. Journalists in this study will be asked what ethical principles

guide their decision making while obtaining and publishing this personal information. A variety of factors may steer their ethical beliefs, from the size of the media market they work in, their age and years of service in the industry, or the education they received to prepare them for a career in journalism, all of which will be considered in this study. Once these opinions are gathered, an ethical analysis using the lens of social responsibility theory will take place to better understand the similarities and contrasts between the expectations of privacy that are held by journalists and news consumers who are interacting with each other online.

This research study aims to gather opinions from professional journalists and news consumers in hopes of better understanding the ways in which these two groups interact online and the potential ethical dilemmas that concern both groups. This study aims to explore the privacy expectations audience members have when posting information, opinions and pictures on SNSs and how those expectations are similar and different from the ways professional journalists use this information within their published articles and broadcasts. The goal of this study is to show how these expectations of privacy may be different depending on their role as a source of journalistic information or a consumer of journalistic information. By understanding both groups' expectations of privacy regarding information posted on these two SNSs, we can begin to create a unified understanding that will prevent emotional harm for the original authors and subjects of this information. This emotional harm may include embarrassment, anxiety, and sadness, after the publishing of this information, that may or may not be accurate and may not be intended for a mass audience. The goal of this research study is to find a mutual understanding between journalists and news consumers in hopes of promoting more positive online interactions.

Literature Review

Origins of Social Responsibility Theory

Normative theory, also known as the concept of journalism ethics, is central to this research study. It is the vein of journalism academic inquiry that asks the question, what is right and what is wrong? The answers to these questions rarely come easily. They require long contemplation and a firm understanding of journalism ethics, as well as the many ways in which they relate to the practice of journalism. This research abides by the ethical guidance set forth by social responsibility theory (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956), which aims to promote a democratic free press that is also held accountable to a strict set of ideals and moral guidelines.

The theory of social responsibility was drafted and explained thoroughly in *A Free and Responsible Press*, a report published by the Commission on the Freedom of the Press (1947). This theory stated that journalists have a responsibility to their fellow citizens to produce and disseminate unbiased and accurate information that is crucial to their wellbeing. The commission felt when it came to all ethical concerns, including that of privacy, journalists must make their decisions based on a balance between minimizing harm and the overall utility of the information that's in question. Commissioners wished that journalists pursue and report information that will benefit the most amount of people in a democratic society.

Social responsibility theory was further developed by Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their groundbreaking book *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). Social responsibility theory was one of four theories of the press that were showcased in this book. Among these theories is Libertarian Theory. The authors preferred this theory over the three

others as it largely provided absolute freedom to publish anything an individual wished to publish without the restrictions of governmental control (Siebert, et al., 1956). However, Social Responsibility Theory has become one of the most widely accepted ethical models in much of the Western world (Himmelboim & Limor, 2011). “Media accept social commitments toward society and restrain themselves accordingly” (p. 73). This cannot be said for every journalist and media organization within the profession, but various trade organizations have promoted strict adherence to this set of ideals (NPPA, 2018; NPR, 2017; ONA, 208; RTNDA, 2015; SPJ, 2014).

Terry Adams-Bloom and Johanna Cleary (2009) argue social responsibility theory is a “no less worthy goal today than it was 50 years ago” (p. 2). This research team acknowledges the ways in which new technologies, such as social media, can affect this moral philosophy. “The new technologies should be seen as an opportunity for the industry to demonstrate the tangible value of socially responsible journalism” (Adams-Bloom, 2009, p. 7).

In the following pages, a brief explanation of ethical codes will be provided to show how social responsibility theory found its way into these moralizing texts. The ways in which these codes have been challenged by the arrival of SNSs will then be discussed. Many scholars have argued these SNSs have significantly altered the journalistic process by making information more readily accessible and by giving more individuals the ability to access, share and curate information, despite having little to no journalism training or understanding of journalism ethics (Lasorsa, Lewis & Holton, 2012; Noguera Vivo, 2012; Ramaprasad, Liu & Garrison, 2012).

Some recent studies will be showcased in the pages that follow, as well as the recent call for new ethical codes that take SNSs into consideration and the many ways in which SNSs challenge ethical norms within the journalism profession. One of the main ethical concerns

surrounding the use of SNSs during the journalistic process involves increased opportunities for journalists to invade a person's privacy. This concern will be addressed and a gap in the literature will be identified, one which illustrates the necessity for this study and others that consider the attitudes of both journalists and news consumers regarding the ethical use of SNSs in the journalistic process.

Creation of Ethical Codes

Several journalism organizations, beginning with the journalism fraternity Sigma Delta Chi, began to draft ethical codes to guide journalists in their daily work (Friend, 2007) as a response to the publishing of *A Free and Responsible Press* and other scholarly texts. These codes focused on guidelines regarding the journalist's roles as a truth seeker, objective news-gatherer and steward of the general public, in a way that promoted an ethical profession that could stand alongside doctors, lawyers and elected officials as crucial members of a democratic society (Ward, 2004). It is important to note that within these professions, failing to adhere to these ethical codes may be punishable by law and may also include a revocation of a practitioner's license. At this current time there is no licensing requirement in journalism and there is no organized effort to create one. In order to prevent a licensing system, various trade groups, universities, think tanks, and media organizations created their own ethical codes. The National Association of Broadcasters was one of the first trade groups to create an ethical code, which it called the Code of Good Practice (Limburg, 1989). The Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) also created an ethical code of its own (Wulfemeyer, 1990).

In his book *The Invention of Journalism Ethics* Stephen J.A. Ward explains several motivations for the creation of these codes (Ward, 2004). Besides promoting objectivity and unbiased news gathering, there are motivations of self-preservation that Ward (2004) says surfaced in the United States after World War I when the profession came under increased public scrutiny. The adoption of ethical principles and codes was seen as both a way of self-regulation in order to dampen the ire of the general public and also a way to promote an industry free from government intervention. This self-regulatory function of ethical codes has prevented government intervention in the decades since World War I and also largely appeased the demands of the general public (Ward, 2004). However, these codes are written in a way that allows journalists and the organizations they work for to “bend the rules,” so to speak, when they deem it necessary to pursue information as part of their “duty to inform” (Husselbee, 1994). The interpretations of these ethical codes also vary depending on the situation, setting and the entity conducting the interpretation. The constant evolution of technologies used for gathering and disseminating information has also led to the new interpretations that have the potential to come into the conflict with the interpretations of lawmakers, governmental bodies and the general public.

Social Media Changing Ethical Landscape

These ethical codes have been challenged in recent years through the development of numerous technological advances (Spence & Quinn, 2008). One of the most recent advances is that of SNSs. By the mid-2000s, almost every major news organization was using SNSs such as

Twitter and Facebook to complement its traditional method of communication, including television broadcasts, radio broadcasts and printed materials (Capilla, 2011). Spence and Quinn (2008) were among the early skeptics who were concerned the increased access to information through SNSs would lead to a greater sense of immediacy in the news industry and may lead to more inaccuracies in news coverage.

“Reports can be uploaded to the Web nearly instantly as news unfolds, but often without the safeguards such as copy-editing and fact checking. The haste with which many news gatherers post their reports on the Web naturally challenges our confidence in the accuracy and completeness of their coverage” (p. 265).

This new tool for gathering and disseminating information has led to a large amount of research in recent years. Previous studies have used gatekeeping theory and agenda-setting theory to build their research framework to study this new information-gathering tool (Goode, 2009; Hermida et al., 2012; Lasora et al., 2012; Noguera Vivo, 2013). Other researchers, like Marcel Broersma and Todd Graham (2013), studied the way SNSs are slowly replacing traditional newsgathering methods, such as in-person interviews and phone interviews. Their study looked at eight national tabloids in Great Britain and the Netherlands from 2007 to 2011 to see how online opinions shared through tweets on Twitter were being used as quotes in print publications. “It (Twitter) offers reporters a range of instant snippets of information that are always on-hand” (p. 447).

“Twitter is used by a journalist in four ways. It can lead them to new stories, helps them find sources and information, provides them with quotes and is useful for verifying information by using the wisdom of the crowd” (Broersma & Graham, 2013, p. 448).

The authors in this study concluded simply copying and pasting quotes via Twitter diminishes a journalist's role and their duty to publish accurate and ethical information.

José Manuel Noguera Vivo (2013) was also interested in studying how journalists use Twitter when he conducted a content analysis of 1,125 tweets to better understand how Spanish journalists were using this SNS to obtain quotes and information and also promote their own news stories. This study further explains the ways in which journalists use SNSs to mold and distribute their news products. These uses include requesting information, promoting news coverage, warning viewers about breaking news and seeking feedback from audience members (Noguera Vivo, 2013).

In the early 2000s, researchers were already amazed by this unprecedented amount of interactivity the Internet could provide to news consumers (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001). Many of these studies revealed a strong willingness from audience members who wished to engage with professional journalists online (Livingstone, 2004). The creation of SNSs has only fueled that drive for interactivity and increased participation online. This increased participation led to numerous studies looking at the motivations that led to this increased participation among news consumers (Glynn et al. 2011; Heise et al., 2014; Vitak et al., 2015).

Various terms have been coined to describe the new ways in which journalists and news consumers are working together, both voluntarily and involuntarily, to gather and disseminate

information. These terms include “citizen journalism” (Compton, 2010) “active audiences” (Quintas & Gonzalez, 2014) and “participatory journalism” (Katz, 2011). These terms and others speak of a relatively active news consumer who is fully engaged in the journalistic process. These active participants often engage with professional journalists and have some sort of understanding of how the newsgathering process works (Goode, 2009).

Many argue these active audience members can no longer be considered quiet and passive consumers of information who simply consume information without contributing information themselves or critiquing information that is provided to them (Hermida et al. 2012). The appeal of being able to share opinions and insight regarding the news events in their community has attracted users, especially younger audiences, to share, recommend and post information online. Scholars have coined the term “citizen journalism” to explain this phenomenon of active audience members who frequently provide media outlets with information, pictures/video of newsworthy events and comments on news articles despite having very little journalism education and receiving little to no compensation for their services (Katz, 2011).

Alfred Hermida and his colleagues (2012) were also interested in learning how news consumers were contributing to the journalistic process when they conducted an online survey of 1,600 Canadian news consumers. This study is one of the few that focuses exclusively on the consumers themselves, and it provides an introduction to the ways in which audience members engage with the media they consume. Hermida and his colleagues discovered in their study several ways in which professional news outlets were reframing the flow of news that was being shared online by consumers. “Social media are becoming ever more ingrained in the news

experience, both from the perspective of audiences and the journalism profession” (Hermida et al., 2012, pg. 822).

Broersma and Graham (2013) believe that due to the convenient and timely nature of obtaining quotes through Twitter, more and more journalists will begin to adopt this practice of social media guiding their media coverage. They argue the balance of power between journalists and sources is beginning to shift toward a much more powerful public voice with the public being able to share and consume information freely on SNSs without having to wait for journalists to publish it. However, this public voice, both researchers discovered, is not always intended to reach a wide-ranging audience (Broersma & Graham, 2013). Many of the “tweets” that later became quotes in widely distributed print publications were not intended to reach a wide audience outside the creator’s smaller social network of friends.

“There are no signs that the source or other sources were contacted to verify information that was twittered. This might indicate ‘sloppy journalism’ and erodes journalism as a practice of verification” (Broersma & Graham, 2013, pg. 461).

