The New Newsroom:

The Impact of Digital and Social Media on Local Television News Stations

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

Of

Drexel University

by

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in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

of

Masters of Science in Television Management

May 2014
Acknowledgements

I cannot express enough gratitude to my thesis advisor, Janice Selinger, and program director, Albert Tedesco for their valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development stages of my thesis. Their willingness to give their time so generously has been very much appreciated.

I would also like to thank the staff at the following organizations for participating in my research study: ABC 6 WPVI, CBS 3 KYW, NBC 10 WCAU, and Fox 29 WTXF-TV.

Finally I wish to thank my boyfriend, Stephen, and my parents, Michael and Debra, for their continued support and encouragement throughout this process.
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. vi

1. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

1.1 Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................. 2

1.2 Background and Need .................................................................................................... 2

1.3 Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 14

1.4 Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 16

1.5 Significance to the Field ............................................................................................... 18

1.6 Definition of Terms ........................................................................................................ 18

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ....................................................................................... 21

2.1 Social Platforms ........................................................................................................... 21

2.2 Digital Sphere ............................................................................................................... 33

2.3 Inside a Local Television News Station ....................................................................... 40

2.4 Breaking News Sub-Study ............................................................................................ 49

2.5 Rationale/Summary ....................................................................................................... 52

3. THE STUDY ....................................................................................................................... 54

3.1 Methodology ................................................................................................................. 54

3.2 Data Analysis ................................................................................................................. 56

4. CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 62

4.1 Discussion ....................................................................................................................... 62

4.2 Limitations ..................................................................................................................... 65

4.3 Recommendations for Future Research ....................................................................... 66

4.4 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 67
Abstract
The New Newsroom: The Impact of Digital and Social Media on Local Television News Stations
Kelsey M. Hanley

This thesis addresses the integration and impact of digital and social media into local television news stations across the country through 2013. Digital and social media have allowed local television stations to stay engaged with their viewers on a 24/7 basis, by promoting constant conversation. Studies note that social media is on a continuous spiral of growth through which viewers have the opportunity to contribute to the news gathering process, and in turn it allows newscasters to continue an ongoing conversation with their viewers in real time. By looking into all aspects of local television newsrooms, this thesis investigates how digital and social media are changing the journalistic landscape. From the newsgathering and news dissemination process, to staffing and revenue streams, digital and social media affect every department in a local television news station. Special attention is given to the three-screen approach and mobile technology, as well as the social platforms themselves, to determine how local television stations have used these particular technologies in their everyday business practice. This thesis also includes a ten question, open ended survey of the Philadelphia Designated Market Area (DMA) to determine how digital and social media have affected the four major commercial television stations in the area (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC). The survey was distributed to television managers, creative service teams, web teams, and the on-air talent with twelve survey's being returned from at least one representative per station. After
analyzing information from the literature and survey data, a conclusive hypothesis was formulated about the future of digital and social media use at local television news stations in the coming years.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social media is affecting the way a local television news station presents information to its audience and how its audience in turn receives that information. Within the next decade or so, social media will have made giant strides in the way local stations present their information and how that information is received by various stakeholder groups, making it virtually different from how information is presented and received today, as social media becomes more relied upon by businesses and all aspects of everyday life. Social media has begun to change the way people communicate information to each other, making for an increasingly open environment in the Internet world since 2008. Naturally, this new phenomenon would affect how news and local information is presented and received, and what the impact will be to all stakeholders and on all social platforms.

Various stakeholders now receive their news on a 24/7 basis due to the open atmosphere of social media, and the three-screen approach, which involves a television screen, computer screen, and a mobile phone screen. Stakeholders have constant access to information via the three-screen approach, which ultimately changes the way television managers at local stations present their information to their audience, as there is no longer a requirement for timed newscasts. All news is now happening in real time through the use of social media, such as tweets and Facebook posts. The moment something occurs, news reporters can alert their audience within minutes due to the far-reaching and fast acting components of social media. (In Changing News, 2012; Bruell, 2012)
Statement of the Problem

This research analyzed how social and digital media have affected the way local television stations present their news and in turn, how their audience receives news in regards to social platforms, social media newsrooms, and mobile technology. The everyday operations of a local newsroom will be analyzed as well, from content and segments, to staffing and audience share.

A case study involving the four major network affiliated stations (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) in the Philadelphia DMA will evaluate how social and digital media tactics have affected the way these particular stations report their news. Information will be gathered from a 10-question survey.

After compiling the subsequent data, the researcher analyzed the findings obtained from the literature review by looking at the social media trends of local television stations around the country and the survey data, to formulate an hypothesis predicting how social and digital media have affected local television news stations through 2013, and what will be in store for the future.

Background and Need

For the researcher to be able to analyze recent social and digital media trends in local television news stations, and make a determination on how these trends are affecting local news, the researcher must be familiar with local television news and social media as separate entities. The history of the two entities and their convergence will give the researcher a better outlook on the different media as a whole, with the information contributing to the construction of a valid hypothesis
about the recent trends of social and digital media and how these media have impacted local television news in 2013.

Significance of Local News

As televisions became commercially available in the early 1940's, the television provided a new community-oriented medium for people to receive news, entertainment, and advertising. Having a television in homes, businesses, and institutions became as ubiquitous as having a telephone. (Monaghan, n.d)

When Congress passed the Communications Act of 1934, it gave the FCC the power to regulate broadcast licensing, making the FCC the central power in all things wire and radio, and later television. The goal of the FCC is to make sure stations served “the public interest, convenience, and necessity,” and the surest path to achieve that is through local news and programming. (Parsons, 2008)

A local television station meets the FCC's objective of serving the public interest as well as the broadcasting network's commercial objectives in six ways. A station has the right to control its programming through shows produced in house or syndicated programs bought through an outside corporation. However, if a syndicated program is not doing well in a particular market, the local station must abide by its contract and continue to pay the broadcast licensing fee until the contract ends. A station has exclusive rights to its locally produced programming—no other competitor can copy or steal anything about a newscast, as well as the personalities reporting those newscasts. In turn, this exclusivity right allows a station to build its brand identity, and tailor these programs to its desired target
market. With this target market, a station has the right to customize programs and change the content or format to compete with outside market forces beyond its control. For example, a newscast can be modified to offer an expanded weather or sports newscast, or offer softer over harder news stories, depending on what most appeals to their target market. Numerous stations also have the ability to control their costs. Although, stations are initially expensive in the start-up, once a station has been established, it can budget exactly what it needs. Adding additional newscasts have incrementally small costs as well, as all the equipment, sets, and talent are fixed. However, with the additional newscast, come additional costs for crew. Lastly, a station has many other profits other than programming to enhance its revenue. A station owns the entire inventory that goes into producing a newscast or program, unlike a syndicated company that has to deal with limited inventory. Advertisers are also more likely to place top commercials in a newscast, as they are not “hit-listed” like other network or syndicated programs, as their revenue is not fixed. (Eastman 2009)

In reference to local news, this area covers everything found in one’s locality; news and events that are only of interest to those that reside in that particular community. Local news can be provided through sources such as a parent network, a network affiliate, or an independent station. (Parsons 2008)

An O & O, (Network Owned and Operated), is a local television station that is owned by both a major network (ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, CW) and a local television station. For example: Disney owns ABC and eight other local stations across the country in cities like New York, LA, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Network Affiliate
stations are local stations that have a contractual agreement along with provisions for pre-emption, to run programs that are distributed by the network. Hearst Television owns 26 local television stations throughout the country including 10 NBC affiliates, 13 ABC affiliates, two CBS affiliates, and one CW affiliate. Finally, an independent station has no formal business relationship with a major network. The independent station produces its own programming or obtains programming rights from syndication companies. However, 95% of local stations are commercially broadcast, meaning they are either an O & O or network affiliate. (Eastman 2009)

A local station usually has seven major departments, which include: administration, engineering, promotion, sales, public affairs, news, and programming. The goal of these departments is to work together to serve the public interest as stated by the FCC. (Parsons 2008)

The Internet and Rise of Social Media

The lifespan of the Internet as we know it, started out with its predecessor, ARPANET which was used by the U.S military in the late 1960’s. In 1989-1990, Tim Berners-Lee made the world-wide-web technology possible through HTTP (hyper transfer protocol). This technology started out as a beacon of openness for all, to express their thoughts and feelings without repercussions. As we move further along in time, the internet has started to veer away from its previous intentions, as more and more corporations have used the Internet for various ways to maximize revenue, looking to evidence of the dot com bubble in the 90’s. (Kung 2008) (Miller 2011) (Seel, 2012)
Social media, however, has started to bring the Internet back to Berners-Lee's initial intentions, once again creating an open environment for all to express their thoughts and concerns. Social media offers communication between individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities, purely through user generated content. This medium can take on many different forms such as social networking sites like Facebook, blogs such as WordPress, Tumblr, or micro blogs such as Twitter, wikis like Wikipedia, content communities like YouTube or Flickr, virtual game worlds like World of War Craft, and virtual social worlds like Second Life. (Seel, 2012)

Not only has social media taken over the Internet, but it has moved into mobile devices as well. Mobile social media displays hyper location and time content to users in “virtual communities.” This content can be accessed through mobile devices such as a smart phone or tablet in conjunction with apps. Examples of these mobile-based apps include: Foursquare, Yelp, Instagram, and Snapchat. Internet based social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter have made mobile-based apps as well, so their users can access their content at anytime in any location even if these users don’t have a computer near them. (Mitchell 2012)

With the increased use of these apps, the web and mobile technologies now have a symbiotic relationship. They are becoming almost interconnected as one, as each medium is able to benefit from the other through the use of these social networking sites and are able to be accessed through multiple platforms at once. (Mitchell, 2012)
Moving on from the personal uses of social media, businesses and organizations have now begun to employ these techniques in their day-to-day practices, and using social media as an advantage of presenting their information in real time as a way to target market their audience. Social media has become an important aspect of marketing and client development in any business around the world. Most businesses and organizations have established a presence in the “big three:” Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, however, with every passing day, more and more businesses have utilized other obscure sites such as Pinterest, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and Instagram, to communicate with their various stakeholder groups. (Bosari, 2012)

