



8-2014

# The Role of Social Media Editors in Television Newsrooms: An Exploratory Study

Allyson Beutke DeVito

*University of Tennessee - Knoxville*, [adevito@utk.edu](mailto:adevito@utk.edu)

---

## Recommended Citation

DeVito, Allyson Beutke, "The Role of Social Media Editors in Television Newsrooms: An Exploratory Study." PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2014.

[https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_graddiss/2816](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/2816)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Allyson Beutke DeVito entitled "The Role of Social Media Editors in Television Newsrooms: An Exploratory Study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communication and Information.

Norman R. Swan Jr., Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Elizabeth Hendrickson, James Stovall, Glenn Graber

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

---

The Role of Social Media Editors in Television Newsrooms:  
An Exploratory Study

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Allyson Beutke DeVito  
August 2014

Copyright © 2014 by Allyson Beutke DeVito  
All rights reserved.

## Dedication

To my husband David DeVito, Ph.D. (and soon to be D.M.D). Your love, support and dedication to me, and to this dissertation, are appreciated more than you will ever know. Your frequent pep talks kept me motivated when I doubted my ability or desire to finish. Thank you, Doctor! I love you more than anything.

To our feline children, Dolly, Sammie and Cash. Dolly was there when I started this process in 2006 and offered support by sitting, purring and most often sleeping on the desk as I worked. While she did not live to see me finish my Ph.D., her younger siblings, Sammie and Cash, eagerly took over her role as assistants on my desk.

Finally, to every Ph.D. student who is still A.B.D. (All But Dissertation), I know how you feel and how hard it is to motivate yourself to finish. I never thought of myself as a procrastinator until this process. It took me a while to realize how important this degree is to me, and I hope you realize the same about your degree. It is not an easy undertaking. I am sure you have faced your share of challenges, doubts, uncertainty and a wide range of emotions and experiences, but just know the emotion you experience once you finish is well worth it and unlike any other.

### #PhinallyDone

"Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Acknowledgements

As English philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead once said, “No one who achieves success does so without the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.” There are numerous individuals who have helped me in some way complete this doctoral degree, and I appreciate each one of you.

First, I must express my sincere gratitude to my dissertation chair, Dr. Sam Swan, for your guidance and advisement during this process. I first met you when I visited campus in 2005, so in many ways it is fitting that you helped me complete my Ph.D. work. Thank you so much for stepping in and directing my dissertation.

I also appreciate the time and dedication of my other committee members.

To Dr. James Stovall, I learned so much from you about how to teach media writing when I served as a JEM 200 lab instructor. I also appreciate all the feedback you have provided during the process of developing my dissertation.

To Dr. Elizabeth Hendrickson, I am so grateful to you for serving on my committee and always offering encouraging emails or texts during this process. I appreciate the times I lectured to your classes about media ethics. Thank you for believing in me and in my ideas.

To Dr. Glenn Graber, a philosophy faculty member, who has been the only constant on my committees. I took your professional ethics course in 2007 and learned so much from you and the other philosophy graduate students. I appreciate you serving on my comps committee and my dissertation committee and providing thoughtful insights about my research. I believe I am the last student whose

committee you will serve on at the University of Tennessee, and I wish you a wonderful retirement with your wife, children and grandchildren.

I appreciate the faculty and staff in the College of Communication and Information at UT who I have known for the past eight years. I had instruction and advisement from some wonderful faculty members, and I offer a special thanks to Drs. Barbara Moore, Dwight Teeter, Dorothy Bowles, Sally McMillan, Catherine Luther, Suzie Allard, Ken Levine, Eric Haley, Lyn Lepre, Naeemah Clark and the late and great Margie Morrison. A very special thanks to Deborah Douglas, Chandra Wilson, Diana Hall, Anne Hensley, John and Sherry McNair and Beth Cole for helping me schedule rooms, complete forms, set up computers, and everything else you do for all us to keep the college running smoothly.

I made new friends during graduate school, and I appreciate the advice and support my fellow graduate students offered. I especially want to thank Drs. Jessica Smith, Aya Muchtar and Katerina Spasovska for your friendship and encouragement.

I could not have made it through this chapter in my life without the wonderfully supportive Gary Family, especially JEM Senior Lecturer Lisa Gary. You are among the first people I met at UT, and your advice, guidance and teaching materials have been invaluable. You are a wonderful teacher, colleague and friend, and we appreciate all the visits you and your family made to our house to check in on Dolly, Sammie and Cash while we were away. Thank you also for letting me vent when I was facing challenges and doubts. You are a great person, and I am so thankful our paths in life have crossed.

I would like to sincerely thank my colleagues at Eastern Kentucky University and the University of Kentucky who motivated me to finish the dissertation. I appreciate many of you asking, “How’s the dissertation going?” instead of ignoring the elephant in the room. A special thanks to Dr. Liz Hansen at ECU for all the teaching opportunities you provided and for the advice you gave me on numerous occasions about the importance of finishing. I also appreciate the friendships of Drs. Kathy Keltner-Previs, Jayne Violette and Ginny Whitehouse at ECU and your encouragement.

At UK, a huge thank you to Dr. Deanna Sellnow who hired me to teach in 2011 and has been a wonderful mentor. I appreciate you being a fresh set of eyes and reading parts of my dissertation and providing feedback. Dr. Sarah Kerckmar, you also have been a great mentor from the very beginning of my time at UK, and I appreciate all the times you asked me how things were going with the dissertation. Dr. Carla Bevins, your friendship throughout this process and frequent lunch dates have been so helpful. Thanks also to Rachel Steckler, Mary Ann Nestmann and Drs. Brandi Frisby, Amy Gaffney, Renee Kaufmann, and Jami Warren for their support.