Hausman (1994) coined the term “re-messaging” to explain this process of borrowing information or viewpoints from outside sources and placing them within the frameworks of a news story. This process poses an ethical quandary as the meaning of the original message could be altered when put into a different context (Hausman, 1994). The accuracy and objectivity of this information could be altered depending on the information that precedes or follows it. This process is similar to the way digital editing can change the meaning of video images and audio

sound bites in a television news story. The pieces of video that come before and after a quote from the subject in a news story can drastically affect how the subject is perceived by news consumers. The same effect occurs when using social media tools to re-frame a person's "tweet" or Facebook posting in a news story online that can drastically alter the original tone or viewpoint the original author was trying to make. By altering the author's original intent, a journalist can easily damage this person's reputation or credibility, and could put their current employment in jeopardy if their employer feels this "re-massaged" message goes against their organization's values and ethics. Audience members appear to be mindful of the possibility of the mischaracterization that can occur when "re-messaging" information online. Survey data suggest 64% of users on SNSs access news information while using these sites (Hermida, et al., 2012). However, 32% of users did not think news organizations should use material sourced from social networks such as Twitter and Facebook (2012). Another 32% of surveyed users were unsure how they felt.

There is also the concern from audience members that journalists could take their original content and pass it off as their own (Ramaprasad et. al, 2012). Both Facebook and Twitter contain a feature known as "sharing" where users can "share" someone else's original post, therefore showing audience members the original author of this information. This feature gives journalists a quick and easy way to attribute information, and therefore follow proper ethics of transparency. However, journalists could just as easily copy information from another user's Facebook or Twitter account and publish it in an entirely new posting giving the illusion that they're the original authors of this information.

Concerns over Privacy Invasion

Besides misrepresentation, another ethical concern shared by many researchers is the increased ability for journalism organizations to invade a person's privacy in the pursuit of new information (Hong, 2005; Mackay, 2012). One of the core guidelines or concepts of social responsibility theory that is crucial for this research project is that of privacy, or more specifically the expectation of privacy. Mentioned earlier, the assumption is that each individual has his or her own unique expectations of privacy, regardless if he or she is a professional journalist or a consumer of the information.

Privacy concerns in journalism in the United States date back to the 1890s when Samuel D. Warren and Louis D. Brandeis wrote an article for the *Harvard Law Review* titled "The Right to Privacy" (Warren & Brandeis, 1890). Both men were prominent lawyers at the time who understood their roles as legal representatives would attract media coverage, but didn't appreciate the media's interest in their personal lives outside of their profession. They argued, "instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of privacy and domestic life" (Warren & Brandeis, 1890). Both men argued all Americans had the distinct "right to be left alone" and to keep various details of their personal lives private. In the decades that followed, various U.S. courts issued rulings that supported this "right to be left alone" (Friend & Singer, 2007). Privacy quickly became a core principle in journalism ethical codes drafted in the decades that followed and was the specific focus of a conference held by the Poynter Institute in December of 1992 (Black, 1994).

Privacy itself is a difficult principle to measure with each individual person carrying his or her own unique definition of what privacy means to them (Vitak et al., 2015). Journalists share in this unique ambiguity as they each wrangle with their own unique definition of privacy. Husselbee (1994) provided a five-point test for journalists to judge whether or not invading someone's privacy is necessary in order to perform their journalistic duty within a democratic society, based on the following questions:

- (1) why is the information they wish to obtain important?
- (2) is it possible to obtain said information without invading a person's privacy?
- (3) what procedures can be used to verify the accuracy of this information?
- (4) how can harm be minimized?
- (5) what role might disclosure play in this instance of privacy invasion?

Over the last two decades, much of the research regarding privacy concerns in professional journalism has focused on information obtained online (Hong et al., 2005; Ramaprasad et al., 2012; Replege, 2014; Whitehouse, 2010). Hong and her colleagues (2005) even argued "the threat to online privacy has become a public concern that ranks above other public policy issues including health care and crime" (pg. 15).

Media scholars, including Louis Hodges, are quite concerned by the quick availability of an infinite amount of information and how this will affect the privacy of ordinary citizens. "As our ability to invade privacy has increased, so too has our willingness to do so" (Hodges, 1994, pg. 197). Ellen Alderman and Caroline Kennedy defined privacy quite succinctly by calling it "the right to be left alone" (Alderman & Kennedy, 1995). This "right to be left alone" argument modernized Warren and Brandeis original writings in 1890 and modernized them for a new

audience. The academic conversation over a right to privacy has continued to evolve since the emergence of SNSs and the Internet. The internet has provided the public with more outlets for accessing and publishing information and some scholars argue studying privacy expectations and potential invasions of privacy are both topics that require more scholarly investigation than ever before.

“Media ethics codes concerning privacy must be updated considering the ease with which information now can be gathered from social networks and disseminated widely. Existing codes allow for deception and privacy invasion in cases overriding public need when no alternate means are available” (Whitehouse, 2010, pg. 310).

Through the use of SNSs to obtain information, pictures and video clips, reporters can call upon their audience members to provide them with opinions and information about the news of the day in ways that have never been seen before. These sources can be accessed through minimal amounts of effort, which brings a cause for concern regarding privacy. Journalists can quote sources using “tweets” or Facebook posts the sources publish online without the consent or awareness of these individuals who may wish to keep this information private (Broersma & Graham, 2013).

Not only can this information be considered private in the eyes of some users, but based on the three principles of privacy protection as illustrated by Helen Nissenbaum (2004) in her essay *Privacy as Contextual Integrity*, the space in which this information is shared may also be considered a private space in the eyes of some people. Instead of a home, where a person may

keep valuables and personal belongings private, the online space where a person keeps information and various details about themselves may also be considered a private space by some individuals (Nissenbaum, 2004). In order to judge whether or not it is appropriate to withdraw information from this private space, Nissenbaum argued one must consider “who is gathering the information, who is analyzing it, who is disseminating it and to whom, the nature of the information, relationships among the various parties, and even larger institutional social circumstances” (2004, pg. 144). It may also be important for journalists to consider the audience the author of this information was intending to reach. They may not have intended to have this information sent out to a wide audience outside the user’s close-knit circle of friends. There is also the possibility the posted information was not posted by the owner of that social media profile.

This process of collecting sources is significantly different than the traditional in-person interview, telephone interview or press conference. In those situations, the source is firmly aware that they are being quoted and recorded, but online sources who are quoted through tweets and posts are not always aware of the possibility that their opinions, pictures, video clips and information could be used within a broadcast news story or published article. The pictures and postings on their profiles are often geared toward an audience of friends and family members who are trusted by the individual. Obtaining and using these personal materials for journalistic purposes could cause great harm to the individual when published on a social media account of a professional journalist who has significantly more followers online (Noguera Vivo, 2013). This harm may include revictimization after a tragic incident, embarrassment after semi-private information is shared with a mass audience, as well as loss of employment and social status. This

potential for invading the privacy of social media users is important to consider now more than ever as social media use has grown exponentially between the years 2008 and 2011 (Broersma & Graham, 2013). It is fair to assume that usage has grown even further since this study took place.

Journalists are caught between two conflicting values: the public's right to information and the public's right to privacy. Elaine Replogle (2014) was also interested in this phenomenon of private messages that later get shared to a wide-ranging audience. Her essay focused on a cancer patient's blog that was later used as source material by a journalist from the British newspaper *The Guardian*. Replogle argues this journalist should have been more forthcoming when she extracted quotes from private messages and emails she received during correspondence with this cancer patient. Replogle also made the argument that some of the medical details the journalist published provided no newsworthiness whatsoever and were merely exploiting a patient's physical anguish in order to grab readers' attention (2014). Ultimately, *The Guardian* agreed when the organization decided to pull the article from its website (Replogle, 2014). This controversy led to a discussion regarding the private/public nature of posts on blogs and social media and whether or not ordinary citizens have a higher expectation of privacy than famous individuals (Replogle, 2014).

Findings from a survey conducted by Glynn and her colleagues (2011) suggest younger people are more likely to use SNSs than older adults. Privacy concerns may be heightened given that these younger individuals may not carry a firm understanding of the journalistic process, and as Boyd (2008) discovered, teen SNS users typically want to share a lot of personal information, but only want it to be shared with a select group of close friends. Therefore, these young individuals may be even more vulnerable to privacy invasion online (Boyd, 2008). While recent

studies show young individuals may not access information shared by traditional news outlets as much as older adults, Marchi (2012) believed these young individuals are engaging with news content shared on SNSs instead. According to Marchi, “Young people today are not necessarily uninformed, but rather they are differently informed than previous generations” (Marchi, 2012, pg. 248). Being that this population group is more likely to engage in the use of SNSs, stronger ethical safeguards are therefore all the more important to protect this population group and others who may not have a firm understanding of the journalistic process.

Calls for a New Ethical Code

Heise and her colleagues (2014) compared various public attitudes toward the role of journalists and studied how audience members felt journalists should carry out their newsgathering duties. Their research showed both groups shared similar views when it came to a journalist’s role as “fast disseminators of precise information and explainers of complex topics and events” (2014, pg. 424). However, Heise and her colleagues noticed a majority of news consumers felt journalists should be more transparent with how and where they find information. The research team also discovered how active audience members were more interested in communicating with the journalists that produced the content than they are with communicating with other audience members, tending to view themselves as colleagues and co-contributors than actual audience members (Heise et. al., 2014). A rift has been noticed by some researchers regarding the feelings and expectations held by both of these groups even before SNSs came about. In 2005, Ward noted “for over a decade, a parade of studies has detected a steady decline

in public confidence in news media in Canada, the United States and elsewhere” (pg. 328). Ward argues this decline in public confidence may be the result of audience members feeling that their ethical expectations were not being met by professional journalists and the organizations they work for, even before SNSs became widely used tools in the journalism profession.

These “growing pains” of the first few years of having increased interactivity available to both journalists and news consumers through the use of SNSs were hypothesized by Bardoel and Deuze (2001) before SNSs even came into existence. They hypothesized growing interactivity with media content as traditional news outlets shifted into the era of “new media.” During the early stages of this shift they believed that some remnants and guidelines from the “old era” of communication would continue to exist, but as the change continues, the traditional technological, social-cultural and professional norms will shrink in importance, with new norms taking their place as audience members become more engaged with the newsgathering process and begin to demand increased transparency and immediacy (Bardoel & Deuze, 2001).

This shifting from the “old era” of journalism into the “new era” of increased interactivity motivated scholars to call for new ethical standards. Spence and Quinn (2008) argued “new media” have altered the social norms, attitudes and practices of professional journalists as their roles have changed from exclusive gatekeepers of information to facilitators of information. With more information coming from an increased number of sources, including citizen journalists/ active audience members, Spence and Quinn argued there is a new ethical standard for “new media” that is different than that of “traditional” media (i.e. print and broadcast). Together they make the case that a “universal ethical standard” is needed to bridge the gap between old and new, while also providing room for what's still to come.

