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# An Exploration of Social Media Use in Local Television News Stations: An Evaluation and Development of a Successful New Media Strategy

Aniseh Ebbini

*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

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NEWS STATIONS: AN EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
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AN EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN LOCAL TELEVISION  
NEWS STATIONS: AN EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF A SUCCESSFUL NEW MEDIA STRATEGY

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Journalism

By

Aniseh Ebbini  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, 2010  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in French, 2010

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University of Arkansas

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the ways in which social media have gained popularity over the last decade, amongst the public, and especially in the television news industry. After evaluating the current ways social media are being implemented and observing national trends, I developed a comprehensive new media strategy to serve as a guide and reference for any television station wanting to incorporate these tools into its regimen.

This thesis is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

Thesis Director:

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Prof. Larry Foley

Thesis Committee:

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Prof. Gerald Jordan

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## **An exploration of social media use in local television news stations: an evaluation and development of a successful new media strategy**

The popularity of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter has skyrocketed over the last four years. That, coupled with the crippled economy, has led local television news organizations to utilize social media as a way to deliver news to and connect with audience members. With the economy in its current state, advertisers are pulling out, causing budgets to be slashed, and jobs to be cut. With the new constraints, television journalists have had to also find ways to capture the attention of an audience that is growing less and less interested in watching television.

### **Literature Review**

The landscape of news consumption is in the midst of a dramatic transition, as online news attracts more news consumers than ever before. Today, audiences can get an “instant helping” of the latest news on the Internet, or receive updates on their mobile phones or on their social network pages (Stassen, 2010). Because of the increasing power of computerized “smart” phones, this immediacy is not only possible, but expected. Not surprisingly, survey research indicates that people now go online to get their news more than they read the newspaper or watch network news (Maier, 2009). Through the use of social media and new communications tools and technologies, new information can be communicated more widely and quickly by more people than ever before (McClure and Middleburg, 2009). “In the digital era, news has become omnipresent. Americans access it in multiple formats on multiple platforms on myriad devices,” (McCarthy, 2010). The shift from an era of broadcast mass media to an era of digital mass media has fundamentally altered the way information is reported and received.

The general public may be leading the way in social media use, but journalists are quickly following suit. According to the 2009 Middleburg/SNCR Survey of Media in the Wired World, nearly 70 percent of journalists are using social networking sites, and 48 percent are using Twitter or other micro-blogging sites and tools (McClure & Middleburg, 2009). More than 90 percent of journalists surveyed said they would agree new media and communications tools and technologies are increasingly using social media to report news, find story ideas and sources, monitor sentiments and discussions, research individuals and organizations, keep up on issues and topics of interest and participate in conversations (McClure & Middleburg, 2009).

### **The Internet**

The advent of Web 2.0 has led to a shift in media consumption – a shift towards web-based communities like social media, wikis and blogs (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010). So, what does this mean for TV news? According to a national survey, only 31% of Americans get their news and information from television (Price & Brown, 2010). And according to Nielsen, “viewership of the three evening network news programs has steadily declined over the past 25 years, falling by more than 1 million viewers each year” (Friedman, 2009). The percentage of people who get their news from the Internet, however, is quickly rising (Price & Brown, 2010). A respondent in a survey commented that she watches less television as social media becomes increasingly important and continues to take up a larger portion of people’s days (McDonnell, 2011). Local television news stations are finding themselves less relevant as consumers turn to other digital sources for news (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010). Fortunately, the news itself is not changing, only the distribution channels (Dalton, 2011).

Traditional mass media are largely considered impersonal sources of news and information. The Internet is a much more personal medium and allows consumers to feel a



stronger connection with the news of the day. “It has radically democratized news publishing, allowing anyone with an Internet connection to tell the world when they are feeling sad, or thinking about having a cup of tea” (Ahmad, 2010, p. 146). The younger generation is leading the way in media habits and youth like the media to be personal and interactive (Friedman, 2009).

With the Internet becoming an integral part of everyday life, television stations are quickly realizing the value of posting stories on the web. Television stations are facing pressure to aggregate audiences across media platforms (Lazaroiu, 2010). “Television viewing is characterized by both virtual and actual mobility: to watch in the space of television involved watching television on television and across the multiple media through which it is now offered” (Lazaroiu, 2010, p. 340).

Contrary to what some scholars claim, online news services cover the most important news stories much more deeply than just providing headlines (Maier, 2009). “In the fragmenting media universe, audiences turning to news websites are not likely to lose track of the dominant stories of the day, but they will find a selection of news reports that offer a fresh perspective of events shaping the nation and the world” (Maier, 2009). Local television station websites also offer a personalized community feedback feature. This is especially important when audience migration to the Internet poses such a threat to legacy media. By personalizing content and allowing for interactive feedback, consumers are getting something that television alone cannot provide. Some worry; even, that the Internet and other new media technologies will replace old media (Price & Brown, 2010).

New media technologies offer perks that television struggles to compete with. Media consumers can use the Internet to download television shows, listen to streaming of radio, and

read newspaper articles online (Price & Brown, 2010). People are now able to access information from multiple media outlets by using just one medium – the Internet. The Internet gives audiences what they want in monetary ways as well: “audience members want quality content at little or no cost and the ability to easily acquire the content” (Price & Brown, 2010, p. 2).