I must also thank all the participants in this study who agreed to let me interview you about your roles in the newsroom. I know how busy your schedules are, and I appreciate the time you gave me and the numerous examples and insights you shared. Without your words, I would not have been able to write this dissertation. A special thank you to one of my mentors from my undergraduate studies at the University of Florida, Tom Krynski, who reached out to a network of



Gator alumni around the country to assist me with finding participants. I also appreciate my former colleagues and students who assisted with locating participants to interview as well. Thank you all!

To the students I have taught at UF, UT, ECU and UK, I finally finished this dissertation so I could continue teaching students like you and learning from you. Some of you called me Dr. DeVito before I actually deserved the title, and I appreciate your well wishes.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my friends, colleagues, former teachers, professors, co-workers and neighbors from the various places I have studied, lived and worked, especially those in my hometown area of Alachua and Gainesville, Florida. I have kept in touch with many of you on social media, and I appreciate all the likes, comments and tweets you have provided throughout this process.

Finally, I appreciate the love and support of my immediate and extended family during this endeavor, so here is a shout out to the Beutkes, Bouffards, DeVitos, and Mullers in the United States and across the pond. I know there were times when some of you did not think I would finish, but I am glad you all kept after me to do so. A special thank you to my parents, Sharon and Amos (affectionately known as Shamos), whose almost daily emails and weekly Skype talks I will always remember and treasure. I already dedicated this dissertation to most the important person in my life, my husband David DeVito, and I know I would not have finished this research if it had not been for your constant motivation and love.

Thank you all again for everything!

## Abstract

More Americans are using social media in their daily lives and finding news and information on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Media organizations are using social media sites to locate sources and verify information to increase ratings and circulation. Reporters and editors are interacting with audiences more than ever before. The result is a weakening of news organizations' systems of editorial control and, consequently, their traditional gatekeeping function.

To assist with disseminating information about news stories and engage with their audiences more, some media organizations are creating a new position at newspapers and broadcast stations, known as a social media editor, producer or manager. They are more common in larger news organizations and differ from website editors because social media editors focus on creating conversations with the audience. Their place in the newsroom, however, is developing and uncertain, especially at the local news level. This study aims to understand their developing role in the local television newsroom and discover their functions and how editorial decisions about made about what content will be posted to social media.

Through long interviews with 23 participants in social media editor positions around the country, this study shows how individuals in these positions are responsible for a variety of roles and functions, and many others in the newsroom depend on their expertise, training and suggestions to carry out their daily tasks. There is a need for positions like these in media organizations, and they are challenging the traditional gatekeeping role by relying heavily on audience interest

and engagement in decisions about posting content to social media and less on traditional news values.

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
Social Media and Newsrooms.....	1
Growth of Social Media Editors .....	2
Purpose and Significance .....	5
Organization of Chapters.....	5
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	7
Theoretical Framework .....	7
Gatekeeping Theory and and Mass Communication .....	7
Definition of Social Media .....	11
History of Social Media .....	12
The Digital Journalist.....	17
Broadcast Journalists and Social Media .....	22
Audience Engagement and Social Media.....	23
Summary and Rationale.....	26
<b>Chapter 3: Method</b> .....	27
Qualitative Research.....	27
The Long Interview Method .....	28
Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews.....	29
Participants.....	31
Recruitment of Participants .....	31
Procedures .....	32
Analysis .....	36
Open Coding.....	37
Axial Coding .....	37
Credibility and Trustworthiness.....	39
Conclusion.....	40
<b>Chapter 4: Findings</b> .....	41
Characteristics of Participants .....	41
Role in the Newsroom.....	45
Functions and Tasks in the Newsroom .....	47
Posting to Social Media.....	47
Training.....	54
Developing Best Practices.....	57
Engaging with Audience .....	60
Attending Meetings and Analyzing.....	61
Strategizing Goals .....	62
Editorial Control and Gatekeeping.....	67
Decisions about Social Media Posts .....	67
Summary.....	73

<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....	75
Key Findings.....	75
Discussion .....	76
Implications.....	81
Limitations.....	85
Suggestions for Future Research .....	86
Concluding Remarks.....	88
<b>References</b> .....	90
<b>Appendices</b> .....	102
Appendix A: Verified Informed Consent Form.....	103
Appendix B: Discussion Guide.....	105
<b>Vita</b> .....	106

List of Tables

Table 1. Television Markets and Size Rankings.....	42
Table 2. Tasks Performed by Social Media Editors.....	48
Table 3. Social Media Used by Participants.....	49

List of Figures

Figure 1. Example of a Newsroom Organizational Chart.....24

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### ***Social Media and Newsrooms***

Social media sites are permeating newsrooms around the country, and journalists now use blogs, Twitter and Facebook to locate sources and verify information (Gordon, 2009; Oriella 2013; Oriella 2012) to increase ratings and circulation. Audiences also are interacting with reporters and editors on social media. The result is a weakening of news organizations' system of editorial control and, consequently, their traditional gatekeeping function (Hermida, 2012).