According to the 2012 Social Media Industry Report, 94% of all businesses used social media as part of their marketing strategy, and 85% of businesses using social media reported an increase in their market exposure. Social media allows businesses to veer away from the traditional business model, and grants them the opportunity to employ their advertising strategy in ways never thought possible. (Potter, 2012) Tumblr has now become an advertising medium for businesses as it allows businesses to create sponsored posts on users walls, (whether the user likes it or not). YouTube, now owned by Google, has increased the frequency of its ads, allowing businesses to place them before, after, and sometimes during a video. (Amy, 2012)

*The Digital Wave of Television*
In 2009, licensed television stations, excluding cable, were required to switch from the traditional analog transmission signal to a digital transmission signal. Although this switch gave stations the ability to have several channels on their assigned frequency, many stations, especially local stations, saw declines in viewership. (Patel, 2011)

Americans claim that local television is their number one source to receive local news, according to Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2012 report. However, with the rise and popularity of the Internet, local news has some new competition. Users can now access their news on demand, giving local television stations and newspapers a disadvantage by receiving news from the Internet. This new flexibility and user control has driven some people away from their print and TV counterparts to the Internet to receive news. The one loophole in this equation, however, is that during times of crisis and disaster, people turn toward their local television station more than any other medium to receive up to date information. (Potter, 2012)

*Convergence of Local TV and the Internet*

With the rise of digital platforms and added newscasts at different times, such as extra local news broadcasts at 4:30am, audience share is finally looking up since a low point in 2011. (Stelter, 2012) It is assumed by Pew Research Center that local stations are now looking to the Internet as an ally, rather than a competitor, as the Internet was viewed in 2008. Stations have now begun using social media as a tool to instigate communication between themselves and their target audience.
Diane Mermigas, of Mermigas on Media states that digital [platforms] are “the driving economic force of the future and the only growth area,” as reported by Pew Research Center. (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell 2013)

All local stations now have their own website dedicated to providing up-to-date information on breaking news, weather, entertainment, and sports programming. Some stations even use their websites to produce content strictly for the web. However, more stations are turning to social media rather than their websites to disseminate information and engage with their audience due to the fact that social media is more personalized and open. (Goetzl, 2012; Stelter, 2012; Stelzner, 2012)

Local stations have also seen increased revenue with online and mobile advertising. Stations are now employing a digital sales staff to exclusively deal with online advertising. Pew Research Center’s projected 2012 forecast stated that local television ad sales will increase by 13.4% and BIA/Kelsey says locally targeted ads will make up a majority of mobile spending and increase by 70%, or $2.8 billion, by 2015. (Potter, 2012)

*Producing Digital Content*

Constant news production is the new reality for local news producers, as they now have to report their content through multiple media platforms. Many agree, though, that this has made stations more efficient and ahead of the curve by adding more newscasts through various platforms, which in turn leads to higher viewership and ratings. (Greely, 2012)
As of 2010, two-thirds of local stations use the three-screen approach for producing and disseminating their content: airing it on TV, on the web, or on mobile devices. (Rosenstiel, Purcell, Rainie, & 2011)

Some stations are also producing some of their newscasts exclusively for their multimedia channel. Vice President of News at Hearst Television, Brian Bacco, stated through Pew Research that Hearst's Manchester, New Hampshire station has launched an evening 10pm newscast found exclusively online as of January 2012. He states this newscast is “fresh [and] serves different communities [of viewers].” (Potter, 2012) However, NBC has abandoned multimedia newscasts in their local station markets, as it plans to launch a national feed with local news cut-ins. (Potter, 2012)

Social Media Use At A Local TV Station

Facebook. Stations use this social networking site as a source of instant feedback from their viewers by sharing news stories they've aired, promoting upcoming stories, posting photos allowing for comments, and updating breaking news and weather. Stations also utilize Facebook in terms of seeking out sources or witnesses for breaking news events. Stations post links to their website so their viewers can receive more information about a topic of interest and in turn bring more traffic to the station's promotional website. The reverse can be said of a station’s website, as it posts links to its Facebook page. Anyone can “like” the stations page, and can receive updates about local news the station is producing on its newsfeed. A station and its advertisers have worked with product placement on
the station’s Facebook page to attract the target audience in the station’s particular DMA (designated market area). (Potter, 2012),

**Twitter.** Although Facebook is the more popular alternative in a local station’s social media use; Twitter comes in at a close second. Faster and easier than blogging, stations have turned to this micro-blogging site for up to the minute coverage of events. Just like Facebook, Twitter gives stations the opportunity to promote stories. Personalization comes into effect, when the reporters themselves tweet about their own investigative stories. The use of #hashtags on Twitter can build a station’s audience instead of just relying on followers alone. They also provide amplified coverage to a particular story, as it will now come up in a discover search. (Poniewozik, 2010; Holocomb, Mitchell, & Gross, 2010)

**Instagram.** Although Instagram is found solely on the iPhone, stations have used it as a marketing technique as well as a further way to interact with viewers. Not only is the station itself using Instagram to post pictures of stories, but also viewers are using it to take pictures of events, breaking news, and severe weather to send to the stations. Just as in Twitter, Instagram uses hash tags as well to increase its audience. (Potter, 2012)

**Pinterest.** Pinterest has the smallest range of local news outlets as pinners, or users on Pinterest. Without any interaction, the site doesn’t allow newscasters or local news stations to start a conversation with its fan base. Despite being a small social platform, some stations have used the site to their advantage, and have the right to be able to say they are on every social media platform. Some stations have
made Pinterest accounts around a particular news anchor and his/her interests, or the stations themselves employ an account. (Wilson, 2012)

*YouTube.* People are making videos of potential news stories, such as breaking news events, special events, or severe weather and posting them on YouTube. Stations are then going onto YouTube to pull these videos to incorporate in their news stories. The problem with this social networking site in regards to news is that sometimes stations are not giving the original producer of the video credit. Also, some users are even stealing copyrighted news content and posting it in the form of a YouTube video. Clear ethical standards have not been reached regarding this type of “shared” content, but YouTube does offer guidelines, however, many people don’t follow these guidelines. (Amy 2012)

*Social Media Newsrooms (SMRs)*

People no longer have to wait for the Evening edition of a local news segment to find out what is going on; they can now receive their news through a variety of platforms at just the click of a button. Through the use of Social Media Newsrooms, a local news station can engage in dialogue with its customers, investors, bloggers, and business partners, at any place in time, giving these stakeholders access to news, public relations announcements, images, audio, video, and other multimedia files. The SMR also allows the local news station to integrate other social content streaming from their Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr accounts into one place for all to see. The SMR provides one go-to place for all of the local news station’s information including facts about corporate partners, financial information,
awards, leadership and newscasters’ bios, as well as the multimedia library. (Goetzl, 2012)

*The New Role Of The Newscaster*

According to Pew’s State of the Media 2012 report, (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell, 2012) local stations are now seeing an overall increase in hiring staff. Larger local markets, especially, have added positions, making the employment rate for local stations back to where it was before the recession started. Stations have added new positions to their payroll, employing digital sales staff as well as multimedia journalists to accommodate the increased use of digital platforms to produce and report stories.

In terms of the multimedia journalist, stations now employ newscasters as a “one-man band.” These people must be able to shoot, report, write, and edit their own stories to be used in local news segments. Moving away from the traditional team of people creating stories, multimedia journalists have provided cut cutting measure for the station, as this type of journalist is proficient in skills needed for the conception of a story to a final version. (Burdine, 2012; Greely, 2012)

While the growth rate is still small for stations employing these kinds of journalists (3-4% per year) an annual RTDNA/Hofstra study, reported by Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2013, states eight in ten newsrooms are using multimedia journalists at least part of the time. Multimedia journalists can most likely be found in smaller markets, where layoffs and various cost-cutting measures have occurred, however, as of 2010, two thirds of these stations, within the top 50 markets, have employed these types of journalists.
Digital Audience Measurement Using Social Media

Although the Internet has given local television stations a chance to expand their broadcasts with a station’s own website, the additional user measurement regarding the station’s website and SMR is small, only a 5% growth, according to a PEJ (Project for Excellence in Journalism) survey presented by Pew Research Center. Despite this small growth, digital audience measurement still amounts to something, with a projected increase in years to come. But Pew has also noted that almost every station in the country has a Facebook page and Twitter feed, with results taken from an annual RTDNA/Hofstra survey. (Matsa, Olmsead, & Rosensteil, 2012; Nielson, 2012)

Looking into a particular local station in Indianapolis, WTHR, Pew reported the fan base on the station’s Facebook page grew from 8,000 to 10,000 in the span of 7 months. Amy Parrish, the station’s digital media director, required all on-air talent to have an active page on the site with at least one update a day. The increased online presence of the staff boosted advertising revenue and by the end of the year, all ad spots on the station’s website were sold out! Salt Lake City’s KUTV station doubled its fan base to 390,000 in just three months with an active presence on Facebook as well. (Potter, 2012)

Purpose of the Study

This study will encompass all the research obtained from the literature review and the survey data to analyze the scope of the effect social and digital media has had on local television news stations in 2013 and beyond.
Through the literature review, the study will examine local news stations' use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Pinterest, and YouTube, to present their information and how these various platforms are affecting their audiences receiving news and local information. Mobile technologies will also be considered as stations produce more and more apps for smart phones and tablets, allowing their audience to be further engaged with their newscasts and information. Furthermore, past means of audience measurement will be examined and compared with how measurement has changed through the integration of social media into the everyday operations of a local news station, and how the ratings of local newscasts are affected.

Focusing on a local station’s website, this study will investigate SMRs (Social Media Newsrooms). These newsrooms allow a station’s audience to come to one place to get all their multimedia information. The newsrooms link all the station’s social media sites as well as provide announcements and updates of stories, press releases, financial information, and staff bios.

Local newscasters have changed the way they investigate a story through the use of social and digital media techniques, enabling them to present their stories faster and more efficiently to a wider range audience through a variety of platforms. Different station personalities are analyzed, from the on-air talent, to the integration of multimedia journalists and social media teams, to see how social and digital media have broadened the local news station’s job market. The newscast themselves will also be studied to see how various segments of a newscast have used social media to enhance the way newscasters present their information. With a focus on
breaking news, in particular, a sub-study will analyze how this particular segment in a newscast is affected by social media, with regards to national disasters such as the Boston Marathon Bombing in March 2013.