The Internet is having a revolutionary and lasting impact on legacy media – local television news media in particular. The development of Web 2.0 and eventually Web 3.0 – the more interactive version of online activity is driving this change. Web 2.0 “socio-technical networks and systems” are changing the balance of power in news production (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010, p. 315). “Web 2.0 challenges news organizations to extend the level of their direct engagement with audiences as participants in the processes of gathering, selecting, editing, producing, and communicating news” (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010, p. 316).

### **Social Media**

The Internet itself has changed media consumption, but social media that operate on the Internet are having a profound effect all their own. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have become “virtual pacemakers” setting the tone of our lives which are increasingly being lived online (McDonnell, 2011). Traditional news organizations (such as local television news stations) are jumping on the social media bandwagon as a way to reach larger audiences. Journalists are “romancing” these new, larger audiences by blogging and posting updates and stories on Twitter and Facebook (Stassen, 2010). Having an affiliate website is not a new trend for local television news stations; most have had them for more than a decade. Something that has emerged recently is the trend of reaching out to audiences in interactive ways, and through different online channels (especially social media) instead of merely providing an online version of a news story (Stassen, 2010).

Social media can be defined as a group of “Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of the Web and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Stassen, 2010). The social networking site Facebook, which allows people to create online profiles and communicate with friends, family , colleagues, and customers, had almost half a billion active members at the beginning of 2010, and the numbers are much higher today (Gleason, 2012). Social media use is definitely on the rise in the United States and across the globe. While traditional news organizations’ websites saw a decrease in unique page visits in 2009, Twitter’s total increased by almost 300 percent (Gleason, 2012). More than one third of American adult Internet users claim they maintain a profile on an online social network (Maier, 2009).

*Social media changing the way people communicate.* Audiences continue to be thirsty for media content, but the platforms are changing. The overarching theme is one of community; social media allows people to feel like they are a part of a community, even if they live thousands of miles apart (Dalton, 2011). People are using the Internet to be more interactive in their online communications; posting comments, links, and pictures on sites of things they follow, even news organizations (Price & Brown, 2010). Web 2.0 allows users, as individuals or social networks, “to produce and distribute news items on the bases of their observations or opinions, and computer-based selection and management systems support collective work processes to gather the information that is spread across the whole network” (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010, p. 305).

Web 2.0 has fragmented the news audience, with growing numbers of news consumers turning to social media and blogging services to get their news. Social media can be defined as a “group of Internet applications that builds on the ideological and technological foundations of

Web 2.0, and allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Stassen, 2010, p. 5). It is widely believed that social media is changing the way people send and receive information; social media are characterized by a high level of interactivity (Stassen, 2010). News consumers are using social media in order to engage with news in ways that challenges traditional media organizations (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010). The interactivity and level of engagement available in social media “transcends anything offered by mainstream media” (Stassen, 2010, p. 6).

*Social media changing journalism.* Not only are online social networks changing the way that people communicate with one another, but they are having a profound effect on journalism as well. Social media is changing the journalism profession, “it has enhanced the dialogue between audience and writer and expanded the scope of those who can participate in disseminating news” (McClure & Middleburg, 2009). Twitter has risen to be one of the predominant media for new information about major events (McCarthy, 2010). It is common practice now for people who are involved in news events, or involved in reporting news events to provide first-hand accounts, videos, and photos of events as they occur. Twitter has also given more power to so-called “citizen journalists,” giving anyone with an Internet connection the ability to tell the world what is important to the community as he or she sees it.

Sometimes breaking news shows up on social networking sites, providing first-hand information about a situation from a possible eye-witness; this makes social networking a valuable tool for journalists to find new story leads (Stassen, 2010). Social network sites are also excellent tools for journalists to do in-depth research on what ordinary people feel or think. Online social networking has an important role to play in journalism as it serves as a source for news and information (Stassen, 2010).

Social media are helping traditional news outlets reach an audience that would be otherwise difficult to tap into (Gleason, 2012). For news organizations to stay ahead in the field, they have to embrace new technology and adapt their products in ways that add value to what they do (Stassen, 2010). The future of journalism is uncertain, but clearly social networking is booming (Gleason, 2012). News organizations are increasingly turning to social networking tools in their efforts to compete in a challenging and fast-changing media landscape (Emmett, 2009). Using social media is a pretty good way to get young readers to read news – one way to get content in front of you is to have your friends recommend it; people want to know what their friends think and what people respect.

People are using social media sites with increasing volume – Nielsen reported that people spent an average of five and a half hours a day on social media sites in late 2009, a figure that has no doubt risen substantially (Price & Brown, 2010). Media organizations are turning to this user-generated content to increase viewership and the connection they have with those viewers. Several scholars have been studying this trend to find out if and how local news organizations are attempting to use this trend to their advantages.

Kerrigan and Graham (2010) studied how Web 2.0 has led the way for a space driven by user-generated content. User-generated content has grown exponentially over the last few years. Sites like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter “allow people to become creators of content and bypass traditional channels” (Price & Brown, 2010, p. 3). More than a third of American adult Internet users report maintaining a profile on an online social network site (Maier, 2009). Today, news consumers are getting their news in a “steady stream information bytes through computers” and mobile phones (2010, p. 305). According to some scholars, social media have led the way for a universal order that is organic:

“Social technologies and movements put pressure on the notion of order and our abilities to create order in the universe of knowledge. Collaborative production can bring value to society and transform previous models of work organization” (Lazaroiu, 2010, p. 341).