To assist with disseminating information about news stories and engage with their audiences more, some media organizations are creating a new position at newspapers and broadcast stations, known as a social media editor, producer or manager. They are more common in larger news organizations and differ from website editors because social media editors focus on creating conversations with the audience. Their place in the newsroom, however, is developing and uncertain, especially at the local news level. They strive to build online interaction by inviting comment and spreading the distribution of stories (Zak, 2012).

These editors describe themselves in media interviews as part listener, teacher, cheerleader and collaborator, helping bring "eyeballs and traffic" to news sites (Gleason, 2010). By answering questions, seeking verification and provoking debate, the social media editor has become the "multi-tasking genie of the newsroom" who puts the journalistic method on public display (Travers, 2011).



News organizations that are employing this strategy are still trying to determine the optimal role of these editors in the newsroom. Consequently, the newness of this position and its changing role have some editors themselves describing their job as that of “Twitter monkeys,” who exist outside traditional newsroom structures (Jenkins, 2012). The newly created positions are becoming more mainstream but not at a rapid rate (Zak, 2012).

### ***Growth of Social Media Editors***

Social media editors first emerged at large news organizations such as the BBC, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today* in 2008 and 2009 (Luckie, 2010; USA Today, 2008). At that time, social media editors identified the need to build loyalty with online audiences via two-way conversations (McLellan, 2009). The goal was to be more relevant to their audience and ultimately strengthen their journalism.

The emergence of these newsrooms positions illustrates news organizations growing dependence on social networks for a substantial portion of their audience (Pew, 2013). According to Newman (2009), social media activity in many newsrooms began informally with journalists dabbling in Twitter and Facebook while doing unrelated editorial jobs. Over time, employers defined these efforts in a formal job description for a social media editor.

These editors may have some of the duties of an online or website editor. For example, posting editorial content to their organization’s news site. But social media editors are usually more focused on building audience interaction through a news organization’s online comments section, and its presence in social networks such as

Twitter and Facebook. They might host live chats, monitor social networks for breaking news and emerging trends, and help reporters find sources (Luckie, 2010). The editors frequently have the inward-focused role of integrating social media into editorial practices and convincing staff of its value in the newsroom (Ellis, 2011). Their outward facing duties include building communities, and helping to start and manage conversations (Bradshaw, 2008). In breaking news situations, they can be debunking editors, aiming to stem the flow of misinformation in the form of hoaxes or rumors (Myers, 2011). These editors may be faceless entities behind an organization's Twitter or Facebook feed. However, successful social media editors inject their personality into their online roles and use this personal connection to build a relationship with their audience (Ellis, 2011).

Social media experts have called on news organizations to redesign their editorial workflow to place social media editors in a central position in the newsroom (Alejandro, 2010). LaMothe (2011) argues community managers, such as social media editors, need to be at the beginning of the editorial process, where they can select and develop content for specific communities. Such integration, however, represents a substantial overhaul of traditional newsroom culture.

The job of social media editor at local news organizations is still relatively new. In a list compiled by Columbia University journalism professor Sree Sreenivasan (2011), there were 89 social media editors in North America in July 2011. In his annual study of more than 1,300 television stations in the U.S., Papper

(2013) found that some stations are hiring social media editors and there are some minor indications of growth in this area.

Because this type of position is relatively new in newsrooms around the world, very little academic research has been conducted. Currie (2012) examined the role of social media editors in Canadian newsrooms and interviewed 13 people who serve in this position. He concluded that social media editors were challenging the traditional gatekeeping function of news editors by representing audience interests in the newsroom. The social media editors he interviewed saw themselves as serving two masters: their newsrooms superiors and also the audience.

Overall, there is a lack of data regarding the nature of these positions in news organizations, specifically at local newspapers and broadcast stations. This study will add to the current body of knowledge by filling a gap in the literature as it will investigate the role of social media editors in television newsrooms in the United States.

Previous research has focused on how journalists are using social media to promote their stories or share breaking news and how consumers of news use Facebook and Twitter to obtain information. However, very few, if any, have focused on what role social media editors play in media organizations, specifically broadcast stations, and how this new position is challenging the traditional gatekeeping role of editors in television newsrooms.

### ***Purpose and Significance***

The purpose of this formative research is to examine how social media editors at local television stations disseminate information and engage with their audience. A qualitative approach was selected to allow social media editors to discuss their role in the newsroom and specifically explain their newsroom's social media guidelines and policies.

This study has significant implications for television industry officials, academics and news consumers who may be affected by the changes the television news business is undergoing because of social media. The findings of this study also could influence ways in which media writing and reporting courses are taught and the types of job skills related to social media that students should learn while obtaining their college degree.

### ***Organization of Chapters***

Because this study seeks to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it—in this case, how social media editors define their role in the newsroom—it uses a qualitative approach to research. This study begins with a review of relevant literature and the presentation of exploratory questions in Chapter 2. The literature provides insight into how other scholars have approached gatekeeping theory, the role of social media in television newsrooms and how journalists are using social media in their reporting. Next, in Chapter 3, the researcher will discuss qualitative methodology. The findings of the study will follow in Chapter 4. Finally, the fifth chapter of the study will offer a discussion of

the study's contribution to current social media and journalism scholarship and practice and conclude by addressing its implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### ***Theoretical Framework***

The goal of this dissertation is to study social media editors in television newsrooms in the United States and examine their roles and functions to also determine how editorial decisions are made about content posted to social media. This research stems from gatekeeping theory, proposed in 1947 by psychologist Kurt Lewin. Gatekeeping conceptualizes the role of editors as influencing the selection of news content through their personal preferences and assumptions. David Manning White (1950) adapted Lewin's theory to the news industry, analyzing the choices made by an editor he dubbed "Mr. Gates." This editor made "highly subjective value-judgments" — ones "based on the 'gatekeeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations" (p. 386).