Whitehouse (2010) shares this belief and calls for current ethical codes to account for the new ways in which journalists can invade a person's privacy online. She asserts that journalists should continue to balance their responsibilities of minimizing harm and keeping audience members informed while gathering and disseminating information within the social media landscape. Specifically, she argues, "journalists are urged to avoid publicizing information about private people unless it is clearly in the public interest" (Whitehouse, 2010, pg. 316). She furthers that self-check mechanism by stating journalists should ask themselves the question, "is the information gained by reporting from social networking pages worth more than the harm done to the profession and the private pain that pulling information from those pages might bring?" (pgs. 322-323). These statements highlight a social responsibility on behalf of journalists, who Whitehouse argues must consider public trust as well as public expectations and feelings regarding ethical use of SNSs.

Even before SNSs, Voakes (1997) conducted telephone surveys and interviews in a Midwestern county and found "starkly different conceptions of journalistic ethics" felt by journalists and members of the public. This division continued when SNSs came into the mix as audience members became increasingly active in the news gathering process. Ward and Wasserman believed that instead of just adjusting ethical codes to accommodate for this increased interactivity between journalists and news consumers, the whole thought process behind these codes must change. Ward and Wasserman (2010) call for an "open media ethics" that include the active audience in the process of deeming what is ethically acceptable and what is not. News organizations, they argued, have historically operated under a closed-off notion of ethics that is specific to each media industry and follows standards that are created by

professionals within that industry. These media organizations, known as the mainstream press, were seen as a “fourth estate of government” that closely watch the other three estates that make up the political decision makers of the United States (Ward & Wasserman, 2010). Due to increased participation, with bloggers, independent writers, and citizen journalists now entering the mix, Ward and Wasserman argue a “fifth estate of government” has formed that in many ways reinforces and challenges the role the mainstream press plays in a democratic society (2010). That is why they call for an “open ethic” on a global level that will set standards of decency, accuracy and truth for professional and non-professional communicators so that both the “fourth” and “fifth” estate of government can operate freely without undermining one another (Ward & Wasserman, 2010).

Ward (2005) also calls for a “public participation” ethical model that takes the public’s thoughts and feelings into consideration. Besides including the audience within these ethical texts, some scholars also feel a unified code is also required, one that binds all media formats together. Capilla (2012) believes SNSs have put an end to the fragmentation of the media, as all formats have converged online. That is why he believes a new ethic is necessary to protect freedom, privacy and accuracy online as the rules apply to all media formats. Himelboim and Limor (2011) suggest that a universal international ethic may be possible when they analyzed 242 codes of ethics in 94 countries and found “a rather consensual perception of journalistic roles around the world” (pg. 71). These countries and codes, first of all, seemed to agree journalists should operate outside of governmental control and should be free to hold governments accountable. Himelboim and Limor (2011) discovered a vast majority of these 242 codes were created by journalists themselves, through trade groups, news councils, unions, and

other organized efforts (pg. 82). The language of these codes also highlighted common principles of seeking truth, defending the public interest, and disseminating information vital to the lives of the general public.

Professional news outlets and journalism trade organizations seem willing to adjust their ethical codes in order to address this new innovation of SNSs. Some of the most well-respected ethical codes include that of the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTNDA, 2015), Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ, 2014), National Press Photographers Association (NPPA, 2018), the Online News Association (ONA, 2018), and National Public Radio (NPR Code of Ethics, 2017). In recent years, these ethical codes have been revised to account for the growing popularity of online news reporting and the advent of social media networking websites (NPPA, 2018; NPR, 2017; RTNDA, 2015; SPJ, 2014) . Some news operations have even adopted their own specific codes of ethics as Wilkins and Brennen (2004) explored during their analysis of the 2003 version of the *New York Times* code of ethics. The Online News Association noticed this trend and decided to create an interactive tool journalists and news organizations can use to revise or create new ethical codes of their own (ONA, 2018). Besides revising their ethical codes, several trade organizations created specific sections that focus exclusively on social media ethics, including the Radio Television Digital News Association Media & Blogging Guidelines (RTDNA, 2018) and National Public Radio's Social Media section in its NPR Ethics Handbook (2019).

These special social media sections touch on the same ethical principles already addressed in the organization's traditional code, when it comes to fairness, truth-seeking, and other common themes, but these sections go further to address the unique ethical dilemmas that

may come up in a social media environment. These environments are often more communal, with community members free to share their comments, criticisms, and even their own reporting on the news of the day. These environments also create strong demands for immediate information that often put heavy burdens on journalists to keep audiences informed with up to date information. NPR's social media code states journalists must fight the temptation to post and share speculative information on SNSs and should follow the organization's strict guidelines for verifying information and sources, including pictures and videos they might obtain online (2019).

Normative theories of the press, specifically social responsibility theory, are still present in these updated codes. Journalists still carry a social responsibility to report objective information while avoiding invasions of privacy and emotional harm when obtaining information through the use of these SNSs (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Hong, 2005). Primarily, these updated ethical codes have focused on the increased potential for journalists to invade a person's privacy and also cause emotional harm. Privacy invasion is one of the most common themes found in many recently updated ethical codes in professional journalism (NPPA, 2018; RTNDA, 2015; SPJ, 2014). For example, the Society of Professional Journalists' code states, "Journalists should balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness" (SPJ, 2014). Privacy as an ethical concern has been addressed previously in older renditions of these ethical codes, but some argue SNSs present more opportunities for journalists to invade a person's privacy. During interviews with Indian journalists Ramprasad and his colleagues (2012) discovered that for the sake of time, some journalists were neglecting to ask permission before publishing pictures and personal

information found on social media profiles. Time was the excuse given by these journalists as to why permission was not obtained. This ethical concern, among others, is why the scholars mentioned above argue for newly updated ethical codes that protect both the journalism profession from increased scrutiny and also news consumers who may cross paths with journalists on SNSs both voluntarily, by providing information and commentary to journalists willingly, and involuntarily, by having their private information shared or published without their consent.

Beyond Ethical Codes

Ethical codes provide moral guidance for journalists, but oftentimes the dilemmas journalists face cannot be easily solved by these ethical principles that dictate what a journalist should do in a given situation. Some scholars argue these codes are rhetorical and may not be followed closely by some professional journalists (Merrill & Odell, 1983). There is also plenty of debate regarding the utility of these codes during a time of changing media environments and convergence. Many journalists don't even know these codes exist, as Ramaprasad, Liu and Garrison discovered when they conducted in-depth interviews with journalists in India (2014). Other journalists in the study also voiced concerns ethical codes were out of touch with their daily lives and didn't adequately address some dilemmas journalists typically face (2014). Mackay (2012) noted a similar concern when many of the journalists in her study stated they're encountering new ethical dilemmas online that haven't been addressed in ethical codes, therefore undermining the effectiveness of these codes. In order for these codes to be effective, and

therefore useful, Ward makes a case for including the public in these discussions so that ethical codes take their unique view of ethics into consideration (2006). There is also the question of enforcement. Infractions are not always known or punished by a journalist's employer or the trade group/association responsible for the creation of journalism's most well-respected ethical codes. Voakes discovered this during his interviews with 42 journalists who were sued for privacy invasion, many of which didn't know they had done anything wrong until a lawsuit was filed against them (1997).

These codes are also seldom known and understood by news consumers who often interact with journalists while using SNSs. Various scholars have created tests and guides to further guide journalists into ethical decision-making, including Borden's (1995) three-part test "when to use questionably obtained information." According to her test, a journalist can use the information when "(a) the information is important to the public and not merely interesting, helpful, or titillating, (b) the benefit from disclosing the information is at least proportional to the harm, and (c) the information is used only as a last resort" (Borden, 1995, pg. 231).

While some academic studies have focused on the ways in which journalists use SNSs and how audiences use SNSs to consume the news (Bergstrom, 2008; Glynn et al. 2011; Hermida et al. 2012), far fewer studies have focused on the connection between these two entities and the ethical dilemmas that follow. This study aims to fulfill a need for more research using qualitative methods that allow news consumers and journalists to express their attitudes and beliefs regarding SNSs and how they should be used ethically by journalists to retrieve information, pictures and video from users who may not want their information shown to a wider public audience. Various factors that may influence a journalist's own unique ethical code will be

considered, including their collegiate education, where ethics are first taught, their age and years of service, which may have an influence on their understanding of online ethics, and the size of the media market they work in, which may also dictate various norms and acceptable uses of SNSs.

Looking at this issue through the lens of a journalist's social responsibility provides a unique opportunity to study how journalists' use of SNSs alters and enhances journalism's role. The overall goal of using a normative lens is to capture the opinions held by journalists and news consumers in order to better understand their attitudes, beliefs and emotions toward the ethical use of SNSs in the journalistic process.

The hope is that journalists and the organizations that employ them will consider these attitudes, beliefs and emotions, as well as the potential emotional harm that comes along with online interactions through SNSs when they draft, revise and adhere to ethical codes.

Research Questions

RQ 1: How do journalists use SNSs to gather news and information?

RQ 2: How do these SNSs help and/or hinder a journalist's ability to perform their vital role within a democratic society and how do they strengthen/challenge their ethical standards?

RQ 3: What ethical dilemmas have journalists experienced when seeking out personal information, pictures and opinions posted on SNSs and how have these personal experiences shaped their own ethical principles?

RQ 4: How do news consumers use SNSs and does privacy play a role in dictating what personal information, pictures and opinions they share on their social media profiles?

RQ 5: What expectations do news consumers have when it comes to professional journalists publishing or broadcasting their personal information, pictures and opinions?

These questions aim to discover the conflicting and unifying opinions of professional journalists and news consumers who often interact with one another on SNSs, namely Twitter and Facebook. By understanding both groups' expectations of privacy regarding information posted on these two SNSs, we can begin to create a unified understanding that will prevent

emotional harm, promote more positive online interactions and will hopefully lead to more socially responsible journalists who take the attitudes of news consumers into consideration when accessing information found on SNSs.

Method

SNSs provide a plethora of information, opinions, pictures and videos. This information provides countless opportunities for journalists to perform their duties to a democratic society while following principles of social responsibility theory. However, access to information on social media profiles some users may consider private or personal also challenges journalists' ethical principles. The ways in which professional journalists obtain and publish this information is wide-ranging (Broersma & Graham, 2013), and the perceptions of which uses are ethical and which uses are not are quite diverse as well.

Therefore, this research study aims to gather opinions from professional journalists and news consumers in hopes of better understanding how these two groups interact online and how their definitions of online privacy coalesce and diverge. This study aims to understand the privacy expectations audience members have while posting information, opinions and pictures on SNSs and how those expectations line up or conflict with the expectations of professional journalists who often use this information in their broadcasts and published articles.

Research Design

This concern regarding ethical interactions between journalists and audience members has been the subject of many research studies (Bergstrom, 2008; Broersma & Graham, 2013; Heise, et al. 2014; Lasorsa, et. al., 2012; Noguera Vivo, 2012; Ramaprasad, et. al., 2012; Voakes, 1997; Ward, 2005; Wasike, 2013). Many of these studies include content analyses to flesh out

trends and new norms (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Lasora, Lewis, & Holton, 2012; Wasike, 2013). Some scholars have decided to include a human element by gathering the opinions of journalists (Noguera Vivo, 2013; Ramaprasad et. al., 2012) and the audience members they serve (Bergstrom, 2008; Hermida et al., 2012; Ward, 2005). Far fewer studies have included the opinions of both journalists and audience members (Heise, et. al., 2014; Voakes, 1997).