This is definitely true with journalism; social media has changed the way that journalists operate in society and deliver information to consumers.

Journalists are quickly picking up on ways social media can advance their work, and they are increasingly reporting perceiving social media as valuable to the profession. Almost 80 percent of respondents to one survey agreed that new media allow journalists to report stories with greater accuracy, and many claim that bloggers help shape public opinion as well (McClure & Middleburg, 2009). This study shows that there is a large percentage of journalists who view social media and public participation in the “journalistic process” to be an important and necessary step in the evolution of journalism, many even going so far as to say they see the “future of journalism to be a highly participatory, collaborative and dynamic process” (McClure & Middleburg, 2009, p. 103). One of the biggest benefits that journalists are seeing with the increased use of social media sites is that news consumers feel a stronger, more personal connection with those who are delivering the news. “They feel like they know the ...reporters personally, because it’s such a personal medium” (Gleason, 2012, p. 7).

**Facebook.** Facebook, in particular, facilitates the feeling of a personal relationship with journalists. Media organizations create corporate profiles and journalists create individual pages to which the audience can link up and receive regular updates (Stassen, 2010). Facebook has close to half a billion users and is one of the largest growing networks of media consumers. People use Facebook to connect with “friends,” so it makes sense that news consumers would

feel a personal connection with journalists they follow on Facebook. The terminology itself facilitates these feelings.

**Twitter.** Twitter, while not as personal as Facebook, is just as popular, if not more so, with journalists. Twitter's interface is very different from Facebook. Twitter is considered to be a "micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read messages" (Stassen, 2010, p. 7). Micro-blogging can be defined as "a new media technology that enables and extends our ability to communicate, sharing some similarities with broadcast" (Hermida, 2010, p. 298). Because of this similarity, it enjoys substantial popularity among television journalists. A journalist or news outlet sends tweets to its followers, these are short messages – 140 characters to be exact – that may be live news updates, or links to other stories. People use Twitter for four main reasons: "daily chatter, conversations, sharing information and reporting news" (Hermida, 2010, p. 299). At least two of those directly pertain to journalistic efforts.

Some scholars claim that Twitter undermines the gatekeeping function of journalism (Hermida, 2010). Because micro-blogging systems like Twitter allow a large number of users to communicate with each other in short bursts of information, journalists may sometimes have trouble differentiating rumor from truth. The immense number of Twitter stories makes it almost impossible for journalists to fact check them all (Ahmad, 2010). Journalists have to be careful with what they choose to share, and only re-tweet what has been individually fact-checked.

**How local television stations use new media.** In order to find out how local television news stations feel about social media and how these new technologies are being implemented in the newsroom, Price and Brown (2010) conducted a series of interviews with small-market television news directors among other local, small-market news leaders. They found that while some of these media organizations were not perfectly adept at using the social media platforms

for news purposes, they did see the value. Local branding being one of the most important aspects of local, small-market news, these organizations aim to connect with the community in a deeper way than just providing a nightly newscast (2010). This can easily be done with social media, and a few of the interviewees were catching on. “Rural media organizations can use social media to make a stronger connection with the public by encouraging user-generated content and local blogging on their sites” (2010, p. 11).

Rural media organizations have fewer resources, lower pay, and smaller staff and audiences, so while many rural news organizations realize the important role that social media now plays in the life of a news consumer, they are not as consumed with social media as they maybe should be. Journalists in bigger markets are using social media with greater vigor and frequency. Social media now gives news consumers the breaking news that they once had to wait for the newscast to see (Wilson, 2010). Media organizations are taking advantage of user-generated content as ways to help audiences feel more connected to newscasts, and to feel that they’ve had a part in the journalistic process (Price & Brown, 2010).

One of the main ways social media is being used in local television newsrooms is to help increase local, community branding and involvement.

“Local branding is important in order to appeal to local advertisers who provide the economic support for all of the media organizations... Almost all of the media organizations [surveyed] said that local involvement went beyond a simple business arrangement, but meant connection to the community through civic organizations and other means of belonging to the community,” (Price & Brown, 2010, pp. 7-8).



This is where social media comes in. Being present and active in social media circles is another way for journalists to be active participants in the community, and may also lead to more personalized, community-driven stories.

Social media is especially important considering the habits of young media consumers. People, and young audience members especially, want to know what their friends are interested in and how their friends feel about certain issues (Emmett, 2009). If a news story is shared by a person's friend, he/she is more likely to read the story, or seek that information on a journalist's page. Because of this, social media is the ideal way to get young people exposed to the news of the day (Emmett, 2009).

One of the most remarkable advantages to social media, and especially Twitter, is the ability to report on a story live, regardless of when the newscast is. A reporter can live-Tweet a story as it is happening, giving news consumers instant access to information without having to wait for the nightly news. In this sense, Twitter is not becoming what some people have feared – a substitute for traditional journalism – but a worthy supplement that adds a great deal of value to the field (Ahmad, 2010).