Lastly, a case study evaluated the four major network affiliated stations (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) in the Philadelphia DMA to determine how social and digital media are impacting these four stations. A 10-question survey will be administered to various staff at these four stations, including but not limited to news anchors, reporters, and those staff in the public affairs, creative services, digital, and news segments. The case study will analyze each station’s audience share, viewer engagement, newscast content and segments, staff, and response to social platforms and mobile technology.

After compiling this information, the researcher will develop a valid hypothesis as to how social and digital media have affected local television stations and local news in 2013, spanning across platforms, and how the newscasts are presented to their audience. The hypothesis will also encompass a prediction for the survival of local news as a whole in the coming years.

**Research Questions**

The research questions provided below were used to address the most critical elements of the study. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effect of how social and digital media are changing the local television news landscape in terms of social networking platforms, social media newsrooms, and mobile
technology. Newsroom culture is also analyzed in the study and includes evaluations of the news content, news audience, and news staff.

**Social platforms**

- How do local stations utilize different social media platforms to transmit content to wide-ranging audiences and how do those audiences receive the content?
- Which social media platforms are prevalent among local news stations and how have they impacted the way a station promotes itself?

**The Digital Sphere: Websites and Mobile**

- How have local television news stations utilized social media newsrooms (SMR’s) and how have SMRs affected the way a local station presents its information and content, and in turn how the audience receives that information digitally?
- How do SMRs affect a station's digital revenue and viewership?
- How has mobile technology worked to a local television station's advantage and how has it affected revenue and viewership?

**Inside a Local News Station: News Content, News Audience, News Staffing**

- How do different parts of a newscast use social media to report stories including sections from weather and entertainment segments?
- In terms of the breaking news segment, how has social media changed the way this segment is reported with regards to national tragedies?
- How has digital and social media impacted a local news station’s audience and staff? What is the role of a multimedia journalist?
- How has the staff at a local news station changed in response to social and digital media tactics?

**Significance to the Field**

Local programming is one of the major sources of television distribution to mass audiences, making it relevant to the various management teams leading a network and/or local station. The prevalence of social and digital media have begun to change the way television management teams conduct business and present their information while utilizing a new array of platforms. Television managers at local stations have started to incorporate social media into their everyday business practices leading communities into the technological age of the twenty-first century and connecting audiences in ways never thought possible.

**Definition of Terms**

Different terms have been used throughout this study that the reader should be familiar with when reviewing this text. The terms listed below are defined in greater detail than what is mentioned in the thesis, as a means for the reader to further grasp the concepts shown in this paper, and increase reader engagement when examining the thesis.
- **Digital Media**: Digital media is a form of media that allows data to be stored in a digital sphere opposed to analog. This includes photos, videos, and music distributed over the Internet.

- **Social Media**: Social media encompasses a wide range of social networks, here listed in this thesis, from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to Instagram, Google+, and Pinterest. These social networking sites allow individuals to connect with family, friends, co-workers, and a plethora of organizations, such as, businesses, schools, non-profits, news outlets, hospitals, etc. In turn, users are able to share information, messages, video, and photos, with anyone in their social network.

- **Citizen Journalist**: When an average citizen plays the role of a reporter and creates user-generated content including shooting, writing, and reporting on a newsworthy event.

- **Three-screen Approach**: In media, this term applies to the convergence of the television screen, computer screen, and mobile device screen. People are using all of these devices at once, and are linked to a single experience. For example, someone is watching a hit cable primetime show on his or her TV. At the same time this person is tweeting about the show via their laptop, and texting their friends with their smart phone.

- **Smartphone**: A cellular phone that has Internet capabilities and can record audio and video. Some of the most popular models include Apple’s iPhone, and Google’s Android.
- **Tablet**: A hand held mobile device that can connect to the Internet via cellular data or Wi-Fi. The tablet is a crossover between a laptop and a smartphone.

- **DMA**: Designated Market Area coined by Nielson Media Research. Made up of 210 markets, they are used to designate TV stations that best reach an area, and attract the most viewers. Philadelphia is considered the 4th DMA, as it covers the 4th largest range of stations to viewers in the United States.

- **Pay wall**: On websites, and most recently newspaper websites, users must purchase a subscription in order to access the content shown on the website.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Platforms

Television stations have used their viewers as sources for tips and stories as long as stations have been in business. From phone calls and write-ins, to interviews and witness accounts, viewers have always been a part of every aspect of a newscast.

In the twenty-first century, there has been expansion towards the Internet as a recognized medium in recent years. Social media is not only used for personal pleasure anymore, but businesses have begun to utilize the medium as a source of revenue in target marketing. (Mikeho, 2012)

Social media allows news stations to continue the story in real time by promoting the conversation on a 24/7 basis. Social media isn’t just another way for stations to distribute news, it also allows them to evolve and grow relationships with their fan base. It allows stations to stay up to date with the happenings in their DMA, and gain more followers.

Amy Wood, anchor of a CBS affiliate station in Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina, carries on a round the clock conversation with her fan base, via social media, only stopping between the hours of 2am-7am, answering every post, comment, and tweet in a timely manner. She also scours the Internet; tweeting and retweeting from various news outlets everyday and has a fan base of 20,000 twitter followers and 100,000 Facebook followers. She views social media as a means to “creating a lot more passion about viewing and the brand in general,” and believes
she has “never felt more connected to my audience in terms of what they care
about.” (Marszalek, 2012)

Nancy Loo at Tribune’s flagship WGN in Chicago makes it a point to answer
every tweet she gets and connect on as many platforms as she can to promote
WGN’s brand. (Marszalek, 2012)

“We have learned our lesson,” says Dana Hahn, news director of Fox O&O
WJBK, Detroit who didn’t include social media in her station’s everyday operation
until 2010. “We really can’t survive now without being in the social media game. It’s
a way to reach a lot of people who aren’t watching the 5 o’clock news,” she says.
(Marszalek, 2012)

Deciding which social media platforms to use can be a difficult decision for a
station, since not all stories are best suited for particular social media platforms.
Each platform offers a station an advantage to promote a certain type of story.
Hatton Weeks, News Director of KAIT-TV in Jonesboro, Arkansas, stated to Poynter
Institute, that the “type of story dictates which social networking site it will be
posted to. “If we think it’s something that’s going to get passed around, it goes to
Twitter, if it’s going to get commented on, it goes to Facebook.” It is vital that
stations realize which story is appropriate for which social media platform.
(McCombs 2012)

“It has almost revolutionized the way we cover news,” Weeks says. “Our
audience, en masse, can communicate with us as we cover stories. Our audience is
engaged more with our product, their voice is heard, and they feel like they’re part
of the news.” (McCombs, 2012)
Facebook

Facebook has become the foundation of social media. It single-handedly promotes an individual, business, or organization, through the use of photos, posts, comments, and likes, and in turn, forms relationships. It started as a site meant for personal use, but quickly spread to the promotion of a business or organization, whether for marketing purposes via ads or forming relationships with its audience and followers. (Facebook, n.d)

Harvard student, Mark Zuckerberg and his roommates launched the site in 2004. It was initially intended for the Harvard student population, as a means for users to create a profile, add friends, and connect with peers. However, it soon grew to other colleges around Boston and other Ivy League schools. Gradually, more and more colleges around the country started using Facebook. The site's popularity soon spread to high school students, and later became available for use by anyone over the age of 13 who wanted to become a registered user.

In February 2012, Facebook filed for initial public offering and began selling stock to the public and trading on NASDAQ in May of that year. As of July 2013, Facebook has 1.15 billion users per month. (Facebook, n.d)

In terms of local news, stations have their own personal fan page as well as fan pages for their anchors and reporters. The reach, reporters and anchors can make with their audience, can be significant, in that it will increase viewer engagement. Facebook allows the story and conversation to continue over into real time. Facebook has become the most popular social platform for local television stations, and every local television news station has reported operating at least one
Facebook page according to Pew Research Centers State of the Media 2013. 64% of adults have been reported using Facebook on a regular basis, and 30% of those adults get their news from Facebook. About 47% of Facebook users, which includes all ages, receive their news from Facebook as well. (Holcomb, Gottfried, & Mitchell, 2013)

Instant feedback occurs from viewers sharing stories, eyewitness accounts, and tips, compared to making calls into the station, as was the norm a decade ago. Newscasters and producers can post a topic on their Facebook page, allowing viewers to give their personal opinions on the topic, and then can later cover it in their televised newscast. In 2009, local television station KAIT-TV in Jonesboro, Arkansas’ News Director Hatton Weeks was introduced to social media, and set up a blog, Facebook, and Twitter accounts for the station.

In an interview by the Poynter Institute, Weeks stated, “[His station] Early on, it was mostly RSS driven, and we realized we had to be a lot more interactive, you’ve got to be conversational, and it’s got to be participatory, or it won’t work.” (McCombs, 2012) Weeks discovered the very foundation for social media success, early on, and have used it to his advantage.

The station will post a “Hot Topic” related to the news presented that day on Facebook at 4:30am. The morning show runs between 5am-and 7am and addresses the “Hot Topic” and viewers comments regarding it. Weeks stated that they usually get over 50 comments by 7am. (McCombs, 2012)

With KAIT-TV leading the trend of a “Hot Topic” posted on Facebook, many news directors have used the site to post special topics of concern such as bullying,
immigration, transportation, and diabetes. News are trying to veer away from the fluff they report on TV and discussing more controversial topics online, with regards to Facebook. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

When Facebook integrated the use of timelines and a cover photo in 2012, it gave brands a chance to tell their story, rather than having a “fan page.” Another perk includes access to Facebook Insight analytics, which can pick out trends in comments and tell how popular a “brand” has become by the numbers. The “subscribe” feature allows Facebook users to subscribe to any brand and gives them updates into the day-to-day posts of that brand. (Facebook, n.d)

As the switch to Timeline became ubiquitous, news stations took the leap, and hoped the switch would be advantageous to their brand promotion. The cover photo can be looked at, like the “lead story” in journalism. That initial picture is what is used to hook fans into “following” the news station. As Facebook is a means to gathering sources and news content, it is vital that a station use the cover photo as a tool to build a large fan base. A popular choice for a cover photo includes a picture of the on-air talent, which in turn, is the face of the brand a news station is trying to create. Other choices include a picture of the logo or a panoramic view of the city the station represents. When looking at a cityscape, a station should make it more personable with a recognizable landmark, to make there fans feel more at home. Another cover photo option is a picture of a behind the scenes look into the studio. When fans see a photo like this, its gives off a friendly approach with a candid moment. It really personalizes that brand, in that a viewer is able to see a more human side of the on air “celebrity” talent. Viewers also enjoy seeing a cover
photo of the station’s technology, such as a helicopter. It impresses fans in a way that lets them know their trusted station stays up to date on recent technological advances. However, a personal touch is often lacking, when this sort of cover photo is used. (Wilson 2012)

Twitter

Since its conception in 2006, Twitter has become the second most popular used social platform for local television stations, after Facebook, and another way to amplify news stations coverage as reported by Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2013. Only 6% of stations reported their newsrooms were not active on Twitter.