To better understand the privacy expectations held by individuals in both groups, professional journalists and average news consumers, a qualitative approach will be used to provide a platform for discussion and various viewpoints. The discussion of privacy and journalism ethics is one that yields a wide array of conflicting opinions, and a qualitative approach provides a platform to probe, to ask for more information that may not be available through a quantitative approach.

A qualitative approach will allow the researcher to gather a wide range of opinions, thoughts and feelings that can later be used in an analysis framed around the tradition of social responsibility theory. Ramaprasad, Liu and Garrison (2012) used a similar qualitative approach while conducting in-depth interviews with Indian journalists to better understand their views on the ethical use of Internet-based technologies for newsgathering and reporting. “In an exploratory study, particularly given the nuances in ethical decision making, in-depth interviews provide a chance to probe” (Ramaprasad, et. al., 2012, pg. 103).

Instead of using in-depth interviews to gather the opinions held by journalists and the news consumers they serve, a focus group approach will be used in order to promote a free exchange of diverse opinions on this topic. This group dynamic will promote a positive and diverse atmosphere where many conflicting opinions can be shared. “The aim of the focus group

discussion is not to build consensus, but just the opposite— to find out what each member of the group thinks about the topic under discussion” (Berger, 1998, p. 89). Lunt and Livingstone (1996) also noted focus groups can often provide “relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk” (pg. 85).

The research questions in this study invoked deep personal opinions regarding privacy and the media industry that some participants were reluctant to reveal at first, but ultimately felt more open to share once they heard the opinions of other participants. In this group discussion setting, the researcher aimed to create an atmosphere where participants felt their opinions not only mattered, but were celebrated for the unique perspectives they brought to this study (Berger, 1998).

In order to safeguard against dominating opinions or “groupthink,” the researcher held six different focus groups, three for each category of individuals, the professional journalists and the news consumers. Each of these groups featured six participants so that individuals felt comfortable sharing their opinions in a group setting without feeling overshadowed by too many opinions in the group. When it came to the decision regarding size of these focus groups, and how many groups to include in this study, the researcher utilized the trials and errors experienced by other focus group researchers who came to the conclusion that a strategy of using less focus groups, but spending more time with each group would be more advantageous (Blaagaard, 2013; Cauwenberge, 2013; Sturgill, 2010).

If not used properly, focus groups can be used to intentionally or inadvertently create biased or tainted information with outspoken individual(s) controlling the discussion, or making

others reluctant to share their own opinions in fear of reprisals (Greenbaum, 1993). That is why the researcher took precautions to prevent him/herself from injecting personal opinions into these discussions. For the sake of full disclosure, the researcher admits that his unique position as a professional television journalist may have adverse effects on the opinions of participants in both groups of individuals, the professional journalists and the news consumers. Therefore, the researcher gave full disclosure to research participants of his dual role as both a researcher and a professional journalist.

This focus group study utilized a semi-structured style. This semi-structured strategy ensured the discussions were focused on the previously mentioned research questions, while also allowing participants the freedom to address other ethical concerns that arose during the discussion. Question guides were created for each set of focus groups, the professional journalists and news consumers. These guides can be found in Appendices A and B.

A trained videographer was hired to record video and audio of these six focus groups. Participants were notified that this video recording was taking place. The University of Missouri-Columbia Institutional Review Board was also consulted before any video recording and/or focus group discussions took place. These recordings were used by the researcher in order to create a paper transcript for each focus group session. The researcher separated the information and opinions into categories that focus on various themes, topics and codes. Once the information was organized into meaningful categories, the researcher analyzed the similarities and differences in opinions held by these two groups of individuals, the journalists and the news consumers.

Focus Group Participants

All six focus groups were held between January 1st and November 30th of 2017. In order to access participants for this focus group study, the researcher utilized personal connections with different journalism trade organizations and academic institutions. Participants were also recruited through personal relationships with leaders who represent the Society of Professional Journalists, Northwest Broadcast News Association, Wisconsin Broadcasters Association and the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. These organizations provided opportunities to network with professional journalists who donated their time in order to participate in this focus group study.

In total, 18 journalists participated in this study. These journalists were separated into three focus groups, each containing six participants. These focus groups were each held in a different Midwest city, one city where the population was over 250,000 people, another with a population size between 100,000 and 250,000, and another with a population less than 100,000. This unique sampling ensured journalists from different market sizes were included in the study, including several large market, medium market, and small market journalists who all followed their own unique ethical standards when it comes to the use of SNSs. The 18 participating journalists include 11 men and 7 women. Their ages ranged from 22 to 55 years old. These journalists also work with a variety of media, including television, newspaper, radio and various digital channels. Their job titles include news director, reporter, anchor, digital editor, writer, photographer, and social media director. The researcher also tried to include as much diversity as possible in this study by including both men and women, participants of various ages and

ethnicities, and journalists who work in various media, and have varying amounts of journalism education and professional experience.

Besides accessing professional journalists, this focus group study also required the opinions of news consumers who are not affiliated with any professional news organization. Through personal connections with various diverse communities in the Midwest, the researcher was able to locate a wide assortment of news consumers who use SNSs to access news and information. These willing participants were screened beforehand using one-on-one email conversations to ensure they are active users of SNSs, and that they actively use them to access news information from at least one professional news outlet in their community. Willing participants who were active news consumers, but did not have access to SNSs were not allowed to participate in the study. In total, 18 news consumers participated in this study. These news consumers were separated into three focus groups, each containing six people. These 18 individuals came from various communities in the Midwest, with populations ranging from a few hundred to more than 250,000 people. These 18 news consumers included 11 women and 7 men. Their ages ranged from 24 to 63 years old.

Below is a breakdown of the journalists who participated in the study:

Participant Number	Gender	Age	Race	Media Industry	Market Size
#1	M	50	Caucasian	Radio	Small
#2	F	24	Caucasian	Radio	Small

#3	F	24	African-American	Print	Small
#4	M	29	Caucasian	Radio	Small
#5	M	35	Caucasian	TV	Medium
#6	M	30	Caucasian	TV	Medium
#7	M	40	African-American	TV	Medium
#8	F	30	Caucasian	TV	Medium
#9	M	31	Caucasian	TV	Medium
#10	F	25	Caucasian	Digital	Medium
#11	F	26	Caucasian	TV/ Digital	Medium
#12	F	24	Caucasian	TV	Medium
#13	M	32	African-American	Print	Large
#14	M	33	Caucasian	TV	Large
#15	M	28	Caucasian	TV	Large
#16	M	29	Caucasian	TV/ Digital	Large
#17	M	60	Caucasian	TV	Large
#18	F	50	Caucasian	Digital	Large

Findings

RQ 1: How do journalists use SNSs during the journalistic process?

All 18 of the participating journalists cited Facebook as their SNS of choice for accessing and obtaining information, pictures and other media for journalistic purposes. Twitter was a very close second with all but two of the journalists using Twitter on a daily basis. Several other SNSs were also cited during the three focus group sessions, including YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Google+, and LinkedIn, but none of these SNSs was used by a majority of the 18 journalists.

Nearly all of the 18 participating journalists stated they used Facebook and Twitter on a daily basis. Journalists who carry the titles of reporter, writer, photographer and anchor stated they use SNSs several times a day to interact with their potential audience. PARTICIPANT #7 stated he sends messages out to “about 15,000 people on social media weekly” and that audience members are actively engaged in discussions about his stories.

Nearly every journalist who participated in these sessions agreed SNSs are invaluable when it comes to providing a platform for audience members to provide feedback and constructive criticism. These journalists feel SNSs provide them with a unique opportunity the industry has never had until now. They cited emails and phone calls as their primary ways to receive feedback from news consumers in the time before SNSs, but they said this feedback was rarely given, and rarely was it constructive. However, when it came to feedback they received on SNSs, they felt a vast majority of the feedback is helpful.

PARTICIPANT #5: “We’ve come to expect that we’ll come in each day with messages from viewers, whether they have questions about our newscasts, or they have questions about a story we’re working on...Facebook especially has a large viewer aspect to it.”

A small minority of the journalists, however, felt a lot of the feedback they received via SNSs was negative, was mostly unjustified, and did not aid them in their journalistic duties.

PARTICIPANT #14 added criticism from his viewers rarely stayed on topic, as viewers seemed to be more interested in boasting their own political and religious ideologies than actually having meaningful conversations about the news content he was producing. “They want to have an argument over ideologies and that's not what journalists should be doing” (PARTICIPANT #14).

A few other journalists echoed this concern, sharing similar encounters with audience members on SNSs.

Besides providing a platform for audience feedback, all 18 participating journalists said they use SNSs to access potential news sources. In most news situations, journalists said they are interacting with official sources on SNSs, such as elected officials, business leaders, governmental entities, and various law enforcement agencies. These interactions with official sources occur frequently, as often as every hour, some journalists said. The interactions with other SNS users who are non-official sources happen less frequently, but they still happen daily, according to most of the participating journalists.

The most common reason for interacting with non-official sources on SNSs was during breaking news situations.

PARTICIPANT #13: “Nearly every breaking news story I work on I’ve been going primarily on Twitter...In nearly every situation somebody is likely to post a photo from the scene or some sort of information of what they saw.”

During these breaking news situations journalists say they are asking news consumers to send them information, pictures and other media files that will aid them in providing news coverage of that given event. The types of video and images journalists are looking for during these breaking news situations include pictures of a suspect, images of crime scenes and other emergency situations, and visuals that show victims who were injured or killed during these breaking news events. However, all 18 of the participating journalists agreed information and media files they receive from non-official sources must be confirmed with at least another non-official source, or an official source with knowledge of the breaking news situation. This policy differs from the way these journalists treat information and media files they obtain from official sources, which they feel does not require confirmation from a second source.

Many of the television journalists said SNSs also help them during non-breaking news stories. PARTICIPANT #15 felt television carries a heavy burden as a visual medium and it is often difficult to find captivating video and images that visually illustrate certain news stories.

PARTICIPANT #15: “It’s great for finding photos and video of past events that you can use if your photographer doesn’t have video of that event...It makes it a lot easier. Press releases don’t supply pictures for you and that puts you in a bind.”

Newspaper and radio journalists also use SNSs to obtain pictures and video for their news coverage, but said they will only use these images if they are not able to retrieve these visuals on their own.

Besides visuals, journalists feel SNSs also provide a unique way to access sources for general news and feature news stories. PARTICIPANT #14 said SNSs can be used in many situations where it is difficult to find non-official news sources who can relate to a specific news story or topic.

PARTICIPANT #14: “I will reach out and say hey, I’m a news reporter. Can you call me at this phone number? It’s a good point of first contact for us to find ‘real people.’”

Several other journalists also provided situations in which they used SNSs to gain access to “real people.” PARTICIPANT #13 believes SNSs are a good way to make the initial contact, but he prefers to conduct the actual interview in person or over the phone. He rarely conducts interviews over SNSs, but says occasionally due to time restrictions he is forced to conduct interviews over Facebook or Twitter. He argues conducting interviews using SNSs are emotionless and do not reveal the full truth of the situation, because you cannot see the emotion on the subject’s face and cannot hear it in their voice.

In many news situations the sources that are found on SNSs are used to help journalists produce content for their primary medium (TV, newspaper, and radio), but in some situations these sources are contacted to provide information for stories that are only disseminated online through websites and SNSs. These stories are designed to inspire active participation from news

consumers and typically feature a topic that carries a great deal of local significance.