### **Citizen Journalism**

Web 2.0 not only allows users to consume news media in this fashion, but also allows users to produce and distribute news items as citizen journalists, thus increasing the user-generated aspect of social media driven news (Kerrigan & Graham, 2010). Kerrigan & Graham (2010) also discuss the tension that citizen journalists cause by just wanting the entitlement to call themselves as such.

“News organizations operate in tightly controlled command and control workplaces, while ‘citizen’ journalists work more flexibly... Amateur citizen journalists will continue to supplement the activities of paid correspondents” (2010, p. 305).

Journalists are easily irked by the idea of citizens – bystanders, essentially – taking away some of their thunder. Many feel threatened by the trend to include ‘citizen’ journalist eye-witness reports in newscasts and on websites. This is hardly the most concerning aspect of participatory journalism.

“Traditionally, the journalist has been the mechanism to filter, organize and interpret [information] and deliver the news in ready-made packages” (McCarthy, 2010). Journalists have to operate under strict ethical codes and often run their stories by several other members of a newsroom before taking a story to air. A ‘citizen’ journalist can run with information without doing any of these things. Many journalists are worried that some news consumers cannot distinguish the difference between a traditional, trained journalist, and a ‘citizen’ journalist. These people gain large followings on social media sites and are sometimes considered to be experts and opinion leaders. Users are becoming ‘broadcasters’ in their own right to audiences that they create and allow access (McDonnell, 2011). This problem is extensive, not only do ‘citizen’ journalists have no codes to follow; there are no ways for audiences to verify information on these private sites (Glodeanu, 2011).

It would be unfair to label ‘citizen’ journalism as exclusively problematic, however. The Internet is changing journalism, and audiences are wanting more; more interaction, but also more involvement. If traditional journalists can find ways to harness the information provided by citizen journalists, it can lead to stories that may not have been covered otherwise.

## **Discussion**

New media offers more “interactivity, sociability, autonomy, playfulness, and personalization” to traditional forms of media (Stassen, 2010, p. 8). Social media provide traditional news organizations, especially local television newsrooms, an opportunity to connect with viewers on a deeper level and build brand recognition. Another advantage to social media is that new information and stories can be delivered and accessed instantaneously, without the need to wait for the nightly newscasts. It is evident that social media facilitates a new type of journalism, one which involves the audience on a deeper level, and forces each journalist to consider his/her relationship with the community more intensely. Journalists are also subject to more scrutiny, and have to compete with audience members who want in on the journalistic action. There is no doubt that social media have changed the journalism profession, and will continue to do so in years to come. The future of traditional journalism is unclear at this point, but there are no doubts that social media is continuing to grow and will play an ever-larger role in journalism than before.

This simple fact led me to research the various ways that local television news stations are currently using new media. In interviews with nine local television journalists, I discovered which implementations were most successful and which were lacking. This coupled with my own experience in the field helped me develop a new media strategy that could be easily implemented in a television news station in a market similar in size to the Fayetteville/Fort Smith, Arkansas market (Market 100).

## **Methods**

To begin my research into how social media is being used in Market 100, I interviewed the station managers at each of the three stations – KHBS/KHOG (the ABC affiliate),

KNWA/KFTA (the NBC and FOX affiliates), and KFSM (the CBS affiliate). After meeting with and interviewing these individuals, I had a better understanding of who in the newsroom was using social media the most, and who was most affected by the implementation. I then interviewed a selection of reporters, producers, anchors, and other management at the Market 100 stations.

After synthesizing this information, I was able to develop a fairly comprehensive strategy that builds upon those stations' successes and failures. After careful observation of media trends, I was also able to include some unique and original ideas of my own into the strategy. This strategy is being called a "new media" strategy because it implements social media as well as other new media technologies.

### **Synthesis of Interviews**

Over the course of six weeks, I conducted on-camera interviews with the staff of the three local television stations in the Fayetteville/Fort Smith, Arkansas market (Market 100). From KHBS/KHOG, I interviewed former News Director Dawn Dugle and Producer Adam Call Roberts. From KFSM I interviewed News Director Rick Bagley (not on camera), Anchor Ashley Ketz, and Reporter Jocelyne Pruna. From KNWA/KFTA I interviewed News Director Brook Thomas, former Assistant News Director Ernie Paulson, KNWA Anchor Neile Jones, KFTA Anchor Brad Reed, Reporter/Weekend Anchor Liz Hogan, and Assistant News Director Lisa Mendenhall (who was Executive Producer at the time of the interview). The overall implementation of and attitude towards social media was the same across the three stations. There were differences, however, in the ways these journalists see the future of television news going.

The three stations implement social media in similar ways. Each station uses social media to get more hits on the website, and each station cross-promotes the station across the three platforms: social media, the website, and the on-air product. Each of the three news directors expressed the change in the definition of urgency. Where news used to break during the 5 o'clock news cast, it must now break on the web, or via social media. Brook Thomas, KNWA/KFTA News Director said,

“I can't wait until 5 o'clock to tell the audience what's happening, if I wait until 5 o'clock to tell them what's happening, I'm late. I'm late to the game, and I've lost a huge component of my audience, because a huge component of my audience has spent all day on the web.”

Former KHBS/KHOG News Director Dawn Dugle agreed, stating the staff at KHBS/KHOG considers the website a 24 hour news channel where news is always breaking.