#### ***Gatekeeping Theory and Mass Communication***

The importance of the gatekeeping function is established in mass communication literature. Westley and MacLean (1957) included the gatekeeping function in their landmark communications model. The importance of gatekeeping was also noted by Schramm (1949), who observes that, "There is no aspect of communication as impressive as the enormous number of choices and discards which have to be made between the formation of the symbol in the mind of the communicator, and the appearance of a related symbol in the mind of the receiver" (p. 259).

White's (1950) classic case study of a newspaper editor ("Mr. Gates") and his "in" or "out" choices of news items is considered the first in which the gatekeeping metaphor was applied in published research by a communication scholar. White notes that it was only after studying his subject's reasons for rejecting stories that he realized "how highly subjective, how reliant on value-judgments based on the 'gatekeeper's own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations, the communication of 'news' really is" (p. 386).

Following White's (1950) seminal work, other researchers investigated the relationship between personal characteristics and the application of values in the performance of the gatekeeper role. A variety of organizational and related constraints, and their consequences, also has been addressed in the literature. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) note that "it is difficult to determine what influence journalists' characteristics have on their work," but they believe education and other background experiences and characteristics "may influence the way in which they see the world, a potentially far-reaching effect on what is selected to report and on how it is reported" (p. 80).

Shoemaker (1991) defines gatekeeping as the process "by which billions of messages that are available in the world get cut down and transformed into the hundreds of messages that reach a given person on a given day" (p. 1). Similarly, Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1972, p. 53) define gatekeeping as, "including all forms of information control that may arise in decisions about message encoding, such as selection, shaping, display, timing, withholding, or repetition of entire

messages or message components.” Shoemaker and Reese (1991) note that “it is difficult to determine what influence journalists’ characteristics have on their work,” but they believe education and other background experiences and characteristics “may influence the way in which they see the world, a potentially far-reaching effect on what is selected to report and on how it is reported” (p. 80).

The gatekeeping process in a newsroom begins when a staff member forms information about a news item into a message. This is the first gate for this event. (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The term “news item” refers to the content actually published and transmitted by a mass medium, the end of the traditional gatekeeping process, with multiple gates in between.

Shoemaker (1991) notes that the examination of personal characteristics is important because gatekeepers do not always apply organizational rules in the same way. Some research has focused on confirming relationships between personal characteristics in the form of education, work experience and skills and media content decisions made by gatekeepers (Chang & Lee, 1992). Chang and Lee found that such individual differences as political ideology, and professional experience influenced editors’ perceptions of foreign news values. Other researchers, however, have focused on the issue of values – intrinsically valued principles or beliefs that are believed to underlie attitudes and behavior (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1982). In the news media, for example, the principle that audience needs should be served leads gatekeepers to rely on traditional news values to select media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991).



Likewise, certain presentation techniques and formats – such as readable copy, proper arrangement of photos, and visually appealing video—become important routines of media work for the same reason (Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). As Shoemaker (1991) suggests, among the various “forces” or psychological processes and individual characteristics that can affect the gatekeeping process are gatekeeper “likes and dislikes, ideas about the nature of his or her job, ways of thinking about a problem, preferred decision-making strategies, and values,” all of which can influence decisions to reject, select, and shape messages (p. 75).

In addition, the body of literature includes additional influences on gatekeeping decisions. Brill (2001) found online journalists were concerned with “competition and appealing to a large audience,” traits she identified as a marketing function. Journalists listened to their audience and responded by setting their production schedules around the habits of their audience and when they were more likely to read content.

In a study of political campaign coverage in 2004, Singer (2006) found that online editors were adapting to the participatory nature of the Internet and “reconceptualizing their gatekeeping role...toward a partnership between users and journalists” (p. 275). Similarly, Cassidy (2005) noted a shift in the roles of online journalists whereby they saw themselves less as interpreters and investigators than their print counterparts. The audience, he suggested, has “an increased role in online news production, and online journalists may place greater importance on the goals and values of (this group) when assessing newsworthiness” (p. 273).

Hirsch (1977) concludes that, in addition to the individual component of gatekeeping, there are occupational and organizational components as well. Thus, other influences addressed in the literature include organizational routines and priorities, resources and their limitations, gatekeeping as a function shared with others, and decision-making autonomy.

### ***Definition of Social Media***

While the term social media was first used in the early 2000s, the Merriam-Webster dictionary did not officially include it as phrase in the English language until 2011. However, the dictionary notes that the first known use of “social media” dates back to 2004. It defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)” (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also provide a definition of social media and have classified different types of it. They define it as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan, Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). According to them, the first website that can be considered a modern social media service, was Open Diary, established in 1998 and shut down in February 2014. It was an early example of social networking that allowed the creation of public, semi-public, or private texts that could be shared with a community. Open Diary was the prototype of today’s blogging services. The terms

“webblog” and one year later “blog” were invented around the discussions about the success of Open Diary. The publishing capabilities in combination with the upcoming of more sophisticated social communities via social network services “coined the term Social Media and contributed to the prominence it has today” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 60). By applying a set of theories in the field of media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure) Kaplan and Haenlein have created a classification scheme for six different social media types: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia); blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter); content communities (e.g., YouTube); social networking sites (e.g., Facebook); virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft); and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Social media network websites include sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

### ***History of Social Media***

Among the first sites that are perhaps the precursors of today’s most popular social media sites were Friendster (2002) and MySpace (2003). Other social networking sites established during this period include Classmates.com, Tribe.net, LinkedIn and Netlog (O’Dell, 2011).