PARTICIPANT #11 uses Facebook Live almost weekly to produce live Q&A sessions. She says these live sessions give her the unique opportunity to talk about local weather conditions in a casual atmosphere and gives news consumers the opportunity ask questions about her weather forecast. Several journalists, especially in the small and medium markets, say they're cautious when it comes to using Facebook Live, because there is no opportunity to copy edit what they are putting online.

PARTICIPANT #5: "Facebook Live has sort of peeled back the curtain to the news industry and the process we use in the field and in the studio, which is a good thing, but also is something you need to use carefully....With Facebook Live it's a little more raw. It's more unplanned and unscripted, but you have to stay within the same boundaries you follow with everything else."

Several reporters said they also use Facebook Live in the field to give news consumers a live look at a news situation. PARTICIPANT #6 says he will also use Facebook Live during press conferences with sports players and coaches. He says viewers will occasionally provide him with questions they would like to ask. He enjoys having this dialogue with sports fans, because they often have ideas and opinions that had not crossed his mind.

PARTICIPANT #6 “On Twitter I can probably get up to 50 people who are commenting and want to know more information about a certain story...I tell them I’m at a news conference and they’re saying, did you ask him this? Did you ask about that?”

PARTICIPANT #1 says news consumers also provide his newsroom with numerous news tips and story ideas via SNSs. He says this engagement has alerted them to numerous news situations they otherwise wouldn’t have known about. He says a surprising number of these tips turn out to be factually correct and often lead to news stories his newsroom never would have considered. Fellow news manager PARTICIPANT #5 says these tips come several times a day. He feels most news consumers understand that SNSs offer a “two-way street” where they can take news and information, but can also provide information as well.

Many of the participating journalists said they primarily use SNSs as a promotional vehicle for their news stories. PARTICIPANT #10 says nearly 95% of their television news stories are shared on Facebook. She says about 80% of the traffic on their station’s website also comes from Facebook and Twitter. PARTICIPANT #18 says her news organization strives to post at least one story on Twitter and Facebook every half hour. She feels posting regularly on SNSs creates a steady flow of information that ensures her news organization remains near the top of news consumer’s Twitter and Facebook feeds.

News managers in the study saw the promotional aspect of SNSs as one of the most (if not the most) important application for news gathering purposes. They saw this promotional opportunity as a free advertising tool for their news organization. Many of these managers said they also use SNSs to monitor their competition. PARTICIPANT #16 uses Tweetdeck, a variation

of Twitter, to create separate feeds, and one of those feeds is made up of competing news stations, newspapers and radio stations. He says occasionally one of the competing news outlets will have information, pictures or video his organization doesn't have yet, and it will motivate them to seek out that information. Many of the reporters said they use Facebook and Twitter to preview their news stories in order to give news consumers a taste of what stories will air in their latest newscast, or will run in the newest edition of their newspaper. However, some of these reporters said they are apprehensive when it comes to promoting their stories ahead of time, because many of their online followers are journalists who work for competing news outlets.

RQ 2: How do these SNSs help and/or hinder a journalist's ability to perform their vital role within a democratic society and how do they strengthen/challenge their ethical standards?

SNSs were seen as both advantageous and problematic by a majority of the journalists in this study. PARTICIPANT #16 feels SNSs have fueled a growing need for immediacy that has shortened the amount of time journalists have to gather and disseminate information. He says this added immediacy often creates unreasonable expectations from both news consumers and managers in the newsroom.

PARTICIPANT #16: "Now with social media, you better be one of the first ones, because everybody follows their social media, they're going to their phones and if you don't have

it, someone else will... We can't always pick up all the facts and information and write it down and create these stories the way we used to."

PARTICIPANT #13 echoed this concern and said the demands for immediacy are highest during breaking news situations where he is forced to make ethical decisions rapidly, often without the aid of managers or other colleagues.

PARTICIPANT #13: "You try to get things verified by official sources as much as you can... You've got an editor breathing down your neck to get something online.... There's a temptation to just run with whatever is out there, but you just have to show restraint and use journalistic discretion at every turn."

Nearly all of the television journalists feel SNSs have also led to an increased amount of harsh criticism from news consumers. PARTICIPANT #14 says sometimes this criticism doesn't even relate to the news content, but instead focuses on the appearance, clothing and grammar he and his colleagues display during their daily newscasts. He feels this criticism impacts journalists negatively and occasionally gets in the way of their journalistic duties, with audience members encouraging him to forgo objectivity and instead insert his own opinions into his reporting. "They want me to spew their politics and be one-sided and I don't want to do that," (PARTICIPANT #14). He argues this criticism is especially harsh when it comes to his female co-workers. PARTICIPANT #3 says this criticism from news consumers occasionally turns hostile and becomes harassment. She shared a specific string of incidents at her newspaper

involving one of her female co-workers who was frequently harassed by a disgruntled reader. She explained how the harassment first began as hostile comments on Facebook, but eventually led to an in-person encounter outside the newspaper's main office. PARTICIPANT #3 feels this harassment negatively impacted her co-worker and largely inhibited her ability to perform her journalistic duties at the newspaper.

Participants also mentioned a concern regarding the proliferation of misleading/biased news stories on SNSs that come from less reputable sources. PARTICIPANT #16 used the term "fake news" to highlight this concerning trend, borrowing a phrase he says is commonly used by U.S. President Donald Trump to describe news stories that criticize his policies and actions. He and other journalists are concerned this "fake news" is a concerning threat to the ethical standard of objectivity and damages the credibility of the entire journalism industry. PARTICIPANT #15 also felt this term "fake news" has led to an increased amount of mistrust among news consumers.

PARTICIPANT #15: "I can see why people are being misled and why people think some of these fake or false stories on social media are real, because even for me it's hard to tell if it is or not. That's why people often carry this big generalization that we're all just fake news."

Another journalist in this focus group session added the current political climate in the United States has motivated some journalists to share their political beliefs on SNSs, forgoing their objectivity, opting to insert their own personal bias into their reporting. This concern led to

a several minute debate during the session regarding when and if it is acceptable for journalists to share their own political biases. Every journalist in this session agreed journalists should not share their own personal biases on SNSs, regardless of the topic, because it violates the ethical standard of objectivity, which they argued is the most important role journalists play in a democratic society. “We report facts, not opinions” (PARTICIPANT #13). During this discussion two journalists shared recent occasions where their colleagues forwent objectivity and decided to cave-in to audience pressure. In both cases these colleagues shared their own opinions regarding U.S. President Donald Trump and in both cases these journalists were reprimanded by their news managers for violating their company’s ethical code. PARTICIPANT #14 was concerned after hearing these stories and added “it’s become too easy for us to interject our bias into a plethora of different things...and that's not our role.”

This topic of journalists sharing their own personal biases on SNSs came up during another focus group session, but the opinions held by journalists in that session were not unanimous. PARTICIPANT #3 feels journalists should have the same rights as everyone else who uses SNSs to freely express their opinions and beliefs. She feels SNSs allow her to create her own “personal brand” and she argues most of her readers appreciate hearing her take on various topics. However, she later added that these opinionated posts on SNSs are only shared on her personal profiles, which don’t represent her news organization in any way, as doing so would violate her news organization's ethical code. While she sees a difference regarding what is acceptable for journalists to post on personal versus professional social media profiles, every other journalist in this focus group session disagreed.

PARTICIPANT #1: “I feel like I’m on the job 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. When you’re a reporter, you’re always a reporter...I’m always very cautious about what I put out there in my daily life on social media on my own personal page, whether it’s Facebook or Twitter, or whatever.”

While SNSs have negatively impacted the journalism profession in many ways, nearly every journalist in this study felt the positive impact SNSs have had on the profession is much more significant. Nearly every journalist in the study, at one point or another, praised SNSs for their ability to provide increased access to people and information. PARTICIPANT #2 says in some situations SNSs provide the only way to access specific pieces of information, and in other situations they also provide the only means to access certain people who do not have a permanent address or home telephone number. She sees this increased access as a major contribution to the journalism profession, one which aids journalists in their role as a “watchdog” on government and society at large. PARTICIPANT #7 adds that SNSs have also made that role as a “watchdog” more important than ever, due to the increased amount of misinformation and bias that is posted by non-journalists on SNSs.

PARTICIPANT #7: “It calls us to arms almost, to get genuine, legitimate, fact-checked and double-checked news out there to our followers.... I think that sort of increases our role as that watchdog to make sure what we’re seeing, at least for us, what people should be seeing.”

PARTICIPANT #7 also felt SNSs allows journalists the unique opportunity to “check the facts” and to “debunk” politically-biased information online and allows journalists to uphold their ethical standards of providing truth and objectivity. Other journalists mentioned the impact SNSs have had on the “gatekeeping” function of the journalism profession. Some journalists argue SNSs have diminished their roles as gatekeepers, while others feel SNSs have merely altered that role.

PARTICIPANT #13: “In the future journalists are going to be the ones who make sense of these massive reams of data that are coming at you on a daily basis. The average citizen can’t sort through it and make sense of it. That’s where the journalist’s role has sort of evolved.”

PARTICIPANT #5 agrees that the role of a journalist in a democratic society hasn’t changed, but has merely changed after the advent of SNSs. Other journalists in this focus group session agreed. PARTICIPANT #8 went a step further to say that SNSs have created a new check and balance on the journalism profession, one that presents challenges for journalists, but ultimately holds them accountable, and she argues that’s a good thing.

PARTICIPANT #8: “Social has kind of allowed people to watch the watchdogs... They kind of keep the media in check. I really do feel that it does create a greater sense of accountability.”

This increased accountability was also viewed positively by a few other journalists in this focus group session. PARTICIPANT #7 feels holding journalists accountable for their actions, while also offering increased transparency in the journalism process, will allow the journalism profession to maintain its role in a democratic society.

RQ 3: What ethical dilemmas have journalists experienced when seeking out personal information, pictures and opinions posted on SNSs and how have these personal experiences shaped their own ethical principles?

All 18 participating journalists shared at least one example of a time when their individual ethical code was challenged while using SNSs. Journalists who carry the title of reporter, anchor or writer encountered these ethical challenges more frequently than the other journalists. The most common ethical dilemma these journalists cited was whether they should use pictures and video obtained through SNSs. PARTICIPANT #14 cited a recent news story that involved a man who had died in a car crash late at night. He explained how his station wasn't able to get a news photographer to the scene in time and the local authorities were not willing to provide any pictures or video of the crash scene. The very next day he and another co-worker searched Facebook and found pictures of the accident. These pictures were posted by witnesses who had no personal connections to the victim of the accident. PARTICIPANT#14 said his news managers wanted him to ask for permission to use these pictures. The witnesses were quick to offer their consent, but family members of the deceased were not pleased that these pictures were obtained by members of the news media. PARTICIPANT #14 said his managers made the

decision to publish these pictures, and he himself agreed with that decision, because it “portrayed the truth of the harsh reality of car accidents and that truth could one day save a life.”