Every single journalist I interviewed explained that social media not only provide a different platform by which to deliver the news to consumers, but also a way to connect with news consumers and viewers of the television newscasts. KNWA Reporter and Weekend Anchor Liz Hogan explained,

“We definitely use it to connect with people, people love that interaction you know and especially throughout the day while they're sitting at work, not necessarily when they're at home during the 5 and 6, we can communicate with them throughout the day while they're at work just check their Twitter or their Facebook page and see what we're working on or, 'Hey there's an accident on 540,' they know to avoid it on their way home, so I think they really enjoy that personal interaction with the staff here. But it also

allows us to bring people the news 24 hours a day instead of just in our 5, 6, 9, and 10 o'clock shows.”

KFSM Anchor Ashley Ketz said viewers enjoy getting to know the television personalities they watch every night, “They can get to know us as not just the people you see on TV, but what we do in our daily lives... I think it’s really important to show a little snippet of what goes on in our day to day newsroom operations and we can do that with Facebook and Twitter.”

Two of the stations, KNWA/KFTA and KHBS/KHOG have hired staff whose whole job is to monitor the content on the social media pages.

One thing that was highlighted by staff from all three stations was meeting consumers where they spend their time. People spend a lot of their days on the web, while they’re at work, on their smart phones, etc. The philosophy of local television news stations has evolved so that journalists are putting their stories out on the platforms that people are using most. KFSM News Director Rick Bagley says bringing news to people on the platforms they frequent is extremely important, “The main thing with social media is to be on the outlets people are on. Everyone is on Facebook, so we want to be there too and hopefully provide them information they find useful enough to like us and to continue to be friends with us.” Former KNWA Executive Producer Lisa Mendenhall agrees that reaching news consumers via social media platforms is beneficial, “Facebook is so all-encompassing...Facebook is a tool that everyone is using...And if you’re not even considering putting your product out there for all of these people to see, to experience, I think that’s a bad call.”

Implementing social media tools into a local television newsroom adds a significant work load for journalists – especially reporters. KNWA’s Liz Hogan reflects on the changes social media have brought to her job,

“I remember when I first started reporting, we didn’t mess with any of that. We didn’t have Facebook pages, we didn’t have Twitter, we had a website but it wasn’t the big deal it is now. And I have to admit, I resisted getting a Twitter page and getting a Facebook page...because it felt like extra stuff that I was having to do, but, reluctantly I did it, and now it’s very much ingrained in our everyday routine.”

She added social media have now become major sources for news tips, “Usually, about every day I get at least one idea from just what I see on Twitter, I mean people will tweet things that they may not think would be newsworthy, but when we see it we think, oh that will make a great story.”

While social media may provide great news tips, that information must be treated with caution. Dugle argued social media should be treated as a scanner. KFSM’s Rick Bagley agreed saying that reporters still need to do fact-checking legwork,

“We’ll take something like that [a social media message] as a tip, so and so is saying this, let’s call and see if it’s true. We try to get it independently confirmed before we go with it and take that extra step...It’s been a learning experience, that even though you get a tweet or you see a tweet from a credible source, you still have to check it.”

Dugle said being too quick to re-tweet can ruin a journalist’s reputation, “If you’re first with it, great. But you better be right. Because the damage you do to your reputation, the damage you inflict upon yourself in that quick moment of a re-tweet, takes a lot longer to make up.” In addition to using social media as a way to get news tips, it can also be used as a way to reach sources as KNWA Anchor Neile Jones explained, “You can reach sources you may not be able to otherwise...I’ve been able to DM (direct message) someone that I can’t get on the phone, and get an answer to a question.”

One downside to social media expressed by these journalists is that stations and news personalities subject themselves to scrutiny on a new level. Former KHBS/KHOG News Director Dawn Dugle explained that journalists can't disregard negative feedback on social media sites,

“You can't get mad at your viewers when they criticize. When you open the door to that dialogue, they feel very comfortable with you. People criticize, and while they love what we do, they're also very critical of it...that's kind of hard to take for some young journalists who've never dealt with that before.”

Other times, viewers can become unruly and offensive with one another, especially when commenting on controversial stories. KNWA's Lisa Mendenhall said this can create problems on the station's social media page, “Some people don't know how to be respectful on a Facebook site, and the cons for us are, sometimes we are so busy with what we're doing here in the building, we're not necessarily able to police the Facebook page.” KFTA Anchor Brad Reed agreed that using social media opens the door for disrespectful viewers to voice their opinions, “You have to become a little bit of an editor when it comes to how you incorporate it into your news product.”

While most of the journalists interviewed are excited for the future of broadcast journalism, there are some reservations and hesitations, especially when considering the fate of newspapers. KFSM's Rick Bagley explained how not evolving with technology can hurt the industry,

“You've got to get there, you can't be a dinosaur. That's some of what's happened to our friends at the newspaper. That sort of thinking that well, if they want the news, they'll pick up the newspaper and they're going to read it. Well, guess what, they're not going to



do that, people stopped reading the newspaper and are not reading the newspaper... So it would be naïve for people in television to think the same thing couldn't happen for us.”

Former KNWA Assistant News Director Ernie Paulson also expressed apprehension about the future of television news,

“I hope the TV news industry is forward thinking enough to know that social media is the future... I just pray that we don't end up in the situation where the newspapers did... I'd like to start having these conversations now and start figuring out what's the best way to do it in the future.”