However, in terms of users, only 8% of adults get their news through Twitter, compared to the 30% of adults on Facebook retrieving news. This may be due to the fact that most users on Twitter are younger, more mobile, and more educated, with 45% of Twitter news consumers being between the ages of 18-29. Facebook, however, is more prone to the adult user. With that being said, the type of news being disseminated on Twitter matters. Most people use Twitter as a ‘by the minute’ update on breaking news such as the Boston Marathon Bombing, Sandy Hook school shooting, and the Supreme Court mandate on same-sex marriages. (Mitchell & Guskin, 2013)

Twitter has been used for passing along information as a story develops. In the case of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, 39% of Twitter users only tweeted the news of the verdict without personal opinion getting in the way.
based news accounts from users has been a recent trend on Twitter with other controversial court verdicts. However, in other cases, a Twitter conversation can change in the blink of an eye, from users expressing sentiment to bashing someone in anger. Twitter is a constantly evolving medium shifting from one topic to another. (Mitchell & Guskin, 2013)

Newscasters can encourage conversation by the use of hash tags. Stephen Clark, an anchor at a Scripps station in Detroit, has employed the hash tag #backchannel, and #earlyrisers which has promoted ongoing conversations since 2012. What makes this particular hash tag worth noting is that it has been created without a newscast to back it up; it is based purely on conversation with the anchor. (Potter, 2012)

Natural disasters and tragedies have also sparked large conversations with local news stations and their viewers. In the case of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, within the first 24 hour period there was a record 3.5 million tweets with the hash tag #sandy. (Potter, 2012)

**YouTube**

Founded in 2005, YouTube is a video sharing website that connects millions of people through the exchange of original videos. These user-generated clips include: video clips, TV clips, music videos, video blogs, and educational/how to videos. Although individuals upload most of the clips on YouTube, many large corporations have begun uploading clips for marketing and promotion purposes via a YouTube partnership program. Google purchased YouTube in 2006. (Elliot, 2011)
Since its conception, YouTube has been vital in reporting news, as users have uploaded eyewitness original content about certain events. The massive impact YouTube has made on the news industry has allowed citizen journalists to become as prevalent as a news anchor. In the week following the 2011 Japan earthquake, 20 of the most watched videos about the damage exploded on YouTube with a total of 96 million views according to a study done by Pew Research Center on YouTube’s affect on the news. This new kind of visual journalism allowed the average citizen to be news reporter. However, due to very few copyright laws regarding YouTube’s video sharing at the time, many news organizations took these videos from the site and uploaded them to their own newscasts.

What has resulted, is a sort of symbiotic relationship between news organization and citizen journalists with an ongoing dialogue. These citizen journalists capture a newsworthy video, upload it to YouTube, and a news organization uncovers it and uses it for their newscast. In turn, some of these citizen journalists are also sharing videos created by the news organizations themselves.

However, from an ethical standpoint, there are no mandatory guidelines on whether this sort of “sharing” can be seen as credible journalism. On occasion, news organizations have not given proper recognition to the citizen journalist for their original content, and vice versa, with citizen journalists using copyrighted material. This in turn, leaves the audience confused as to who is the reliable news source. (Amy, 2012)

According to Pew Research Center’s study on ‘YouTube and the News’, YouTube’s most popular newsworthy videos portray natural disasters. Interestingly
enough, 70% of YouTube’s followers live outside of the U.S, resulting in non-U. S 
events that are being reported by news outlets. News events were also the most 
searched videos on YouTube, with the most popular videos including a mix of raw 
and edited footage. 39% of these videos came from the citizens themselves, and 
51% came from news organizations. (Amy, 2012)

Consumers have relied on YouTube as a source of “on demand” news, and 
watching it when they want it and where they want it. This allows consumers to 
create their own news agenda by choosing which news outlets and citizen 
journalists to watch, instead of being limited to local and national news stations.

In terms of reporting these videos through various news outlets, local news 
still outpaced network news with audience viewership. Local news has benefitted 
from YouTube by growing its audience, and not just limiting the news to people 
living in their community and DMA segment. Local news producers also use it as 
means of having an on the scene report from citizen journalists, when they are 
unable to get a reporter out there to cover an event, especially in terms of 
international events.

When Google acquired YouTube in 2006, YouTube began employing 
partnerships with major news outlets to produce unique content especially made 
for YouTube. In 2007, YouTube created ‘Partner Program’, a program in which 
revenue is exchanged for original content creation and a news channel. With more 
than 1 million partnerships in 27 countries, including CBS, YouTube has begun to 
take a more ethical approach to sharing videos. YouTube has also given direct grants 
to smaller organizations, such as local news stations, as a way to further promote
creative content. The Content ID software allows partners of the program to copyright their material and have it blocked if there is an attempt to post it elsewhere. (Amy, 2012)

**Instagram**

Instagram is a mobile app for photo and video sharing. It allows one to connect with the larger social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, by simultaneously uploading a picture to the sites you choose. With 150 million users as of September 2013, Instagram has established itself as a media channel for brands to disseminate content. What’s notable about Instagram is that 88% of its users are under the age of 35, thus appealing to a younger generation.

Hash tags are also used on this platform, in a way that’s similar to Twitter, where users can search for things they are interested in, and add them on their photos, so that other users can find a particular photo. Local news stations can employ special station hash tags for their followers to use when posting a picture, or when they themselves post a picture, as a way to crowd source. The new 15-second video option on Instagram, allows newscasters to share breaking behind-the-scenes news clips from reporters. Just like Twitter, Instagram has the ability to tell its audience breaking news story for down to the minute news, by using hash tags. Video clips on Instagram can also be used as teasers, to get followers excited for a story that will later be promoted on the televised newscast. (Looney, 2013)

Several NBC owned and operated stations have partnered with Instagram to invite viewers to upload their own photos, so that they can be used on-air and
online at the stations’ discretion. To find the photos, NBC has requested that users employ a localized hash tag. For example, stations in New York, Miami, Washington, and Hartford, Connecticut, have asked their viewers to upload a picture of holiday lights around their city with a localized hash tag, and then the station will promote the picture on a newscast, with their viewers having the chance to be featured in NBC’s news content.

“Our viewers send us great photos, particularly during breaking news, special events and severe weather,” said Greg Scholl, president of local integrated media at NBC Owned Television Stations. “Instagram is easy to use, widespread and makes photos look good. We can now bring these fantastic images into our local news broadcasts and easily share our viewers’ photos widely.” (Miller, 2011)

Google +

Upon conception in 2011, Google+ had up to 10 million users. What made Google+ an ideal platform for news outlets was the use of Sparks, which are topics that a user has an interest in. Google+ then shares the spark with recommendations and search algorithms to customize the content on each spark. They don’t just tell you what your friends have read, they tell you what you should read. The downfall of Google+ for news outlets is that there is no way for interaction. (Sonderman, 2011 October 12)

Google’s original intention was that the site would be for personal profiles for individuals, however, local television stations began making pages to further promote their station’s brand and as another way to connect with their audience. In
its trial run with businesses, Google+ decided it preferred individual profiles, banned all business profiles, and actually shut down a local television station’s profile in Missouri (KOMU). (Sonderman, 2011 July 21)

Google+ also uses the circle feature in which it puts individuals into categories. A local news outlet could create gender specific circles and put out headlines based around those demographics interests or have an entire Public circle for everyone.

**Pinterest**

Launched in 2010, Pinterest is a pin board photo-sharing site that allows users to create lifestyle boards of their findings. After users “pin” images, they can then categorize them on virtual “bulletin boards.” Users also have the option to “repin” images from other users on the site or from a live feed. Although few stations have created pages on this site and interactivity is quite low, there are some pioneer stations that have utilized this particular platform to their advantage. Stations that are utilizing Pinterest include Fox News 8 in Cleveland, KARK News 4 in Little Rock, KING 5 in Seattle, WHSV 3 in Harrisonburg, VA, KSAT in San Antonio, WBAY in Greenbay, Wisconsin, KHQ in Spokane, Washington, WPTV in West Palm Beach, WSB in Atlanta, KGW in Portland, and CW56 in Boston. Boards that these stations have created include food and recipes tailored to the community; special events happening in that locality, scenery and weather of the region; news stories the station has produced; and behind the scenes, including staff on the set or in the field. However, more and more people prefer the personalization of lifestyle boards
of a station rather than a repeat of news stories users have already viewed in other platforms. (Wilson, 2012)

Food and Recipes boards seem to have the largest fan base with the most pins and repins. WHSV 3 has created a board called ‘Taste of the Valley’, which has over 1200 followers. Behind the Scenes boards are the next most popular type of board for news stations to create. Unique pins of candid moments seem to get the most repins compared headshots. Weather is another prevalent board news stations create. The station can pin pictures of weather and cityscapes around its area to personalize the station's brand locality. (Wilson, 2012)

However, despite some of the strides local news channels have made in using Pinterest to promote their brand, most TV managers see Pinterest as too frilly and a site that doesn't offer the hard news component that other outlets employ. It is also not seen as a priority unlike other social media platforms.