Several of the other journalists in this group nodded along as a sign of unity, because they too had to decide at least once during their careers whether to use pictures or video of tragedies in their news coverage. The unanimous decision in this group was that the news organization in this specific case was right to publish the pictures they obtained. PARTICIPANT #14 said news managers looked at every picture individually to make sure they didn’t show any signs of blood or the deceased victim in the accident. The other journalists in the group nodded in approval, saying this procedure was common within their own news organizations. Similar situations also came up during the two other focus group sessions. During these sessions, which took place in the small- and medium-sized cities, the opinions of the journalists changed. Journalists who worked in the smallest city showed more reluctance toward posting pictures of tragedies. PARTICIPANT #1 said it is harder working in a small community, because everyone knows you by name and they are quick to speak out when they feel like their rights have been violated. He said in some situations his news organization has removed pictures and video from its website after family members of deceased individuals have called in to complain. Many of the journalists in the medium-sized media market also felt a strong sense of loyalty towards the community they serve. PARTICIPANT #10 said her organization has also removed pictures and video from its website and social media pages after viewers complained. She argued “their rights as a citizen definitely come before news,” as she argued a news consumer’s privacy was more important to her than “getting the facts” (PARTICIPANT #10). PARTICIPANT #7 was quick to condemn this news organization’s decision to remove pictures and video after receiving complaints. He

explained how his career has brought him to numerous larger cities where news organizations are less likely to show restraint. He argued news is not always happy or positive and that it is important to cover negative news stories with the same vigor and level of transparency. However, he feels it is important for him as a journalist to adapt to the ethical standards each community seems to have.

PARTICIPANT #7: “I was in a market of New York and we were aggressive in our use of it and it actually served us well.... I’m especially learning to evolve and change that here in this market, because people are a little different here, depending on the size of the town and the area you are in. You know here, you want to tone that down just a little bit.”

This journalist also disagreed with a majority of the other journalists in his focus group when it came to asking for permission to use pictures and video. He argued everything published on SNSs should be considered public and journalists shouldn't shy away from using them, as doing so doesn't violate ethical codes as he sees them, by contrast, he feels doing so actually reinforces his ethical standards of truth-seeking and upholding a citizen's “right to know” (PARTICIPANT #7). However, the policies set forth by his employer often contradict this belief, which is why he occasionally defers to his managers when it comes to deciding whether or not to publish pictures and video obtained through SNSs. PARTICIPANT #17 says her news organization as a whole agrees with this belief that everything posted on SNSs is public domain.

PARTICIPANT #17: “We embed tweets/public Facebook posts/Instagram photos without using permission since embedded code provides a live visual link to publicly posted content.”

While many of the journalists disagreed when it came to whether or not pictures and video should be published without permission, all 18 participating journalists did agree journalists should at the very least attempt to get permission. If permission is denied, a majority of the journalists in this study said their news organization would accommodate that request. A small minority said their news organizations would carefully consider whether or not they should still publish the pictures or video, depending on the given situation. PARTICIPANT #7 stated if it was up to him, he would publish the pictures and videos regardless of being denied permission to use them, but said his news managers felt otherwise.

Several journalists also shared examples where information they received through the use of SNSs challenged their ethical code. PARTICIPANT #16 explained how he and his colleagues discovered the identity of a deceased pilot on Facebook. The pilot had recently died in a small plane crash and authorities were withholding his identity at the time. News managers ultimately decided to not publish the pilot’s identity, because they argued there was no way to have 100% confirmation of the pilot’s identity. These managers felt the information they received was credible, and matched the age and physical description they received from authorities, but they eventually came to the conclusion that without confirmation from authorities or direct family members of the deceased they were not going to publish the pilot’s identity. Had they been able to confirm the pilot’s identity, PARTICIPANT #16 said he would have published that information

in a heartbeat as it would have fulfilled his ethical standards of seeking the truth and providing his community with accurate and honest information. Other journalists in the group brought up privacy concerns as they worried about the pilot's family and whether or not they should learn of his death on social media. In this specific scenario PARTICIPANT #13 said the medium of delivery, SNSs, becomes an important variable to consider, because unlike television newscasts or newspapers, which take several hours to prepare and publish, SNSs allow for the instantaneous publishing of information that could easily reach mourning family members quick enough to cause emotional harm. PARTICIPANT #13 made the argument that withholding the information until the next day's newspaper came out would be permissible, according his own personal ethical beliefs, but publishing the pilot's identity that same night over SNSs would not.

During all three focus group sessions the topic of independent confirmation came up. Journalists in these sessions unanimously agreed they would never publish information they obtained via SNSs unless it was 100% confirmed. PARTICIPANT #2 argued this restraint has caused problems for her news organization on numerous occasions. She cited a recent breaking news situation that happened in a very public place. More than a hundred people witnessed the incident and many were quick to post information on SNSs. PARTICIPANT #2 explained how she and several others in the newsroom were tracking this information in order to understand the context of the situation. Meanwhile, they were also working with the authorities to confirm whether or not any of the information they were finding on SNSs was in fact accurate. At this point, she says, authorities were not able to confirm or deny a majority of the information she and her colleagues had discovered online, and therefore her news organization decided not to publish it. This decision to show restraint angered several news consumers, because they felt this

news organization was either not doing its job or was somehow covering up what had happened. In this scenario PARTICIPANT #2 argued two ethical standards were being pit against one another, the truth-telling function of a democratic free press, and the ethical standards of accuracy and verification.

PARTICIPANT #4 works at one of the competing radio stations and also recalled covering this news event. He also experienced negative feedback from news consumers after his news organization decided to show restraint. At the time he was frustrated with his news managers, and the situation overall, because it left him feeling helpless, and forced him to defend himself and his news agency to an audience accusing them of ethical violations and secrecy. PARTICIPANT #3 shared this feeling of helplessness and she wrangled with numerous news consumers who reached out to her on SNSs the night of the incident.

PARTICIPANT #3: “We had so many conflicting reports coming out. We had heard multiple people were shot, there were people dying, saying it was a bloodbath, and stuff like that.... We had people asking, why aren’t you telling us everything? I ultimately said, what we are doing here is we are providing you with the most accurate information and verified information from reliable sources that we can. It wasn’t as big of a bloodbath as everybody thinking it was.”

All three journalists who covered this incident felt the restraint their news organizations showed that day was justified, because authorities later disproved a vast majority of the information witnesses had shared on SNSs. They also agreed the situation was a good lesson for

them as young journalists, because it reaffirmed the importance of verification, accuracy and truth. While these standards were first learned during their time in college, they cited their professional careers as more instrumental when it came to the creation of their own personal ethical code.

Of the 18 participating journalists, 16 either majored or minored in journalism while in college. These 16 journalists said ethics were taught in at least one class they enrolled in. However, 5 of these journalists said they went through college before the advent of SNSs. These journalists were all over the age of 35 and said SNSs didn't come out until a few years after their journalism careers began.

These 5 journalists argued the same ethical code they follow when publishing content on their primary medium (TV, radio, newspaper) is basically the same ethical code they use while publishing content on SNSs. They argued the same journalism principles should apply regardless of medium. The two journalists who didn't major in journalism while in college agreed. One of them was an English major and the other majored in video production. Both of these journalists said the first few years of their journalism careers they relied on their co-workers and managers to help them create their own ethical codes. The 16 journalists who majored in journalism agreed their own ethical codes were largely influenced by situations they encountered only after they entered the profession. These 16 journalists all agreed their news managers and older co-workers were crucial in the development of their own personal ethical codes. However, it is one of these managers/senior staff members who didn't major in journalism. PARTICIPANT #10 says co-workers often come to her guidance and advice, but she says it wasn't until recently that she created her own ethical code.

PARTICIPANT #10: “For me, it’s using common sense. Like, how would I feel if somebody used this information...I’m just learning from experience and just the newsroom in general...It’s definitely been an interesting road for me.”

While all 18 journalists had their own personal view of ethics, they said the decision whether or not to publish information on SNSs is ultimately made by managers. The 5 managers who participated in the study said they often consult their middle managers when they are asked to make difficult ethical decisions. PARTICIPANT #5 argued every case is different, as it brings a unique set of circumstances that allow you to bend or break the rules, which is why he says there is no written ethical code in his news room.

PARTICIPANT #5: “We don’t have anything that’s posted or listed.... We have unwritten rules on how to use social media and what to do, what not to do.... It’s an evolving conversation.”

When asked to provide examples of these “unwritten rules” PARTICIPANT #5 changed the wording “unwritten rules” to “basic common sense” and explained how he feels ethical conduct should be governed by common sense instead rigid ethical codes.

Many of the younger journalists in the study, those under the age of 35, were critical of management’s ability to create and uphold effective ethical guidelines for SNSs. PARTICIPANT #13 argues most journalists who have worked their way into a management role entered the

journalism profession before SNSs were widely used by the general public. He believes journalists are mostly on their own when it comes to creating and adhering to ethical standards online.

PARTICIPANT #13: “Your managers tend to be old school. They don’t understand what Twitter is, much less be able to give you any guidance for it.”

Only 1 of the 18 journalists said their news organization has drafted a written code of ethics for SNSs. However, this journalist admitted he has never read his organization’s ethical code despite encouragement from management to do so. Another journalist said his news organization holds annual training sessions where SNSs ethics are discussed, but he couldn’t recall ever seeing an actual written code of ethics at his organization. Three of the journalists said they have read ethical codes that have been put out by journalism trade groups, like the Society of Professional Journalists and the Radio Television Digital News Association, but these journalists couldn’t remember any of the ethical principles written in those codes. A few of the journalists actually condemned these ethical codes for their rigidity.

PARTICIPANT #9: “I think it’s kind of ridiculous for organizations like SPJ and others to have clear cut guidelines page by page when it comes to social media.... It’s social media and I feel like it’s always going to be the ‘wild west.’ Just having guidelines for every little thing when it comes to social media, it doesn’t even seem to make sense.”

PARTICIPANT #2 agreed with this condemnation in a separate focus group session. She argues every interaction a journalist makes on SNSs features a unique set of circumstances that cannot, and she argues should not, be regulated by a written ethical code. PARTICIPANT #1 agreed, stating his belief that every unwritten rule his organization has in place can be broken in certain situations. He argues most news organizations employ a check and balance system that requires management approval before information is gathered from and published on SNSs. However, a vast majority of the participating journalists said they are the sole regulators of their professional social media accounts. PARTICIPANT #6 says in most situations, management is only involved in the online conduct of employees after a consumer complaint has been filed.

PARTICIPANT #6: “Our station, at least over the last year-and-a-half, has been finding out these unwritten rules when either myself or another colleague breaks them. That’s when everyone else learns not to do that anymore. There’s been a few times where it has been station wide where someone has don’t something or posted something or taken something that we shouldn’t have.”

This theme of creating ethical standards through trial and error came up in all three focus group sessions. News managers agreed, despite their roles as internal ethical regulators in the newsroom, that the profession as a whole is still figuring out how to adequately regulate its own ethical conduct on SNSs. PARTICIPANT #5 says his own ethical standards are constantly evolving with every situation his newsroom encounters. Many of the journalists, especially those in the small- and medium-sized cities, said news consumers also act as ethical regulators on

SNSs. PARTICIPANT #6 explained how viewers have questioned several of his posts on SNSs in recent years. He says in a few occasions this criticism led to the removal of these posts. During these situations news consumers had a direct impact on the ethical standards carried out by professional journalists.

RQ 4: How do news consumers use SNSs, and what role does privacy play in dictating what personal information, pictures and opinions they share on their social media profiles?