While no one was ready to predict the future of television news, all agreed that social media is changing it profoundly and permanently.

### **New Media Strategy**

This strategy is designed to create optimum social media viewer participation. Social media traffic equates to website traffic which often equates to advertising revenue. Increasing social media reach is also important for journalists since many people only ever get their news from social media sources as opposed to the more traditional sources like newspapers and nightly local newscasts.

### **Getting Started**

At this point, all stations in a market comparable in size to the Fayetteville/Fort Smith, Arkansas market should have social media pages set up for the station. Individual news personalities like reporters and anchors should also have professional station affiliated pages. The station Facebook and Twitter sites should be accessible to all employees who contribute content, but should be managed primarily by one employee during each shift. Typically, a web content manager will be responsible for managing those sites M-F, 9-5. During evening,

weekend, and early morning shifts, one of the producers should be assigned to manage the social media content during that shift.

Facebook and Twitter should be used in similar yet distinct ways. Facebook is a more interactive tool, while Twitter is more immediate. Each tool should be used according to its strength.

Facebook and Twitter should be connected in such a way that should anyone post to the Facebook page, a tweet also goes out on the Twitter page. Having the sites connected this way is beneficial. It is not necessary or advantageous to have tweets posted to Facebook.

When these two sites are connected, an employee need only post a story to Facebook with a headline and a link to the story on the stations website, and the story will automatically be sent out as a tweet as well, in addition to a link to the website. This cuts down on the work that employees need to do in terms of posting.

Every story, regardless of size or relative importance, should be included on the Facebook or Twitter pages. No exceptions. Many argue that only the most important, interesting, or controversial stories should be included on social media pages and that only the website should include all of the smaller stories, but many people now get their news primarily or exclusively from social media, it is important to fill those viewers in on all of the news of the day. Stories that receive more comments, views, likes, and general traffic will automatically be bumped and will display closer to the top of the page.

### **Daily Duties**

Throughout the day, reporters should post updates on stories from the field. This should be done on their reporter affiliated Facebook and Twitter pages. For continuous updates to the

station's main Facebook page, reporters should email or text information and photos in to the web content manager or the employee in charge of updating the page during that shift.

Whenever possible, it is preferable to live-Tweet from the field and post the full story to Facebook later in the day. I will go into full detail about live-tweeting in a later section. This is why linking Facebook and Twitter so that only posts put onto Facebook automatically go out on Twitter is important. When a reporter wants to restrict what is posted on one site versus the other, this is the most effective strategy.

Reporters should make sure to tease, or preview, the stories they are working on throughout the day as a way to hopefully get more viewers for the newscast. Another tease strategy for reporters is to shoot a 15 second promo of the story while out in the field and upload it to the reporter's and station's Facebook page as a more visual teaser. Photos should also be sent in from the field so that the web content manager can post them to Facebook. These steps not only inform the social media audience of the news of the day, but will hopefully pique the audience's curiosity to the point that they will tune in to the nightly newscast.

Some stories that garner a lot of public comment are often well-suited to posting as questions on Facebook or Twitter. These questions can start a conversation among Facebook fans in the comment section of the post. This is sometimes advantageous when needing content for the newscast. It is the new media version of the "man on the street" interview. Producers can write up a full-screen graphic with some of the feed-back from Facebook fans.

### **Troubleshooting**

Opening up the social media sites to public input in that manner also runs the risk of inappropriate or offensive comments from social media fans. The web content manager at this point has to play the role of mediator. Comments must only be deleted if they are directly

offensive or profane. First amendment rights must be taken seriously, but when the station or reporter's name is on the page, it is appropriate to remove content that does not further the conversation, or that may be unnecessarily negative. Along those lines, just because a comment or post is directly critical of the station or a reporter is not grounds to remove it from the page. The best way to handle this is to acknowledge the viewer's concern or disappointment. If the person is being profane or excessively offensive to specific groups of people, the comment or post can then be deleted. A good rule of thumb is to delete any posts or comments that would not be appropriate to air on television; this includes profanity and other excessively offensive content. There is also the possibility that other stations may try to redirect social media fans to their sites. It is appropriate to block access of the sites to these select individuals.

### **Live-Tweeting**

This is a remarkably useful tool in breaking news situations, court cases, and other similar news stories. This allows the reporter to provide followers with a steady stream of updates throughout the day. Reporters can live-tweet photos and information from breaking news so that viewers can be instantly updated even if the newscast is hours away. This is also another opportunity to do video teases for Twitter or Facebook. If cameras are allowed in the courtroom, reporters can even live-tweet photos of witnesses at the stand, etc. This gives news consumers the feeling that they are a part of the unfolding story. This also helps reporters tell the story later since they have essentially been writing the story all day long.

### **New Technologies**

Until now, television stations have focused on Facebook and Twitter. After observing national media trends, it is clear that new technologies and social media tools will become more prevalent in local television news. One tool that should be adapted to local television news is the

Shazam music identification application. A few national corporations have implemented this technology as a way to link people directly to their websites after merely viewing a television commercial. News packages can also have distinct audio signatures that when recorded on the Shazam application can redirect viewers to the station's website.