It's a modest start, but it’s a start nonetheless. “It’s more of a marketing ploy for us,” Mollie Reynolds, social media reporter for WPTV says. “It’s not necessarily to drive viewers to television, but to get our brand on another platform.” (Malone, 2012)

**The Digital Sphere**

*Social Media Newsrooms*

A social media newsroom (SMR) is another word for a station’s website. Television stations have been using websites not only as a one stop shop for their information and content, but as a place where the station's audience can access the
Digital content. Traditionally, a web newsroom is where you can find a collection of press releases, a company’s history, newscaster bios, financial information, awards, a contact page, and the multimedia library with audio and video files. Stations have also added pages and links to the categories of news they cover everyday, such as the weather, marketplace for classifieds, health and lifestyle, news, and sports.

Now, with the added bonus of social media, stations can stream content directly from their YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter accounts via an RSS feed, making it easily accessible for the audience to view content in one place. Video news stories are also prevalent on the station’s website with occasionally unseen footage from a particular story. The SMR allows stations to constantly be in the loop of reporting ‘by the minute’ updates rather than waiting to report their findings in the next scheduled newscast. A station’s website can also supplements a newscast by providing additional information to what was presented in the newscast.

However, according to Pew Research Center’s State of the Media Reports for 2012 and 2013, most stations have not realized the benefits of their websites to provide additional information, and still use their websites as a means to repeat information that was previously broadcast in a scheduled newscast. (Potter, Matsa,
Only a few stations around the country have used their websites as a platform for additional information. For example, the CBS affiliate station in San Antonio, Texas, has used the web as a means to appeal to the 18% of people with military ties in the market. On Veterans Day, the San Antonio station offered a seven part, Web-exclusive series aimed at this niche market, in remembrance of honorable veterans. Jan Boyd, the station’s digital media director, states that what is done on the web can be a lighter alternative to what’s broadcast on TV. The station also tries to produce two stories a month for the website, by either building on a broadcast story, or reporting on an original one. (Marszalek, 2012 Nov. 20)

Nielsen’s Social Media Report of 2012, (2012) looked at two ABC affiliated stations in Portland (KATU) and Seattle (KOMU), and determined that during primetime and late night newscasts, people are said to have simultaneously watched TV and used their computers. The station’s websites were viewed most between the hours of 5-7pm. (Goetzel, 2012)

The study also showed how stations utilize their websites in a way that allows them to expand their reach to drive cross-platform sales. The Nielsen study looked at the late night weekday performance of the two stations and compared that to the reach of the station’s website. In Seattle, KOMU had a late night news reach of 22.9% of 25-54 year olds, with a 3% increase of website traffic over the period. In the 18-34 demographic, website traffic reach was 2.4%. Portland’s KATU station had a 27.6% reach for its late night newscast in adults 25-54, and 4.6% increase of traffic
to the station’s website, and the 18-34 demographic had a 3.9% reach to the station’s website. (Nielsen, 2012; Goetzl, 2012)

Gray Television is implementing “enhancements” once a month to track the digital content on their stations’ websites. Each local television news station will be graded on video and audio clips, the number of stories posted, images, and polls. The idea of these “enhancements” is to measure audience share, and how a station’s digital content will keep the audience coming back for more.

*Digital revenue.* More and more ads are found on station’s websites as a source of revenue in the digital age, as local stations have recognized the significance of digital advertising. According to Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2013 (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013), digital advertising is growing, albeit slowly and had a 10% increase in 2012 reported by BIA/Kelsey. However, digital advertising on a station’s website only makes up about 3% of a station’s revenue, with a projected growth of 4% by 2016. Despite the bleak estimation, WMUR in Manchester, New Hampshire (a Hearst owned station) has defeated the odds, in that 10% of its revenue is from digital advertising and it has the most visited website in the state.

According to Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2013, video is the fastest growing segment in digital advertising. Video will account for 11% of all digital advertising by 2016, as local television stations begin incorporating digital video in their advertising strategy to be centered about their websites. E-commerce is also primarily an untapped revenue source for local television stations since less
than a third of stations have offered sponsorships, classifieds, or special deals on their website. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

_Digital audience._ With fewer younger audience members tuning into local televised newscasts, stations have turned to their digital platforms and the “multiscreen experience” to engage this particular demographic.

The start of pay walls on digital newspaper sites, have driven audience traffic toward the free websites of local news stations to receive news, such as the case for stations in Greenville, South Carolina; Greensboro, North Carolina; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Tulsa Oklahoma; and Des Moines, Iowa.

In terms of tracking the amount of viewers visiting a station’s website and social media platforms, some local television stations have had difficulty converting all of their digital users into their total audience count. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

_Mobile Technology_

More than ever before, news outlets have realized the power of mobile technology. Mobile can be received and viewed anywhere and anytime, the only thing needed is a Wi-Fi connection.

In 2012, Pew Research Center completed a study regarding mobile technology use and the news. 50% of U.S adults own a tablet and/or smart phone, and of those mobile users, 66% of adults get their news on a mobile device. Mobile users are not just checking headlines on these devices, they are reading in depth
stories. Users also commented how they are receiving their news with a mobile
device from a plethora of sources according to PEJ. 29% of users using apps get their
news from four or more sources. (Mitchell, 2012)

Pew Research Center’s State of the Media for 2013, states that 80% of local
television stations have reported producing one or more apps for mobile devices.
However, the content on mobile apps are more repetitive than what is on the web,
due to feed based technology, and lacks new and original content.

Some stations are going past the monotonous dissemination of content and
adding specific features on their apps to make them stand out from others station’s
apps. For example, 8 ABC-owned stations offer an alarm clock with morning news
and weather updates from anchors as an innovative way to allow people, to start
their day, according to Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2013. The Cox
station in Atlanta has incorporated traffic information in real time to help users on
their commutes to the office. Numerous stations all over the country, such as KJRH
in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and KSTP in Minneapolis, Minnesota, have added severe
weather updates to their app, for users to track storms and weather patterns in real
time. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

Several Sinclair Television stations produced their newscasts online during
Hurricane Sandy, so people without power were able to find out what was going on
regarding the storm via their mobile devices. Sinclair also makes all of its video
footage available online so it can be accessed from a mobile device. Del Parks,
Sinclair’s Chief Tech Executive states, “our content can’t be saved for the big
news cast... We can’t make the same mistake that the newspapers did in how we deal with the multiscreen experience.” (Jessell, 2012)

According to Chip Mahaney of Scripps Network, these mobile apps are having less of an advantage with local television fan bases than social media. He stated “it just is not an easy sell to get people to adopt a new platform just to talk about a newscast,” in an interview with Pew Research Center regarding local stations and mobile technology. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

On tablet devices, 60% of users use their browser to get news, just 23% get news mostly through apps, and 16% use both equally. Browsers are still the dominant choice over apps to receive news, According to “Mobile and the News,” a study produced by PEJ. What’s astounding from PEJ’s research is that half of the surveyors confessed to not even knowing what an app was. Users with Apple devices were more likely to use apps. However, 89% of tablet users who use apps to receive the news checked their tablet or smart phone daily. (Mitchell, 2012)

Digital advertising on mobile devices has developed into another source of revenue for local television stations. Lisa Bishop, vice president of digital media at Gray Television states, “In some markets, we are getting more views for mobile than [online], because of the screen size, it’s more intimate, in your face,” as reported by Pew Research Center’s State of the Media 2012. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2012)

Mobile audience compared to a web audience for local television stations has grown exponentially. Chip Mahaney, senior director of local digital operations for E. W. Scripps, states, “Our audience proportionally is growing faster on mobile than on Web. It used to be mobile was a small fraction [of our digital audience]. In some
cases mobile has overtaken Web.” Especially outside of working hours, the prevalence of a mobile audience has surpassed that of a web audience. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2012)

Inside a Local Television News Station

News Content

Background on local television news. In 2012, RTDNA/Hofstra University produced a study regarding the amount of news produced by local television news stations. Since 2008, the amount of local news put on the air by all market sizes has continued to increase annually, with few news directors planning on cutting the amount of news airtime in the future. As of 2012, according to RTDNA, local news has averaged five hours and thirty minutes of airtime per weekday.

The majority of the additional news hours have been in the mornings, in the 5am-9am-time period, with 28% of stations adding this timeslot into their schedule. 20% of local stations have also added a 4:30am time slot, which has increased viewership by 13%. However, most of these 4:30am newscasts don’t offer original content; they usually retrieve information from the late night newscast from the night before. The newscasts usually contain weather, traffic information, and recaps. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

Local television stations have also added weekend morning newscasts into their schedule, as viewers have more downtime during the weekends, and are not rushing out the door to get to work. Most notably, ABC affiliated station WLS-7 in Chicago, has been a pioneer of these weekend morning newscasts, and has added an
extra half hour to its Sunday broadcast. This additional half-hour brings WLS-7 to a
total of three hours of live news, spanning from 6-7am, and 8-10am. The CBS owned
station, WBBM-2 in Chicago, has also followed suit, by adding additional newscast
from 8-9am on Saturday mornings and 7-8am on Sunday mornings. (Lazare, 2012)

In a 2013 study done by Pew Research Center, local newscasts have placed a
greater significance on their weather, sports, and traffic segments. Four in ten
stations started their newscast with weather, and increased the weather segment
airtime from 25% in 2005 to 29% in 2012. 58% of adults surveyed stated that they
turned to local news stations for weather and traffic updates.