Facebook was by far the most popular SNS among participants. Only one participant stated they were not currently active on Facebook at the time. Participants over the age of 40 relied more heavily on Facebook for news and information. Five of these participants stated Facebook is the only SNS they use.

Twitter was the second most popular SNS among participants. Seven of the 18 participants said they were currently active on Twitter. Only two of these Twitter users were over the age of 32. A few of these users also felt Twitter was more conducive to gathering and disseminating news than any other SNS. One participant mentioned Twitter was his favorite SNS for monitoring breaking news situations.

Reddit was also mentioned by three participants who all stated it was their preferred SNS when it came to finding news and information. These three Reddit users argued all other SNSs are more focused on staying in touch with friends and family than they are about providing users with news and information.

Three participants also mentioned YouTube as a SNS they use to watch news stories from local and national media sources. However, these participants saw YouTube as merely a vessel that stores videos, and not an engaging platform for feedback and commentary.

Participants in the study also mentioned Instagram, SnapChat and LinkedIn as SNSs they occasionally use, but these SNSs were seen more as ways to connect with acquaintances, and platforms to share ideas, than they were seen as tools for accessing news and information.

All 18 news consumers who participated in this study either utilize or at least have knowledge of privacy controls available to SNS users. Users of Reddit, Twitter and YouTube felt privacy controls served very little purpose within these SNSs. Participants said they mostly use these SNSs to access news and information, and rarely post their own original content on these platforms. However, nearly every Facebook user in the study reported that they are currently using some form of privacy control on their SNS account. A majority of the participants only allow friends and followers to access their Facebook profiles. A few other participants are currently using privacy controls that are less strict. Both MALE, 27 and MALE, 29 said they don't use privacy controls at all, because they feel nothing they post would be of interest to anyone outside their close groups of friends.

(MALE, 29): "I usually don't bother using anything strict when it comes to privacy controls, because I don't plan to post anything too personal and I know if you really want to find out more about me, you're going to be able to regardless of me trying to stop it."

Many of the participants in the study shared this view of online privacy. Despite utilizing privacy controls on SNSs, participants had little faith in their ability to actually protect private information online.

(FEMALE, 24): “I’m under the impression based on all the hacks you see on the news that if someone wants to get my information on my profile they can do it at any point.... I have no doubt they can see whatever they want to.”

Participants of all ages shared their skepticism toward SNS privacy settings. MALE, 57, feels privacy controls can only prevent SNS users outside your social network from accessing your profiles, but they cannot control what friends and followers do with your information.

(MALE, 57): “It only takes one well-meaning friend to share everything I hold private.... I set my privacy levels for friends only, yet it only takes one friend to share or repost something and it is out in the world.”

This skepticism of privacy controls was cited by many of the participants as the sole reason why they often refrain from posting certain types of information, pictures and videos on SNSs they don’t want shared with anyone outside their individual social network. While some participants felt privacy is a right that should be upheld on SNSs, one that may someday be achieved through a mix of legal rules and regulations, they felt at this time no reasonable human being should expect to have any sense of privacy while using SNSs.

A majority of the 18 participants voiced an overall apprehension toward posting information and other content on SNSs. These participants consumed much more news and information than they shared on SNSs. MALE, 29 explained this apprehension in the most succinct way when he said, “I’m more of an observer than I am a participant.” This apprehension was felt by participants of all ages, but was much more prevalent in participants over the age of 30. However, FEMALE, 63 said she is currently using two separate Facebook accounts so she can separate her active political commentary from her close friends and family.

(FEMALE, 63): “I have a general page and then I have one for politics and that’s where I get into the weeds and get into more issues. I’ve just got a lot of negative reports from friends and family on my politics and how active I am.... I just like to separate those two aspects, because some people close to me don’t want to get into that stuff or see it from me.”

The other 17 participants stated they were less likely to share their political beliefs and ideologies on SNSs. These participants were more likely to share or post news stories on their SNS profiles, but rarely, if ever, do they provide their own opinions on the topics portrayed in these stories. Many of the older participants, those over the age of 33, said they often refrain from sharing their opinions on SNSs, because they were afraid of offending someone. They were also afraid of harsh criticism and negative commentary from SNS users who disagree with them. Younger participants were worried about these two concerns as well, but were also mindful of how current and potential employers might react to their opinions online.

Five participants also said the current political climate has become another reason to not post or share opinions on SNSs. These participants specifically mentioned the Black Lives Matter movement, President Donald Trump, and both conservative and liberal ideologies as reasons to not share news and information on SNSs. Many of the participants in the study stated however, that the above mentioned variables have motivated them to access more news and information on SNSs. While many of the participants have chosen observatory roles on SNSs, and choose not to get involved in the discussion online, they saw the importance of staying up to date with current political issues and local news.

RQ 5: What expectations do news consumers have when it comes to professional journalists publishing or broadcasting their personal information, pictures and opinions?

All 18 participants follow or subscribe to at least one professional news organization on at least one SNS. These professional news organizations include a mix of local, national and specialty news sources, though local news organizations were followed more often than any other type of news organization. Besides news organizations as a whole, about half of the participants said they follow individual journalists on SNSs. However, none of these participants could recall a time when they actually sent one of these journalists a message, or reached out to them in any way. A few of these participants said on a rare occasion they might comment on a news story one of these journalists posted on an SNS, but they couldn't recall a time when one of these journalists responded to their comment.

When it comes to journalists using SNSs to gather information, pictures and video, participants had wide-ranging opinions. While all 18 participants agreed journalists should be allowed to use SNSs to gather information and sources for articles and other published content, disagreements formed in all three focus groups over what kinds of information, pictures and video journalists should be allowed to gather. Some participants felt there should be a different standard for SNS users who work hard to keep their online information private. These users include individuals who utilize privacy controls and post very little information onto their individual SNS profile. FEMALE, 28, feels journalists should consider how they got the information online before they use it. She brought up the scenario of an SNS user's friend or family member sharing their information, pictures or video with users who are outside their individual social network. In this situation FEMALE, 28, argues the information may have reached an unintended audience and therefore journalists should consider whether or not this information should be widely disseminated online.

(FEMALE, 28): "I feel like, depending on your privacy settings, you post things on the internet with the expectation that other people aren't going to see it.... I mean, if it's something where you don't want it seen, then it shouldn't be out there and made public for everyone."

During this focus group session one other participant was sympathetic to this opinion, but the other four participants strongly disagreed, arguing all information on SNSs should be considered public, and therefore free for journalists to obtain and disseminate.

(MALE, 26): “I think if somebody is posting about it then it’s no longer their property and I think it’s for anyone to use that.”

Participants under the age of 30 for the most part agreed with this opinion, while some over the age of 30 argued certain news situations required specific sets of rules. FEMALE, 46, brought up the scenario of a car accident, and whether or not journalists should be allowed to obtain pictures of the wreckage. In these types of situations, where individuals are injured or killed, and great emotional harm can be done to victims and family members, she argued journalists should use caution. Other participants in this session agreed, though some argued these cautionary considerations are not unique to SNSs, as journalists use several other methods to gather information, pictures and video.

Consumers agreed SNSs offer journalists a unique opportunity to disseminate information quickly to a wide audience. Participants shared examples of how they have clicked on links posted on Facebook or Twitter that quickly took them to the full story on a journalism outlet’s main website. The consumers not only understood why media outlets used SNSs this way, but they, for the most part, appreciated this function, because it brought news articles to their attention that they otherwise wouldn't have seen or heard about. Consumers also appreciated the way news outlets use SNSs to get information out quickly during breaking news situations, instead of waiting for the next television newscast, the next edition of the daily newspaper, or the next radio news show. While consumers didn’t have any qualms with journalists using SNSs as a tool for disseminating and sharing information, many did have

concerns when it comes to the types of information that is shared, and the way that information is shared.

A majority of the 18 participants felt journalists should obtain permission from a SNS user before gathering and disseminating information, pictures or video that was posted on a news consumers social media profile. FEMALE, 63, argued journalists are required to obtain permission when they gather personal information, pictures and video during other news gathering methods, such as in-person interviews, phone interviews, and press conferences, whether that permission is officially granted by the information provider, or simply implied in the situation. She felt journalists should ask permission even when there is no physical interaction between the journalist and the information provider.

Some participants argued permission should be required in every situation, while others felt permission was only required in certain scenarios. MALE, 57, felt journalists should consider the lengths at which the SNS user has gone to keep that information private. He felt journalists should consider a user's privacy control settings and whether or not that user meant for this information to leave the confines of their individual social network. However, if the SNS user who posted this information has loose privacy controls, or if the journalist can show this user wants their information to reach a wider audience, then MALE, 57, felt this information was fair game for journalists to disseminate.

Participants under the age of 30 mostly agreed that permission should be required before a journalist can disseminate information they obtained on SNSs. However, many of these younger participants were more lenient with this permission, stating that users carry the burden of policing themselves with the kinds of information they post. FEMALE, 28, also felt

journalists should be afforded the same rights as other SNS users, who at this time are free to share a SNS user's information, pictures and video on their own SNS profile without asking permission, thereby taking this information out of the initial user's individual social network and disseminating it to a wider audience. FEMALE, 28, acknowledged most SNS profiles do not have as wide a reach as the profiles used by professional news organizations, though she felt the same rules should apply regardless.

Participants in one focus group session felt requiring a journalist to obtain permission before disseminating information, pictures and video obtained on SNSs not only protects the user's privacy, but also protects the journalist's reputation by forcing them to check the validity of this information. MALE, 26, stated he trusts information journalists post on SNSs less than he does information they publish on other formats, such as newspapers, TV broadcasts, and radio shows, because he argues it's too easy for journalists to simply post information on SNSs without checking its validity. He argued the permission requirement would force journalists to engage with the SNS user who posted this information, which would force the journalist to question the validity of the information this user posted.

During another focus group session FEMALE, 46, brought up another scenario of a breaking news situation. She stated how her local newspaper disseminated comments from SNS users who claimed to be witnesses to this event without seeking their permission, and therefore without questioning these users' credibility. She said the newspaper cautioned viewers that the information from these witnesses has not been verified by authorities, but FEMALE, 46 argued these comments painted an inaccurate picture of the event and skewed the opinion of news consumers regardless of the newspaper's warning. She said a majority of this information was

later disproved by authorities and the newspaper did not publish any corrections on their website, or on any of their SNS profiles. Other participants in this focus group session remembered this specific incident and all agreed they lost a lot of respect for their local newspaper after this incident. This example has less to do with journalism ethics, per se, but does however show the moral standards news consumers follow when it comes to using SNSs. These standards dictate how they themselves interact with others on SNSs, and in turn they feel professional journalists should not only follow them as well, but should perhaps adhere to even stricter moral standards.

Despite the many concerns and scenarios mentioned previously, the unanimous opinion from all 18 participants was that SNS users should carry no expectation of privacy while posting and sharing information, pictures and video online. As stated previously, a majority of the 18 participants are currently using some level of privacy control on their SNS profiles, but none of these participants held much confidence in their ability to actually keep information private. Therefore, a majority of the participants reiterated when it comes to journalists using SNSs to obtain information, pictures and video they should follow certain rules, such as seeking permission, and considerations of privacy, but in the end, the responsibility of protecting privacy ultimately falls on the backs of the SNS users themselves.