Other new media tools include programs that make live shots possible in areas that are inaccessible by live truck. U-Stream and Skype are two such programs that are revolutionizing the idea of live. It used to be that live shots had to be done within feet of a live truck – by the side of the courthouse, in front of a burning building, etc. Now with these programs, a live shot can be taken from anywhere that a reporter can get a 3G signal on a smartphone. Reporters can go live from a search and rescue boat on the middle of a lake, for instance. These tools should be seriously considered as viable alternatives when a traditional microwave or satellite live shot is not possible.

### **Conclusion**

After evaluating the trends in new media including social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, along with interviewing journalists that have been experimentally implementing these tools over the past couple of years, it was obvious that a comprehensive social media strategy would simplify the process for stations who were transitioning into implementing these tools or simply wanted to use them more efficiently and effectively. I drew upon my own experience in television, as well as research conducted in local television newsrooms to develop the strategy. The new media strategy I developed encompasses tried-and-true methods of local television news stations, as well as original ideas developed while carefully studying national media trends.

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## Appendix A: Video Script

((TAKE SOT))

Ashley Ketz "We're on Facebook, we're on Twitter, and we use it every single day. Not everyone has time to sit down and watch a newscast, but they are on Facebook, at least several times a day." 00:34 - 00:46

((TAKE SOT))

Dawn Dugle "We use social media as a tool, much like a megaphone to tell people where it is, where they can find it. If you don't have our web page open all day long, that's fine; we'll let you know about it on Facebook. We'll let you know about it on Twitter." 11:25 - 11:38

((TAKE SOT))

Liz Hogan "It allows us to bring people the news 24 hours a day instead of just in our 5, 6, 9, and 10 o'clock shows. It's become an around the clock kind of thing....I think it probably brings us viewers that we may not, wouldn't normally have. Maybe some people that don't normally watch the news do now because of our presence on Facebook and Twitter, and even if we don't turn those internet folks into television viewers, we do get them going to our website." 1:43 - 2:15

((TAKE SOT))

Ernie Paulson "You don't break a story on TV, it's very rare anymore, you break it online, Facebook, Twitter. So it's utilizing that throughout the day and hoping that people will see those stories." 1:03 - 1:15

((TAKE SOT))

Brook Thomas "I can't wait until 5 o'clock to tell the audience what's happening, if I wait until 5 o'clock to tell them what's happening, I'm late. I'm late to the game, and I've lost a huge



component of my audience, because a huge component of my audience has spent all day on the web, and that's where they are." 8:45 - 9:00

((TAKE SOT))

Dawn Dugle "We have a 24 hour news channel on 4029tv.com and if we're holding news, or we just give it out a little bit, or we think 'I don't want to give it out because I don't want the competition to know what we're working on.' You know what, let them know, because at the end of the day, I know we're going to tell a better story, I know that we're going to give people some stuff on the web, but at 5, 6, and 10 we'll give them a little bit more, if we're doing our job right." 11:00 - 11:25

((TAKE SOT))

Ernie Paulson "My last station I worked at three years ago, we had a producer that was getting mad at reporters or photographers who were tweeting about stories they were working on or about breaking news, saying "Oh no, you don't want to do that because then they won't watch." Obviously that's totally turned around." 5:45 - 6:00

((TAKE SOT))

Lisa Mendenhall "I would say more than anything, it's just a way to connect with the viewer. Make the viewer feel like they are a part of the newscast, because in our perspective -- If they feel more involved, more connected, they're more likely to come back to us continually for our news coverage, whether it's our newscast, our website, our iPhone and Blackberry app, whatever it may be." 00:48 - 1:09

((TAKE SOT))

Brad Reed "The key is finding a mix of those things... If you have an outlet to connect with them, then you want to share your product with them, so I do believe it is a storytelling technique

and a way to get you product out there, but at the same rate, it's a way that you're able to gauge who is watching your product and who is interacting with your product like never before." 1:30 - 1:53

((TAKE SOT))

Neile Jones "You can connect with your viewers in a way that you can't do through a television screen. I mean, yes, I can talk to you and hopefully you're watching and we're in conversation together, but through Twitter you can actually ask me a question and I can answer it quickly, and Facebook's the same way." 1:15 - 1:28

((TAKE SOT))

Ashley Ketz "They can get to know us as not just the people you see on TV, but what we do in our daily lives, our weather guy posts pictures of his kid on Facebook, so it's a way to let people in on what we do and what we do behind the scenes. I think it's really important to show a little snippet of what goes on in our day to day newsroom operations and we can do that with Facebook and Twitter." 2:00 - 2:22

((TAKE SOT))

Liz Hogan "I think it's had a huge impact, because I remember when I first started reporting, we didn't mess with any of that. We didn't have Facebook pages, we didn't have Twitter, we had a website but it wasn't the big deal it is now." 3:10 - 3:30

((TAKE SOT))

Brook Thomas "Five years ago I would have told you that I would not be spending a lot of my day surfing Facebook. Five years ago staff would have been in trouble for playing on Facebook. Five years ago we were punishing staff for getting on Facebook during work hours. Now it's required." 14:58 - 15:15

((TAKE SOT))

Brad Reed "We within the last year just hired, we hired a new position to where, their position is to where all day they've got Facebook pulled up and all of our social media tools and our website pulled up and they're a social.. the title is Web Content Manager." 9:46 - 10:00

((TAKE SOT))