The most popular social media site today is Facebook, created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his college roommates at Harvard University. Originally called “Facemash,” the site was designed as a “hot or not” game for Harvard students and gave students the chance to compare student photos side-by-side to determine who was more attractive. In January 2004, Mark Zuckerberg started writing code for a

new website known as “thefacebook.” He launched it in February 2004, and membership was restricted to only Harvard University students. It soon expanded to other Ivy League schools and eventually to most universities in the United States and Canada by 2005. On September 26, 2006, Facebook was opened to anyone age 13 and older with a valid email address (Carlson, 2010).

Registered Facebook users create a personal profile and add others as friends. They can exchange direct messages, post status updates, photos and videos and receive notifications when others update their profiles. Users also can join common-interest user groups, communicate with friends through a chat function and also share content that includes website URLs, images and video (Facebook, 2014).

In September 2006, Facebook added a News Feed, which appears on every user's homepage and highlights information including profile changes, upcoming events, and birthdays of the user's friends (Sanghvi, 2006). Users see a selection of content in the News Feed, which was originally determined by the algorithm EdgeRank. During the past few years, Facebook has started using a more complex ranking algorithm, and during an interview in August 2013, Engineering Manager for News Feed Ranking at Facebook, Lars Backstrom, estimated there are as many as “100,000 individual weights in the model that produces the News Feed.” EdgeRank elements are still used but the News Feed algorithm is much more sophisticated than only a few years ago (McGee, 2013).

Facebook launched Facebook Pages, also known as “Fan Pages” by users in

2007. These pages allow users to interact with businesses and organizations in the same way they interact with their Facebook “friends.” One common way this interaction happens is by using the “like” button, a feature launched in 2010, that allows users to express their like of content such as status updates, comments, photos and videos (Fletcher, 2010; Peters, 2011).

On its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, Facebook remains the dominant social media platform and is used by 57% of American adults and 73% of everyone from ages 12-17. Among adults, 64% of Facebook users visit the site daily, up from 51% in 2010, and 31% of adults say they use Facebook to keep up with news and current events (Pew, 2014).

On the heels of Facebook’s creation and growth, Twitter was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass. Known as an online social networking and microblogging service, it allows users to send and read short 140-character text messages called tweets. When a person resends a tweet it is known as a retweet (Twitter, 2014).

Formed by board members of podcasting company Odeo, Twitter’s beginnings started during a brainstorming session about using an SMS (Short Message Service) to communicate with a small group. The original project code name was twttr, and Dorsey published the first Twitter message, “just setting up my twttr,” on March 21, 2006. He has explained the Twitter name as, “...we came across the word ‘twitter,’ and it was just perfect. The definition was a ‘short burst of inconsequential information,’ and ‘chirps from birds.’ And that’s exactly what the

product was” (Sano, 2009).

As of January 2014, 19% of online adults use Twitter (Pew, 2014). Tweets are publicly visible but senders can restrict message delivery to just their followers. Users can tweet via the Twitter website as well as compatible external applications on their smartphones and tablets. When a user subscribes to another user’s tweets, this is known as “following,” and subscribers are known as “followers” (Twitter, 2014).

Hashtags, words or phrases prefixed with a “#” sign, are used to group posts together by topic or type. Also, the “@” or “at” sign followed by a username is used for mentioning or replying to other users. To repost a message from another Twitter user, and share it with one’s own followers, the retweet function is symbolized by “RT” in the message (Twitter, 2014).

A topic, word or phrase that is tagged at a greater rate than other tags is known as a “trending topic.” Trending topics can become popular because an event prompts people to talk about a specific topic or through a concentrated effort by users. In March 2010, Twitter’s blog post said the most popular Twitter trending topics would scroll across the Twitter homepage (Bowman, 2010).

Other forms of social media that have developed during the past decade include Tumblr, a microblogging platform and social networking website founded by David Karp and owned by Yahoo! Inc. The service, launched in 2007, allows users to post multimedia and other content to a short-form blog. Users can follow other users’ blogs, as well as make their blogs private. As of July 1, 2014, Tumblr hosts

over 192.9 million blogs (Tumblr, 2014).

Instagram is an online mobile photo and video sharing social networking service that allows users to share their media on other social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. Created in 2010, there are more than 100 million users, and 17% of online adults have an account (Pew, 2014). In April 2012, Facebook bought Instagram for \$1 billion in cash and stock. In a post on his profile page, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg said Instagram would continue to work with rival social networks, and users can still post on other services, follow users outside of Facebook, and to opt out of sharing on Facebook. (Rusli, 2012).

Google+ is a social networking site owned and operated by Google Inc. Google has described Google+ as a "social layer" that enhances many of its online properties, and that it is not simply a social networking website, but also an authorship tool that associates web-content directly with its owner/author. (Google, 2014). A Google+ user profile is a public visible account of a user that is attached to many Google properties. Launched in 2011, it includes basic social networking elements such as a profile photo, about section, background photo, interests, places lived and an area to post status updates. Two popular features are Circles and Hangouts. The Circles feature allows users to organize people into groups for sharing various Google services. Hangouts are free video conferencing calls for up to 10 people (Google, 2014).