Crime, once a popular topic covered in local newscasts, saw a downgrade in
airtime from 2005 to 2012. The topic dropped from 29% of airtime to 17% of
airtime in that time period. Politics and Government coverage decreased by 50% in
2012, from 7% of total airtime in 2005 to only 3% of airtime in 2012. Television
managers began taking this segment out of newscasts, as more people preferred
fluff to hard news, according to “A Changing TV News Landscape” produced by Pew
Research Center. (Jurkowitz et al., 2013)

Due to the onslaught of digital video, citizens have began taking a larger role
in journalism, as they have produced more original videos and have pitched them to
local television stations. Most of these videos are found in the disaster and accident
segments of a newscast and have resulted to the addition of 13% more airtime in
2012 and 2013. In 2005, coverage of the economy had an airtime of 3%, however,
due to the recession in 2012, coverage of this segment has increased to 8%.
The study also noted that local stations have cut down on the length of news stories and have reduced the number of edited package stories on air, meaning less in-depth journalism. From 1998 to the beginning of 2012, 31% of stories were more than a minute long and 42% were under 30 seconds. At the end of 2012, only 20% of the local television stories surpassed a minute, while 50% of the stories lasted no longer than 30 seconds. Live staff reports only accounted for 44 seconds of a newscast and anchor voice-overs contributed only 25 seconds on average. Airtime devoted to live, on the scene coverage, rose from 1% in 2005, to 6% in 2012. (Jurkowitz et al., 2013)

The loss of the under 30 demographic has left local news stations at a cross-roads, with some media analysts believing that local TV may be gradually heading down the same path as newspapers. Although local stations have tried to increase their weather, sports, and traffic segments to get more people interested, most notably young people, there has been a trend of the under 30 demographic turning to the Internet to find information, since the Internet gives people a ‘what they want and when they want’ source in a moments notice. (Jurkowitz et al., 2013)

How digital and social media affect news segments. In 2011, Pew Research Center’s State of the News Media 2013 report stated that 80% of local stations fed their news content to three devices: television, the Web, and mobile.

Social media is also supplemental to local news, as people are not going directly to social platforms to receive their news. “71% of those who ever follow news links on Facebook also get news somewhat or very often by going directly to a
news organization’s website or app. Among Twitter news followers, 76% also go to home pages or use apps from a news organization very or somewhat often,” as stated by the study ‘What Facebook and Twitter Mean for the News’, produced by Pew Research Center. (Mitchell, Rosensteil, & Christian, 2012)

In terms of the weather segment, social media became a more important platform when reporting severe weather in 2011. A Columbia, Missouri station (KOMU) used its Facebook in an effort to coordinate a response to tornado damage that happened in Joplin, Missouri. This addition only supplemented the relief efforts that were being shown on TV. WWBT in Richmond, VA also used social media to regularly update its audience on Hurricane Irene, so the people without power were able to stay in the loop. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2012)

On the entertainment side of a newscast, stations have used social media as a means to further provide updates on celebrity events. Fox affiliated station, KTTV, in Los Angeles even went as far producing a specialty app for the case of Dr. Conrad Murray in the death of Michael Jackson. In 2011, the “Michael Jackson Dr. Trial” smart phone app became the best selling for purchase-app on iTunes. The app kept users up to date with live, continual coverage of the daily highlights in Dr. Murray's manslaughter trial in 2011. Similarly, the NBC affiliated station, WESH, in Orlando, Florida, created an iPhone app around the coverage of the Casey Anthony trial. WESH also created a Facebook page dedicated to the trial, which had six times as many followers as the WESH Facebook page. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2012)
**News Audience**

In 2012, local news stations lost their overall audience share in every key time slot, according to Pew Research Center, with the 5-7am-morning slot having a 5% audience decline. Even the nontraditional timeslots had a shortage of viewers for 2012. The midday time slot lost 2% of its audience, and the 7pm time slot lost 5%. The early evening newscast, once considered one of the most popular times to tune into local news, has steadily been losing viewers for more than a decade, with a 14% drop in viewership over the past five years. Also, the additional live news times added by stations have not seemed to increase the overall audience numbers, but instead has generally left a more fragmented audience.

Although most Americans say they watch local news on a regular basis, and local news has continued to remain one of the top sources for Americans to receive their news, audience still continues to stagnate, and continues to do so, as it has in recent years.

The biggest viewership drop can be found in the younger demographic, as adults under 30 rely more and more on the Internet as their source of news. In 2006, young adult viewership was at 42%, however, it has dropped to 28% in 2012. Television managers have realized that this demographic is looking for more personalized and “on-demand” sources for their news, which is usually found in more abstract sources on the Internet.

What’s refreshing for local television news stations is that digital audience is up. Scott Blumenthal, executive vice president for LIN Media told Pew Research Center, “We are not a TV station anymore as much as a provider of news on multiple
platforms.” (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013) However, local television station’s main business is still over the airwaves of TV, and the Nielsen viewership numbers are not promising. There has been an astonishing drop in overall TV viewing in 2012, not just with local news stations, as most people begin watching TV online. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

Network affiliated stations from the four major commercial television stations, (FOX, CBS, NBC, and ABC), had their three key time slots (morning, early evening, and late night) drop on average by 6%, in overall audience for 2012. Independently owned stations have also recorded substantial losses in viewership, according to Pew Research Center. (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2013)

**News Staffing**

Local television news stations have created more job opportunities in terms of a social media team employed at a station. Long gone are the days of a news station’s social media presence being maintained by one person. Stations have begun hiring small teams of people to coordinate their social media efforts and strategies. Multimedia journalists are also becoming more prevalent in local news stations, as television managers are looking for journalists with multiple skillsets to meet the changing digital demand, as job titles at local stations are beginning to blur together. (Sonderman, 2011)

Television journalists use social media, to produce Facebook fan pages and Twitter accounts to promote themselves and their stories, so as to constantly stay connected to their audience. Nowadays, if journalists aren’t the first to report a
headline on a social networking site like Twitter or Facebook, they’re not doing their “job.” Social media has provided journalists a way to stay ahead of the curve, and report something within seconds of finding out about it. Since most social media sites allow for very little content to be published at once, journalists have also had to learn how to think differently. No longer are they expected to write out eloquent prose; they must deliver clear, concise headlines to draw their audience’s attention and keep them updated 24/7. (Sonderman, 2011)

*By the numbers.* With a 4% increase in news staff in 2011, local television newsrooms employed, on average, 32 staff members. This is the same number of staff as before the 2008 recession in 2006. Stations in the top 25 markets increased their staff by 20% on average.

News Directors have even stated that they plan to hire even more staff in 2013. The most popular jobs for new staff included that of producers, reporters, and web staff. Most stations are looking for someone who can do everything as a lot of job titles have blurred over the years.

The multimedia journalist especially saw large job growth in 2012, with markets of all sizes hiring them. These solo journalists saw a 3% increase in all job markets. 25% of stations in the 26-50 DMAs stated that they are more likely to use the multimedia journalist compared to the average reporter according to Pew’s State of the Media 2013.

Although there is a large increase in employment for local newsrooms throughout the country, the same cannot be said for salaries, as they have only
increased by 2% in 2011. Most of the new staff in newsrooms are entry level, which contributes to the low pay grade, however, the more seasoned staff, such as anchors, saw an 8% decrease in their annual salary. (Potter, Matsa, Mitchell, 2013)

Multimedia journalists. Multimedia journalists are known as “one man bands.” These solo journalists must be able to shoot, write, report, edit, and most recently code, their news stories for not only local newscasts, but for digital devices. Traditionally, television news crews consisted of a team of people working together to produce one story at a time. Producing a story consisted of a camera operator, a correspondent, and a sound or lighting technician on the scene of the said story. Once the necessary footage was shot, their work was overseen by a producer and then handed over to an editor to assemble that footage into a finished story to air in the next newscast. (Burdine, 2012)

However due to cost cutting measures, stations have begun to employ multimedia journalists. Hand-held or tripod mounted cameras and editing programs on laptops have made it possible for one person to create all aspects of a story to be presented in a televised newscast. Some journalists are even going as far as shooting content on their iPhone or iPad, until they can get to a computer and then uploading their content to the station’s multimedia platforms.

Television managers at local news stations believe that these journalists will not only produce an increased quantity of newscasts but will also add to the quality of a newscast as well. Television managers hope that these journalists will in turn become beat reporters, focusing on an area of expertise, and producing the highest
quality journalism on that particular subject, while simultaneously cutting production costs for their station. Many veteran TV journalists, however, are skeptical of this new way of doing things, and disagree with managers believing that quality will greatly suffer, as not everyone has the appropriate skill level and experience to accomplish all of these tasks at once, in a manner that still produces top-notch stories. (Greely, 2012)

On-air personalities. Local news anchors have greatly benefitted from social media by using these tools to create their own brand. From establishing their own Facebook page as a way to promote their news stories for the station, to a Twitter account providing continual information on a particular story, on-air personalities have become local celebrities across the cities and towns their stations represent. Social media has allowed anchors to engage in a dialogue with their viewers and use it as a networking tool.

In terms of Twitter, “twanchoring” has become a popular term amongst newscasters. (Burdine, 2012) Anchors have tweeted during their newscast and in-between commercial breaks to give viewers the most up-to-date information. They also create dialogue with their followers when they respond to tweets. Many anchors have used Twitter as a way to get their viewers excited about the next story package shown on-air. They often compose teasers during commercial breaks to grab the attention of their audience. Anchors also tweet links of the print version of their stories before they air and include the names of other reporters that helped with the story using the “@” symbol. (Burdine, 2012)
Social media teams. Producers at local news stations have begun to employ social media teams as a part of a station’s strategy to integrate digital media into everyday operations, as they no longer see social media as a one-person job. These social media teams are usually accountable for platform presence, maintenance of the station’s website, and developing new strategies. Effective social media use requires that a station must be connected at all hours of the day, and everyday of the week.

Social media teams are also closely tied to reporters, as Twitter is known as one of the best reporting tools. Teams also encompass the reporters themselves, as reporters can post the latest updates on what they report. (Sonderman, 2011)

Breaking News: Sub-study

The breaking news segment of a newscast has been greatly impacted from the way social media has affected newsgathering and reporting, with Twitter being the lead social platform.

Social media has changed the way people consume news, especially for the younger generation, as they look to the Internet rather than a TV or newspaper to receive information. News stations have had a problem keeping up with viewership as more and more people turn to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to receive information. With that being said, news outlets and journalists have had to alter the way they disseminate their information to fit their audience’s increasing digital needs. They have looked to websites, produced news outlet apps, and
maintained Facebook and Twitter pages to keep up with their audience on a 24/7 basis. (Stahl, 2013)

As the web is still mostly uncharted territory, there is no set system on reporting the news online. It can almost be compared to a competition as journalists race to get their story out first; even going as far as not fact checking to make sure their stories provide the correct information. In regards to a national disaster or tragedy, journalists and news outlets want to be right there in the middle of the action and the first to report it. Most initial reports of a tragedy usually provide some false information as everyone is hurrying to get their word out before the next team, potentially giving the public inaccurate information as to what is going on. Many news outlets and journalists have had to retract initial statements due to the race of being the first news outlet to report information, that online news reporting has turned into.