Neile Jones "For me social media, in a way, if used correctly is very much like the old news wires that we used to use. You know the old sources that you used to trust, you still double check it, but you still use it." 1:05 - 1:15

((TAKE SOT))

Dawn Dugle "The downside is you need to treat social media like a scanner. There are too many times that Twitter rumors go flying through cyberspace." 12:01 - 12:10

((TAKE SOT))

Brad Reed "I think some of the cons can be is that anyone can use it. ANYONE can get on Facebook and get on Twitter and say whatever they want, and they can send it at you and post it on your wall and put it on Twitter and put it at you." 10:47 - 11:00

((TAKE SOT))

Lisa Mendenhall "Some people don't know how to be respectful on a Facebook site, and the cons for us are, sometimes we are so busy with what we're doing here in the building, we're not necessarily able to police the Facebook page." 14:56 - 15:06

((TAKE SOT))

Dawn Dugle "That's kind of hard to take for some young journalists who've never dealt with that before. Viewers who feel like they can tell you they don't like your hair, they don't like the way

you said something. Viewers who think they're talking to another television station, and they post it on our Facebook page, and you're like 'that wasn't us.'" 7:43 - 8:03

((TAKE SOT))

Ashley Ketz "I'd say that's probably one of the biggest cons, is people just voicing their thoughts without thinking first about what they're really putting out there and our name is on it so we have to be very sensitive to that." 5:37 - 5:49

((TAKE SOT))

Lisa Mendenhall "Our policy is, if we see something with a curse word, yes we will try to take it down, because we realize that young people are looking at our Facebook page and we realize that people who just don't want to see curse words all over the page are utilizing our Facebook page and we want to make them feel comfortable using it." 15:36 - 15:54

((TAKE SOT))

Brad Reed "I think you have to be careful though, I see where you're going with it, where you're going with it is, 'well if you're going to use social media and use Facebook and just any Joe Blow can express their opinion about something,' well that's where you have to be careful and there is a little bit of, you have to become a little bit of an editor in that sense and you have to watch and see what people are saying and be a little bit of an editor when it comes to how you incorporate it into your news product." 8:20 - 8:48

((TAKE SOT))

Neile Jones "You're still doing your job hopefully, 100%, I mean, I'm not going to back off what I'm supposed to do here, just because another element has come into my world. That'd be like saying the stories that we do on the Internet, they're just not as good as what we do on air." 5:13 - 5:30

((TAKE SOT))

Brook Thomas "If it's taking away from their craft and their work, they are not managing their time well. And they don't really care about the quality of the craft and their work. Here's why I can say that: the persona who actually gets it, actually cares, actually gets the craft of this industry...is already doing the social media side of it. They're already incorporating different ways of getting the story out there, because they are going to see that as part of the craft." 18:25 - 18:59

((TAKE SOT))

Ernie Paulson "Lazy journalism will always get you in trouble, you can be lazy in TV writing, you can be lazy on Facebook, you can be lazy on Twitter, on the web... I think that poor writing, poor journalism degrades the business, I don't think anything on Facebook or Twitter... It's a matter of how you do it." 11:30 - 11:52

((TAKE SOT))

Ashley Ketz "I think if you're smart about it, and use it in situations where it would be relevant to the story, I don't think that every single story that we cover every day we're going to say "Oh, look what our Facebook friends are saying about this!" It may not be relevant; I think you just have to use really good judgment on that." 6:05 - 6:22

((TAKE SOT))

Lisa Mendenhall "I think it's absolutely worthwhile, it's not degrading, if it were, there wouldn't be a billion people using it and there wouldn't be so many high profile people working to get the word out in that kind of a system." 10:25 - 10:40

((TAKE SOT))

Liz Hogan "I think it'd be hard not to, I think you'd be at a real disadvantage as a TV station if you didn't use social media, I think you just have to." 8:09 - 8:15

((TAKE SOT))

Dawn Dugle "There are too many television stations that think the web, social media, is the fries with the burger, oh it's just an add-on. The people who feel that way aren't going to survive."

9:20 - 9:45

((TAKE SOT))

Neile Jones "It's kind of one of those things that even if you don't use it, you better learn how to use it because your competitor is going to be using it so I think it's just one of those things you have to adapt to. If not, you might be a dinosaur. I'm not saying it's perfect, social media, I'm just saying you need to learn how to use it." 6:25 - 6:44

((TAKE SOT))

Ernie Paulson "I think we just have to, I hope the TV news industry just is forward thinking enough to know that social media is the future, and how we incorporate it, how do we make it all work, and I just pray that we don't end up in the situation where the newspapers did. And I think now they're finding other ways to do it and doing it well, but talk about behind behind the 8-ball. I don't want to end up in that situation. I'd like to start having these conversations now and start figuring out what's the best way to do it in the future." 19:03 - 19:35

((TAKE SOT))

Lisa Mendenhall "I think if they're not using social media as an integral part of what they do each day, they are making a huge mistake. Again, this is a free website, it reaches a billion people... I can't even describe it to you, it's just so massive, it's all-encompassing." 11:30 - 12:08

((TAKE SOT))

Brad Reed "One of the things we've learned is the main thing is, you've gotta do it. Before, a couple of years ago, it was 'do we do it? do we not use social media?' I think now we've learned, you just have to do it. And as to how we're going to do it, that's what we keep learning." 5:13 - 5:29