Discussion

The ethical standards held by news consumers and professional journalists revealed significant similarities and differences that will be discussed below. News consumers, overall, held a rather impressive understanding of the journalistic process and carried a strong understanding of journalism ethics. Professional journalists, however, seemed to understand journalism ethics, but appear to put a lesser value on ethical codes overall.

When it comes to the news consumers in this study, despite their relative passivity in the journalistic process, and the overall apprehension toward sharing information on SNSs, most shared a strong understanding of the journalistic process, and how that process can be aided or hindered by SNSs. A large majority of these participants also carried a mild to moderate admiration toward the journalism profession, and understood its role in a democratic society. Participants who viewed the journalism industry negatively were concerned about the perceived proliferation of “fake news” and other misinformation that finds its way onto the internet. However, these concerns were more focused on content and specific media outlets than they were SNSs and how journalists use them in the journalistic process.

During the three focus group sessions with news consumers, there appeared to be a strong sense of trust that journalists would perform their journalistic duties ethically. Various situations and scenarios involving unethical or questionable behavior by professional journalists were shared during the sessions, but participants who shared these stories understood that these situations were isolated events that do not reflect the beliefs and actions of every journalist and journalism organization. That being said, a large majority of the news consumers felt journalists should always ask for permission before disseminating any information, pictures or video that is

retrieved off an SNS profile. Many of these participants also felt any information that is gathered on SNSs must be verified through another channel before it can be disseminated by professional journalists. This verification process, consumers argued, makes up for the lack of an in-person interaction with the original source of this information. This lack of an in-person interface between journalists and news sources was the main reason why some news consumers in the study stated they trust news information less when it is disseminated over SNSs, regardless of the journalist or journalism organization that is sharing it. These news consumers, and a few others in the sessions, argued increased transparency and an explanation of how and where journalists obtained their information would ease some of these concerns and would help rebuild the trust they have lost in news information on SNSs.

News consumers were more wide-ranging with their opinions regarding ethics and their rigidity. While some news consumers viewed ethics as absolute ideals that cannot be broken, others had a philosophy that mirrored the journalists' viewpoint that ethical guidelines are merely suggestions. A large majority of journalists in this study disagreed with written ethical codes due to their rigidity. These journalists argued ethical norms on SNSs are constantly changing, and every situation presents a unique set of variables that cannot be measured and justified by written ethical codes.

Instead of relying on these codes and following strict rules, as news consumers largely felt was the best practice, journalists overall tended to rely on their own ethical beliefs and standards instead. These standards varied from journalist to journalist, but overall, they featured a strong adherence to the concepts of information verification, truth-telling, objectivity and the protection of privacy. Journalists largely agreed, and shared similar adherence when it comes to

the first three ethical concepts. However, the researcher noticed a few deviations when it came to each journalist's definition of privacy. In certain real-life scenarios journalists shared during the focus group sessions, journalists held different beliefs of what information in that specific case should and should not be considered private. While some journalists felt it was ethical to publish private information in these scenarios for the sake of truth-telling and providing accurate information to their audience, other journalists argued privacy was more important in these scenarios and withholding said information would be more ethical in the end. Journalists with more experience, and also those who work in larger-sized media markets, had the tendency to value truth-telling over privacy, and largely felt invading the privacy of one individual person was acceptable for the sake of providing accurate information to a mass audience. Younger journalists, and those who work in smaller-sized markets, seemed to place a higher value on privacy, as they felt a stronger connection to their news consumers, seeing them more as neighbors or friends than consumers.

Despite their differences, all journalists in the study stated the two greatest influences that shaped their own unique ethical standards include their undergraduate education in journalism school, and the tutelage of their peers and news managers. Not only did these two influences help journalists create their own individual ethical standards, they also served as reference points during questionable situations. Many of these cases involved the journalist seeking advice from their news managers and other co-workers with more experience. In the end, journalists said the decision on whether or not to disseminate a specific piece of information online was made not by them, but by a manager with more experience.

This common practice highlights the amount of power news managers have when it comes to setting an ethical standard within their organization. Not only do these managers have a large influence on shaping the ethical standards of their younger employees, they are also tasked with making the ultimate decision on whether or not a specific piece of information should be disseminated online. While every journalist in the study felt their news managers perform these duties adequately, it is important to highlight the fact that none of the news managers in this study received academic training in online ethics. Their college education took place long before SNSs, like Facebook and Twitter, were invented. Instead of relying on formal education, something many of the younger journalists stated they do when they come across a situation that challenges their ethical standards, news managers instead rely on their work experience, and “gut feelings.”

This reliance on experience, instead of written ethical codes, greatly deviates from the opinions held by news consumers in this study. This disconnect may or may not be experienced in other regions of the country, or with other age groups and populations of news consumers, but in this specific study the division between news consumers and news professionals regarding this matter was significant. The researcher was surprised to discover the journalists in this study had a large disdain for ethical codes, given the long history these codes have in the journalism profession, and the great care and time various journalism organizations have put in to drafting them. The researcher views these ethical codes as important, being a professional journalism himself. He agrees with the overall consensus from journalists in this study that ethical codes can be rigid at times, and don't always reflect the countless unique ethical situations journalists encounter on a daily basis. However, the researcher feels ethical codes provide a sturdy

foundation journalists can use to build their own ethical beliefs. Much like legal precedent sets the tone for interpretation of law, the researcher believes ethical codes set a precedent for future ethical decision-making.

Without ethical codes and standards the researcher fears journalists will fall back on “gut feelings” when an ethical decision needs to be made. The researcher acknowledges “gut feelings,” instincts and intuition are important influencers in the decision-making process, but without a strong foundation in ethical standards and values, the researcher argues such arbitrary influences will yield shallow decisions that only consider one person’s experience and not the collective experience of an entire industry. Journalism organizations in this region might want to consider whether or not this disconnect is a cause for concern and whether it warrants a revisiting of their organization’s current ethical standards.

Although journalists carry a majority of the responsibility when it comes to maintaining strong journalism ethics and standards, news consumers bear some responsibility as well. Several news consumers in this study shared personal experiences with journalism content they felt was unethically obtained or disseminated via SNSs, but none of them shared their grievances with the journalism outlet that was responsible. The researcher feels news consumers who value local journalism have a responsibility to speak up and make those grievances known.

While this study focuses on social responsibility theory and hopes to create more discussions of what ethical interactions look like between professional journalists and the audiences they serve, the purpose of this study is not to create a unifying ethical code. While several ethical codes have been discussed in this research study (NPPA, 2018; NPR, 2017; New York Times, 2018; RTNDA, 2018; SPJ, 2014), the researcher is not implying that these ethical

codes are inadequate, or require strict adherence from every professional news organization. The purpose of this study was to highlight the opinions and ethical expectations from two groups of individuals in order to show their differences, in hopes of promoting a healthier dialogue and mutual understanding between both parties. With both parties becoming increasingly symbiotic, and with growing mistrust of online information, a mutual understanding of both party's ethical beliefs and intentions is critical, as more journalistic activity moves into online spaces.

Limitations

This study employed focus group sessions to better understand the opinions and beliefs of journalists and news consumers regarding the use of SNSs for journalistic purposes. While the research method offered unique opportunities to access complex thoughts and opinions from both sets of individuals, journalists and consumers, the researcher noticed a few limitations. In each session six individuals participated, but that participation was not always equal across the board. Some participants needed more encouragement than others to share their thoughts and opinions. Participants who were more confident and assertive tended to dominate the conversation which made some quieter participants more reluctant to share their opinions. These quieter participants were frequently encouraged, as the researcher used direct questioning to draw out more participation, but these efforts weren't always successful.

While the researcher took great care in studying journalists with diverse backgrounds, ages and job titles, there is the acknowledgement that some populations of journalists were not adequately represented in this study, specifically when it comes to racial minorities, and journalists who work for digital news organizations. While the study did include representatives from minority populations, and digital news organizations, a vast majority of the participating journalists were of Caucasian descent who also work in legacy media formats (television, newspaper and radio).

This study also carries regional limitations, as only journalists and news consumers in the Midwest region of the United States of America were recruited to participate. A study conducted

in other regions of the United States, or in other countries, would likely yield different outcomes, and possibly an increased level of diversity.

News consumers in this study were also relatively passive when it comes to the journalistic process. This apprehension towards sharing ideas, information, pictures and video on SNSs is not shared by all online users. A sampling of news consumers who are more active in the journalistic process, and are more inclined to interact with journalists via SNSs, may carry different ethical ideals and beliefs when it comes to the gathering and dissemination of online information.

Further Research

The voluntary and involuntary collaboration between professional journalists and news consumers during the journalistic process will only become more common as time goes on. Further research is needed to better understand this symbiotic relationship and how both entities can ensure a healthy flow of information that reduces inaccuracy, emotional harm and the invasion of privacy. Researchers should consider expanding this study to other regions of the United States or perhaps taking on a nationwide approach. Researchers should also consider an international approach utilizing other countries where a free press is part of its democratic structure.

Various population groups also deserve better representation in this line of research. Further research is needed to address the limitations of this study, which the researcher admits doesn't fully address the ethical beliefs and opinions of young adults, teens and adolescents, as well as various minority groups that weren't adequately represented in this study.

Researchers should also consider other research methods when drafting future studies, such as in-depth interviews, surveys or workplace observations. If a focus group method is used again, researchers should consider using mixed groups that include both journalists and news consumers. By mixing these two sub-groups, researchers may unearth unique viewpoints, debates and discussions between participants from two different viewpoints on this topic. The researcher feels keeping both sub-groups separate was the appropriate research method in this current study, but also feels future studies may benefit from taking a different approach and mixing both sub-groups together during focus group discussions.

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Appendix A

Question Guide for Focus Groups Involving Professional Journalists Who Use SNSs

1. Which SNSs do you use?
2. How do you use them?
3. Are these SNSs helpful for journalists? Why or why not?
4. How often do you interact with individual people on these SNSs?
5. When obtaining information, pictures or other media files hosted on these SNSs, do you ask for permission? Why or why not?
6. What rules and guidelines do you follow while using these SNSs?
7. Who taught you these guidelines?
8. Does your news organization/ownership group have a stated ethical policy?
 - a. If a policy exists, do people at your organization know what that policy is and how to access it?
 - b. If a policy exists, when was it written and how often is it reviewed?
9. Do you feel that SNSs can be used unethically by journalists and if so how?
10. How concerned are you regarding the privacy of the individuals you may come into contact with while using SNSs?
11. How have SNSs changed a journalist's role in a democratic society?

Appendix B

Question Guide for Focus Groups Involving News Consumers Who Use SNSs

1. Which SNSs do you use?
2. How do you use them?
3. What do you typically share/post on your social media profile(s)?
4. How private would you consider this information?
5. How do you use SNSs privacy controls and how much do you trust them?
6. How do you feel about people other than your friends/followers looking at your profiles and the information you post?
7. How do you use SNSs to obtain information from professional journalists and other media sources?
8. How do you feel about journalists using SNSs to obtain and distribute information?
9. Should journalists ask permission before obtaining and distributing information found on SNSs? Why or why not?
10. What rules and guidelines do you think journalists should follow when collecting this information?
11. Is there a concern over privacy invasion or do you feel there is no expectation of privacy while using SNSs?