A Slate Magazine (2013) article that was produced the day after the Boston Marathon Bombing stated that Twitter has a huge effect on every aspect of the news and is notorious for the unreliable information that has been initially tweeted as a tragedy is happening. Many journalists and news organizations have made the mistake of keeping their automated Twitter feeds on and have accidentally tweeted an off-topic item as a tragedy is occurring. Using the Boston Marathon tragedy as an example, even reliable wire services such as The AP filed an erroneous report saying cell phone service was shut down in Boston in order to prevent bomb detonations. The New York Post was also sharing unconfirmed reports on its website, later proven false, which created more panic in the public than what was needed. Some
journalists have even gone as far as making a political point in the wake of a tragedy, deterring from the seriousness of what is happening.

As many reports from social media sites and word of mouth are proven false, in the wake of a tragedy, most of the correct information won’t come in until the next day. It has become clear that breaking news has now become broken, according to Slate (2013). Respectable sources such as CNN have even been at fault when reporting a breaking news story for not taking time to check facts when reporting that there was an arrest of a “dark skinned” suspect from the Boston Marathon. CNN was mocked for not keeping up with the constant web news reporting, but as CNN’s staff took more time prior to posting on Twitter, they were prevented from further embarrassment that was happening to other sources reporting on Twitter. In a nutshell, we are given breaking news stories much faster than we can comprehend them. (Stahl, 2013; Manjoo, 2013)

In terms of local news stations and breaking news, ABC affiliate WEAR-3, in Pensacola, Florida was affected by the outbursts on social media in response to a bomb threat at Crestview High School in October 2013. Law enforcement had to make the judgment call on when and how to tell people about the bomb threat. However, because of the rapid speed of social media, Facebook and Twitter featured updates on the threat before law enforcement had a chance to do anything. Despite the outrage from parents, the Sheriff’s office stated that it would release information in due time when the situation was handled; they did not want to raise the risk of something else happening involving the threat to put the kids in danger. Although family and friends post the majority of Facebook’s content, some information runs
the risk of being inaccurate, as with the case of the Crestview bomb threat. The local sheriff’s department made a statement that all reliable and accurate news involving an incident will come from the Sheriff, and the office will get information to local news outlets as soon as possible, as the threat of inaccuracy from questionable sources is a greater cost to families and citizens, compared to receiving news directly from the sheriff’s office. (Social, n.d)

**Rationale and Summary**

This literature review examined the current trends in social media and how it’s affected local news stations around the country as a whole. Local television stations are changing the way they disseminate news to their audience with the integration of the Internet into everyday business practice. Viewers are also changing the way they receive news whether it’s via a mobile device or a social media site like Twitter. A station’s website, otherwise known as an SMR, connects users to a station’s social media pages as well as digital versions of stories and spots. The multimedia journalist has become a vital role at local stations, as these reporters have multiple skillsets for the adaptation of the Internet into routine operation. As the ongoing integration of social media is still in its early stages, this thesis provides insight into what local news stations have already accomplished in terms of implementing the medium into business practice, as of 2013.

The hypothesis of this study is that local television news stations are changing dramatically due to the impact of social and digital media. After examining the literature in the field, it seems to be local news stations are adopting a universal
practice when it comes to disseminating their information via the Internet. This digital change in the local news industry will continue to grow, as social media continues to impact news production. Local television stations have expanded their communication and interaction with viewers through the Internet and mobile technology, increasing connectivity. This constant communication has changed the format of news into a 24/7 timetable, allowing viewers to receive news whenever and wherever they want. The literature reviewed does not contradict this hypothesis and supports the fact that social media is becoming an important aspect in news production and dissemination.
CHAPTER THREE: THE STUDY

This research studied the impact of social and digital media on local television news stations. Since the integration of the Internet into business practice, local news stations have been using the Internet to their advantage by creating station websites, utilizing social media platforms, and dipping into mobile technology. The dramatic changes occurring at local television stations have impacted the way stations report the news and how audiences receive news due to the Internet. Not only has news dissemination changed, but local news stations have begun to rely on multimedia journalists, as these technology savvy reporters present stories to audiences in a new way.

Methodology

This thesis included a set of ten qualitative survey questions that will provide a better look into how local television news stations are adapting to the rise of the Internet and social media in the workplace. The survey focuses on the Philadelphia DMA because Philadelphia is the 4th largest television market in the country. Employees from each of the four major commercial television stations (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC) participated in the survey. Responses were obtained from a random selection of employees at these local stations, from on-air talent such as anchors and reporters, to news directors and creative service teams, to give a broad outlook to the changes occurring at their particular station. The station management was included as they are the decision makers and the pioneers who are adapting their stations into the digital realm. The on-air talent was also included as they have
insight on multimedia and citizen journalism, and have used social media as a means to connect with their fan base.

Links to the surveys were distributed via email and sent individually to each candidate. The survey was drafted on Qualtrics. Each question was chosen as a means to determine the social and digital media usage pattern at the Big 4 local television stations in the Philadelphia DMA. Questions range from the effects of social media in newsrooms, in terms of revenue, viewership, and staffing, and the growth of the Internet in business practice. Questions also ask respondents background information on themselves, including the station they work for, their role at the station, and how long they have worked at the station. The final question asks the respondents to make a prediction on how social media will impact local television stations in the future. A list of the ten qualitative questions can be found in the appendix. The responses to the questions give evidence to the research questions and hypothesis asked in this thesis, and provide a first hand account of social and digital media use at local television news stations.

The validity of this thesis is based on the evidence presented in the literature review and research to predict the effects of social and digital media on local television news stations. The verification to the answers of the research questions was found in the literature review and responses from the survey candidates.

In order to ethically gather data, the identities of the survey respondents have been kept anonymous in the name of academic research. The respondents are aware that their answers are used in this thesis to deduct a hypothesis regarding the impacts of social media on local news stations and what the effect this medium will
have on local news in the near future. The data collected is a broad analysis obtained from respondents and by no means offers a strategic outlook of how these four local news stations are using social and digital media to their advantage. The broad scope of questions asked in the survey created an open environment for the survey recipient to be frank in answering the questions, and diminished worry in the recipient that a competitor would discover how social media is impacting a particular station.

Data Analysis

The information garnered in this study addresses each of the research questions and enables the researcher to deduct a valid hypothesis regarding the effect of social and digital media on local television news stations. The survey used in this study offered responses to ten qualitative questions (see appendix) on social media usage at the four major commercial local television stations in Philadelphia.

The survey was given randomly to news anchors, reporters, news directors, television managers, and creative service teams at ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC and in no way presented any form of bias to a particular station. The total number of surveys given out was sixteen with twelve being completed, resulting in a 75% response rate. Of the responses returned, 4 were reporters, 2 were anchors, 2 were television social media departments, 3 were television managers, and 1 was a news director. Representatives from each of the four major commercial stations (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC) completed the survey resulting in a 100% response rate. The average number of years the respondents have been in the local news industry is 4 years and 9
months. Two questions in the survey analyzed the trends of social media use at a local television station. Four questions determine the effects of social media on local television news stations regarding staffing, revenue, viewership, and content. The final question asked the respondents to predict whether social media will have a greater impact on local television news stations in the future. All of the responses to each individual question provide insight into the larger picture in deducing a hypothesis on the future of social media and how it will impact a local television news station in years to come. The overall outcome concludes that social media has benefitted local television news stations. The on-air talent has used social media as a means to engage their viewers bringing about station loyalty and the increase of relationships according to majority of the responses gathered.

Survey Responses

**Question 1: What local new station do you represent?**

The four stations surveyed (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) had a 100% response rate, with at least one respondent representing each station. 3 respondents represented ABC, making up 25% of respondents. There were 4 respondents from CBS making up 33% of respondents. NBC also had 4 respondents, making up 33% of respondents. Fox had 1 respondent, making up 9% of respondents.

**Question 2: What is your role at the local television news station you represent?**

Out of the twelve overall responses to the survey, 4 were reporters, 2 were anchors, 2 were television web and social media departments, 3 were television
managers, and 1 was a news director. Four reporters represented NBC, NBC, Fox, and CBS. Two anchors represented ABC and CBS. Two social media departments represented ABC and CBS. Three television managers represented CBS, NBC, and ABC. One news director represented NBC.

**Question 3: How long have you worked at your station?**

The shortest amount of time a respondent has worked at the station is 6 months, with the longest being 19 years. The average time worked at a station is 4 years and 9 months. CBS represented the shortest amount of time worked at a station, as one of the respondents had only worked there for 6 months. A respondent from NBC held the longest amount of time worked at a station, which was 19 years.

**Question 4: What social media platforms have impacted your local television news station?**

All four stations surveyed stated they have used Facebook and Twitter to enhance their social media presence. Only one station reported using other various platforms, which included Taxi Cab News and Gas Station News.

**Question 5: How is your local television news station moving towards a three-screen approach when reporting news?**

The consensus of all the results reported state that stations are trying to push content to social media. On-air talent is encouraged to tweet throughout the day to engage viewers and build relationships. Two stations reported to employing full-time social media managers to manage online content. Regarding mobile devices, the majority of stations have used a station created app to send immediate alerts to
viewers’ mobile devices in staying up to the minute on various stories. Most apps are dedicated to breaking news and weather coverage. One respondent admitted to not knowing what the three-screen approach was, and called himself a “green eyed shade journalist.”

**Question 6: How has the staffing at your news station changed with the incorporation of social media into everyday business operations, with regards to multimedia journalists and social media teams?**

All stations reported to having staff dedicated to online and digital content. Two stations reported having a social media team, and 1 station reported employing a social media editor. One station reported to adding positions in management and producers in the past few years. All stations agreed that training was pertinent for future staff at a local television news station to stay up to date on the latest trends.