Pinterest is a free website where users can upload, save, sort and manage images, known as pins, and other media content (e.g. videos and gifs) through

collections known as pinboards. Pinterest acts as a personalized media platform, where users' content and the content of others can be browsed on the main page (Pinterest, 2014). Popular board categories include food, arts and crafts, and style and fashion. Created in 2010, the site landed in the top 10 largest social networking sites with 11 million total visits per week (Sloan, 2011).

One of the newest forms of social media that was created in 2013, is Vine, a mobile application owned by Twitter. Users create and post short video clips. In an introduction on its blog, Twitter explained the concept. "Like Tweets, the brevity of videos on Vine (6 seconds or less) inspires creativity" (Sippey, 2013).

### ***The Digital Journalist***

The traditional values of journalism are accuracy, fairness, and objectivity, with accuracy being the most important characteristic of any news story (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Stovall, 2012). While these values have not changed over time, the ways in which journalists report and obtain sources and information for their stories have evolved rapidly, especially during the past two decades. Gone are the days when a print journalist only carried a reporter's notebook and pen to cover a story, or the only way to learn about breaking news was to watch a television network or listen to the radio. Online journalism has changed the way journalists report on a daily basis. Journalists are developing new styles of how to present the news but the fundamentals of good writing and strong reporting remain.

The ways journalists perform their daily tasks has changed dramatically. Many journalists believe their title is "digital first," meaning they break news as it



happens online, rather than holding it until the next publication or broadcast. They also believe their largest audience is now online rather than off, and their performance is overwhelmingly evaluated based on digital metrics and analytics (Oriella, 2013).

Perhaps an even larger development that has grown immensely since the start of this century's second decade, is the increase of social media usage among the media. More and more journalists across the world are discovering the relevance of social media sites in their reporting. Facebook and Twitter are the two main social media sites that journalists use on a daily basis to generate story ideas and share their stories (Gordon, 2009; Oriella, 2013, Oriella, 2012; Oriella, 2011).

Even though this current research shows journalists are using Facebook and Twitter in their reporting, it has not necessarily been a rapid change. In 2008, many journalists reported having personal Facebook and Twitter accounts, as well as professional ones that are sometimes encouraged and even mandated by their news organizations. However, how they were using social media in their professions was a bit muddled. Some journalists said they used Facebook more for networking purposes and saw it as limited in its usefulness as a journalistic tool (Wilson, 2008).

In a small study of sports journalists, Reed found the comfort level of using information from a social media source depends on the sports journalist's attitude about an athlete's maturity level and the individual interpretation of information posted on social media sites. This appears to support Schultz and Sheffer's (2010) exploratory study about how Twitter is affecting sports journalism. The researchers

found there is a place for Twitter in the newsroom, whether it is a headline service for breaking news or a way to promote journalists' work.

Even though more journalists are using social media as part of their jobs, there are areas of disconnect between traditional journalism practices and social media, which demonstrate a need for ethical guidelines. Director of Kent State University's Media Law Center for Ethics and Access Jan Leach said the issues surrounding social media and ethics include authenticating sources of information, assuring reliability of information on linked sites, dealing with conflicts of interest and accountability concerns (Leach, 2009).

While there have been numerous national and international stories that show the power of social media to disseminate information to the masses, there are cases at the local level as well. Journalist Courtney Lowery wrote about how her local media organization, NewWest.Net in Montana, has rethought how journalists should be using social media as a reporting tool after a breaking news incident several years ago. When a building exploded in a downtown area, no local news organizations had reporters at the scene, but many witnesses started tweeting what they were seeing. They also posted photos and videos and shared emergency information via the tweets. "Here in Montana, this explosion was our 'aha' moment in experiencing how social media, Twitter, in particular, opens up new possibilities in journalism. Before that day, we'd used Twitter to push our stories, viewing it as another channel by which to market our content" (Lowery, 2009, p. 33).

During the past five years, journalists have started using social media more

in the newsroom, and they now see it as more valuable than they once did. In its latest survey of more than 500 print, online and broadcast journalists worldwide, the 2013 Oriella Digital Journalism Study found that 51% of journalists use social media to gather news stories. Journalists also see the value of social media for self-promotion. More than half of those surveyed, 55%, agree that blogs and social media are good ways for journalists to build their personal profiles and engage with their audience. The number of journalists who actively tweet increased from 47% in 2012 to 59% in 2013. In the United States, almost 80% of journalists surveyed report having a personal Twitter account (Oriella, 2013).

With numerous technological changes, the fundamental role of journalism is the same, to gather evidence from sources, write stories and share them with an audience. However, there are new and changing tools at their disposal. Researchers wrote that the organizations that will succeed in this “New Normal for News” will be those that keep abreast of these changes. “They will be the ones that integrate their storytelling – using conventional text, video, graphics, and interactive content – as well as harnessing the social media profiles of their own people, and those of key influencers around them” (Oriella, 2013, p. 9).

For the first time in 2013, the Oriella survey asked journalists how the success of their material is evaluated. The researchers describe how not that long ago, editors would have looked at the number of pieces making print, and the number of exclusive articles, as a yardstick of journalist performance, but times have changed. Media outlets use of social media to promote their own content, plus

the inherent “trackability” of digital content, means editors, managers and publishers have a much wider variety of metrics they can look at. Researchers said the single most important measure is the unique visits their articles receive, chosen by half of the journalists surveyed. This view is most strongly held in the United States and Canada, with 68% and 86% respectively. Journalists also responded about the growing importance of user engagement to measure success in terms of increases in social media followers, how many likes or tweets they get, which suggest editors are looking beyond sheer traffic volumes to track the social media reach (Oriella, 2013).

Despite all the changes occurring within newsrooms, the study found journalists remain upbeat about their jobs. Thirty-four percent said they believed digital media had improved the quality of their journalism over the past two years. However, the digital model is creating headaches for many of them. A third of journalists globally (and 50% in the U.S.) agreed that they are finding it harder to keep abreast of events on social media (Oriella, 2013). This sentiment aligns with previous research that has shown how journalists do not always embrace technological changes in a positive manner. Singer (2004) observed that journalists were resistant to the change associated with new technologies because of ingrained habits and skills. This supports Daniels and Hollifield (2002), who found that newsroom professionals react to change with resistance and negativity. Giles (1995) argued that journalists resist change because it threatens traditions and news routines. In their case study of new management strategies at the *St. Louis Post-*

*Dispatch*, Gade and Perry (2003) noted that journalists did not evaluate the changes as positive, although they had a greater stake in managerial decisions.

### ***Broadcast Journalists and Social Media***

In his annual survey of radio and television news stations in 2013, Bob Papper found the use of social media continues to expand in television and radio. In fact, more than 90% of news directors surveyed say their stations are using social media in some form. New directors say they are using Facebook and Twitter most often and list a variety of ways their newsrooms are using social media, including finding story leads and following up on stories. Stations are running some of the Facebook comments during newscasts, and they are asking for viewer feedback via Facebook. Television news directors say their staff members are having “conversations” and “interacting” with viewers. More than 87% are covering social media in their newscasts, and the same amount incorporates social media into storytelling (Papper, 2013).

Papper asked television news directors about the most innovative social media projects they had worked on, and answers vary. Many say they are using Facebook to explore special topics such as bullying, diabetes, immigration, and solving cold cases. A number of them also talked about contests, app development and trying to get more Facebook fans. Papper also found that audience engagement is growing with social media polls and live chats, and a few news directors mentioned inviting audience members to participate in daily news meetings.

Many stations note using social media for promotion of the website and on-air newscasts. They also are using contests on Facebook to attract more followers. Other social media use includes: Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Storify, Tumblr, Yelp, Hootsuite, Google+ and Instagram (Papper, 2013).

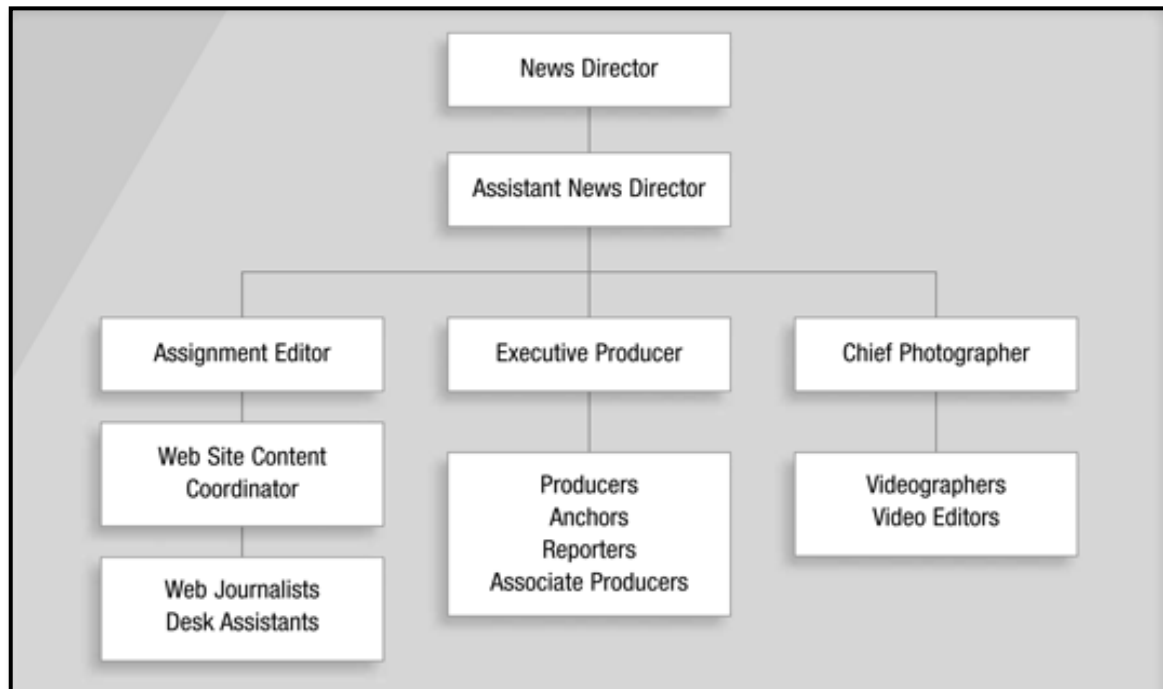
The way news is gathered and delivered is evolving just as rapidly as audience expectations, technological changes and job descriptions for journalists. All of these changes also mean the organization of a traditional television newsroom is evolving.

Figure 1 on the following page is one example of how a television newsroom might be organized. As one can note, a social media editor position is not listed but most likely would fall under the supervision of a news director or assistant news director. While it is not shown, a general manager is the supervisor of the news director and all other departments at the station.