**Question 7: How has the news content in terms of newscast segments, been affected by social media?**

All 4 stations have been using Facebook, Twitter, and their station’s website to gather story ideas. Viewers have increased the news gathering process by supplying stations with content via mobile devices. However, all stations surveyed stated that the way news is reported hasn’t been changed by social media, social media has only enhanced stories by adding pictures, video, and comments sent in by viewers. One respondent added the only way social media has changed newscasts is that anchors now say, “What do you think? Let us know on Facebook or Twitter.”
Question 8: What is the effect on audience and viewership ratings with the integration of social media into your station's everyday practice?

85% of respondents either stated they weren't qualified to answer this question or they were not sure of the answer. Two respondents stated that the broadcast side does a lot of promotion and web driving to the station's website, but very little promotion is done from the website to the broadcasting side.

Question 9: How has your station’s revenue been affected by social media?

92% of respondents stated they were not qualified to answer this question or they were unsure of the answer. One respondent stated there has actually been a greater cost to the station to hire additional web staff than what has been generated by the station’s website or social media accounts.

Question 10: Do you believe the impact of social media will grow at local newsrooms in the year(s) ahead?

100% of respondents stated that social media would continue to impact local television news stations in the years ahead. One station stated that overall television viewership is down, but social media is on the rise as a news source so stations will have to react accordingly.

Summary

The results taken from the survey have shown that social and digital media impact a local television station and their influence will continue to grow at a local
television news station in the future. The survey has allowed the randomly chosen respondents to act as a representative for their station and to discuss how social media is affecting their local station in particular. The results show that the digital revolution is constantly changing, despite being in its very early stages. A partnership seems to have formed with television and social media, with each medium continuously enhancing the other one. Social media and television have become mutually beneficial to each other as departments have been dedicated to a web staff, anchors and reporters connect with their fan base via Twitter, and mobile devices have been added into the mix to keep viewers tuned in by the minute on breaking news and weather headlines. Social media hasn’t even tapped into its full potential and it will continue to benefit local television news stations in the years to come.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the impact of social and digital media on local television stations, and deduced how social and digital media are continuously growing and building acceptance amongst local television stations in terms of incorporating both into everyday business practice. In conclusion, from the survey and literature review, a hypothesis produced by the researcher will offer the reader insight into the future of social media on local television news stations.

Discussion

The findings from the survey indicate a growing trend in social and digital media amongst the four major commercial (ABC, CBS, Fox, NBC) local television stations in Philadelphia. After combining both the results from the survey and the information garnered from the literature review, the researcher has deduced that social media will have a greater impact on local television news stations in the future.

The impact of social and digital media on local television news stations has been substantial. According to the survey results and literature review, the influence of social media is widespread around the United States, and most notably in the Philadelphia DMA. Social media has proven that the adoption of this medium in everyday business practice has become vital for the survival of a local television news station against its competitors. It seems that local television news stations and social media have formed a partnership, with each medium feeding off the other, as consumers increasingly grow more concerned with the aggregation of news on a 24/7 basis. The survey itself provides evidence that social and digital media have
greatly impacted the Philadelphia television landscape and will continue to grow in importance and reliance from a local television news station.

Local television news stations are relying more on multiple platforms to disseminate news, and will continue to grow in the future. For example, in the Philadelphia DMA, results taken from the survey indicate that local stations are only embracing Facebook and Twitter; however, one station has begun to use more obscure platforms such as Taxi Cab News and Gas Station News to attract viewers. In order to gain a larger audience share, stations have been promoting their stories not just through social platforms but on their websites and mobile apps as well. (Cromwell, 2012) Scott Blumenthal of LIN Media states, “Our online numbers are up dramatically, we are not a TV station anymore as much as a provider of news on multiple platforms.” (Daly, 2013) However, most of the information found on local television news stations’ sites are also provided in the aired newscasts. (Cromwell, 2012) Evidence from the survey and literature state that only small numbers of stations around the country are using multiple platforms as a means to disseminate additional information. For the time being, local stations will continue this trend, however, in the coming years, for stations to stand out against competitors, the researcher believes multiple platforms will be used to aggregate some information not found in a local newscast, and particular platforms may be used for stories with a niche audience.

The use of social media platforms will only continue to increase at local television news stations. Stations will rely more on the platforms as a way to further connect their fan base not only to their brand, but also to their on-air talent. Results
from the survey show that it is pertinent for on-air talent to tweet multiple times a day as a means to connect with their viewers and form loyal relationships. Due to this trend of constant tweeting, on-air talent in particular will increasingly be seen as local celebrities, while trying to achieve a large fan base for their stations. In the case of Nancy Loo, a reporter and fill-in anchor at Tribune’s WGN in Chicago, she has surpassed her own station’s following on Facebook with 683,000 subscribers to her public posts. In terms of viewership at that particular station, the main newscast only draws fewer than 400,000 viewers. As stated above, the numbers show that she has a larger fan base than the station itself.

The findings from the literature review and survey indicate that advertising on digital platforms will only continue to increase as well. As more and more people flock to the digital sphere to receive their news, digital platforms will be seen as more of a recognized medium for advertisers to place ads. Pew Research Center also concluded that advertising on social media has seen a substantial increase, with a prediction of $9 billion in advertising revenue by 2016. (Marzalek, 2012)

According to the annual RTDNA/Hofstra survey, the 2013 report has seen a 3% increase in hiring of multimedia journalists- a one man band that report, shoot, write, and edit their own stories. One in four stations in medium to large markets have doubled their employment with solo journalists from the year before. (In Changing News, 2012; Bruell, 2012; Marszalek, 2012) With that being said, stations in the coming years will need to start thinking about training current and future news staff at local television stations, so as to stay relevant with up to date social media practices.
Social media has affected all departments at a station, not just the news department. Television managers have begun to add “social media” or “digital” departments at their local news stations or social media or digital editors. However, survey results indicate that although social media is in its early stages, stations haven’t exactly reaped the benefits in terms of cost cutting measures, as the addition of web staff hasn’t generated an increase in total audience viewership.

Limitations

This study has limitations on interpreting the data and the results of the survey. The survey was administered via email to the group of randomly chosen participants, and dependent on the truthful and open responses of the participants. Only twelve of the sixteen surveys were returned to the researcher and the respondents all had various job titles, skewing results, as responses were not taken from the point of view from a certain position found at each station and were completely chosen at random. One station only had one respondent, which also skewed results and did not depict an accurate outlook on the effects of social media on that particular local television station.

Another limitation includes the methods to obtain survey results. Distribution of the survey was done via email with not all respondents replying. All respondents were notified that the survey data was used for educational purposes and would not be available for public consumption or distributed to competitors. Confidentiality was also ensured, with names and job titles not used in conclusive results from the data collected. However, even after disclosing this information,
some respondents were still unable to answer various survey questions, either from not being qualified, not knowing the answer, or not allowed by higher management.

As social media is constantly evolving, more research is needed to corroborate the findings taken from the survey results to fully understand the impacts of social media on local television news stations. The change social media is bringing about a local television stations are an ongoing process, with platforms and applications being altered daily.

Recommendations for Future Research

As stated above, social media is continuously changing the way local television news stations are adapting to trends in social and digital media. This study deserves to be monitored and modified as social media keeps altering the way local television news stations are being impacted by this phenomenon. As more platforms emerge in the coming years, local television news stations will constantly be in transition. Viewers will begin to utilize news platforms and newsrooms will have to adapt to what their consumers want. Research from the literature review has already proven that social media is having an impact on a global scale. The influence of social and digital media needs to be constantly updated to reflect the current state of the local news media, as local television staff attempts to grasp a greater understanding of the positive impacts of social and digital media to their station. As millennial rely more on social platforms in terms of receiving news, local television news stations will need to begin to figure out how to target this demographic through social and digital media.
In terms of the survey, a larger respondent pool would greatly affect data retrieved and offer a more thorough outlook on the effects of social and digital media on local television stations. Staff from all departments should be interviewed, rather than a randomly selected pool of applicants, as social media has impacted all departments at a local television news station, not just the news gathering aspect itself. Although survey results have shown the effects are still in the early stages, we can conclude that social media is mutually beneficial to a local television news station and will only continue to further impact local television news stations.

**Conclusion**

Although the changes social media is bringing about at local television news stations is still in its infancy, there has still been dramatic changes with the adaptation of social and digital media in local newsrooms, compared to five years ago. The researcher predicts that in the next decade, viewers will begin to play a larger role in news aggregation, while becoming more actively engaged in story telling via social media. There will no longer be one-way conversation with viewers passively watching the nightly news. Social media has created a two-way dynamic for viewers and local television stations to connect. Reporters and anchors will increasingly answer viewers’ questions on social media platforms in real time and use these answers in broadcasts, which in turn will create a bond with a viewers who have now become a part of the news gathering process.

The future of social media on local news stations is creating a more personalized effect, as audiences are connecting with their preferred local news
station via social platforms. As stations begin to rely heavily on viewers, citizen journalists will become more prevalent in our society, as this role will become more credible in newsrooms across the country. Newsrooms will further depend on community content and engagement, and incorporate user-generated content into journalistic practice, with citizens becoming a key aspect of the newsgathering process, which in turn creates collaborative reporting between the citizen and station. Local news reporters will start to listen to what their community is saying rather than telling their community what they need to know. This effect will further back up the two-way conversation between a station and its community, and creating a collaborative process when it comes to disseminating news content through the increased use of social platforms.

In closing, the effects of social media on local television news stations are universal and are in a continuous state of ongoing change. Research from the literature and data collected from the survey, conclude social media is a positive change for local television stations, and that television managers should use this new medium to their advantage rather than being scared to embrace it. Social Media will only enhance the viewership experience, and connect local television stations with their communities in ways never thought possible.


Sage Publications.


Appendix A- Survey Questions

1. What local news station do you represent?

2. What is your role at the local television news station you represent?

3. How long have you worked at your station?

4. What social media platforms have impacted your local television news station?

5. How is your local television news station moving towards a three-screen approach when reporting news?

6. How is your local television news station moving towards a three-screen approach when reporting news?

7. How has the news content in terms of newscast segments, been affected by social media?

8. What is the effect on audience and viewership ratings with the integration of social media into your station’s everyday practice?

9. How has your station’s revenue been affected by social media?

10. Do you believe the impact of social media will grow at local newsrooms in the year(s) ahead?