### ***Audience Engagement and Social Media***

Facebook is popular among a diverse demographic mix, but other sites have unique demographic user profiles. Pinterest holds a stronger appeal to female users with women four times as likely as men to have a Pinterest account. Twitter and Instagram have particular appeal to younger adults, urban dwellers and non-whites. There also is substantial overlap between Twitter and Instagram user bases (Pew, 2014).

In terms of engagement, Facebook has high levels among its users, with 64% visiting the site at least once a day and 40% doing so multiple times a day. While



**Figure 1.** Example of a newsroom organizational chart. Adapted from *Television News* (p. 34) by Teresa Keller and Steve Hawkins, 2009, Scottsdale, Arizona: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.

Twitter and Instagram have significantly smaller numbers of users compared to Facebook, users of both these sites tend to visit them frequently. Some 57% of Instagram users visit the site at least a once day (35% doing some multiple times a day), and 46% of Twitter users are daily visitors (29% visiting multiple times a day) (Pew, 2014).

A media outlet's audience arguably has influence in the types of content posted online today more than ever before. Newspapers and television stations have long realized that audience interest in their stories, photographs and videos is responsible for generating higher ratings and circulation. What has changed is how in an online environment, audience members have more power and control over the content they see.

In a 2011 study, Howe asked online news consumers and social media users what motivated them to share news articles with individuals in their social networks. More than 90% said they shared news to stay connected to family and friends, and one third indicated they share news to be provocative and start a debate. More importantly, the survey asked participants how often they shared news articles on social media websites, 4% said they share multiple news articles multiple times a day, 12% said they one news article daily, and 19% reported they share news content a few times a week.



***Summary and Rationale***

Journalists' work roles, habits, and expectations continue to evolve as new technologies emerge. Most journalists in newsrooms around the world use social media daily to perform a variety of tasks, and in the United States, the use of social media among adults continues to grow. The population is relying more and more on social media to obtain their news, and they are engaging with members of the media at the same time.

Previous research has focused on how journalists are using social media to promote their stories or share breaking news and how consumers of news use Facebook and Twitter to obtain information. However, very few, if any, have focused on what role social media editors play in media organizations in the United States, especially television broadcast stations, and how this new role is challenging the traditional gatekeeping role.

The goal of this formative research is to examine how social media editors are functioning in local television newsrooms and engaging with their audience. Three primary questions will guide this exploratory study. In this study, the researcher wants to examine the role social media editors have in television newsrooms and what functions they perform. Also, the researcher will examine how editorial decisions are made about what type of content and when content will be shared on social media sites.

## Chapter 3

### Method

#### ***Qualitative Research***

The purpose of this study was to discover the role of social media editors and their functions in television newsrooms to determine if and how they are functioning as gatekeepers. A qualitative approach was used to determine the answers to these primary questions. The researcher selected the long interview method as the instrument of inquiry because of its descriptive and analytic purpose. As McCracken (1988) explains, the goal of the qualitative interview is “to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one’s culture construes the world. How many and what kinds of people hold these categories and assumptions is not, in fact, the compelling issue” (p. 17). The long interview method allows a researcher into the lifeworld of an individual to see the content and pattern of their daily experiences (McCracken, 1988).

In this study, the researcher studied the phenomenon of the role of social media editors in television newsrooms, and participants in these positions are the ones who had experiences they described. One reason for using an interview approach is to create a dialogue between the participants and the researcher. The interviews involved dialogue that ensured data emerged from the voices of the participants. Categories and themes emerged from the participants because they served as the experts (Angen, 2000).

By conducting qualitative research inquiries in this study, the researcher hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons governing such behavior. From an epistemological standpoint, qualitative methodology focuses on the language, signs and meaning present during an observation. Studies using qualitative inquiry approach data analysis from a holistic and contextual standpoint while maintaining methodological rigor and transparency. Qualitative research maintains methodological rigor by using checkpoints such as carefully coded data and themes discerned and documented for consistently and reliably (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

### ***The Long Interview Method***

The qualitative method the researcher used was the long interview, which is one of the most utilized and powerful methods in qualitative research according to McCracken (1988). “The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (1988, p. 9). The best way to understand people is to try to understand their reality from their perspective. What they say, how they say it, and even what they do not say gives the researcher insight into another reality and another truth. The best way to understand people is to try to understand their reality from their perspective.

This method is consistent with the assumptions of phenomenology since phenomenology assumes the only access to realities is through the conscious expressions of those who live and create the realities (Gurwitsch, 1974). According to Gurwitsch, human beings “have a certain conception of the world they live in, and

of themselves as living in that world; in some way or other they interpret whatever they encounter in their world” (p. 129). In this study, those conscious expressions, conceptions and interpretations are the words of the participants.

While the long interview method can be time consuming for participants, and some may have inhibitions about being interviewed, McCracken (1998) and other researchers contend there are benefits to respondents when using this method:

This characteristic of the qualitative interview leads to other benefits, including the opportunity to make oneself the center of another’s attention (Ablon, 1977; Von Hoffman and Cassidy, 1956), to state a case that is otherwise unheard (Lenzoff, 1956; Wax, 1952), to engage in an intellectually challenging process of self-scrutiny (Merton & Kendall, 1946), and even to experience a kind of catharsis (Gorden, 1956). In essence, for most participants, there are more benefits than risks associated with the qualitative interview. (p. 28)

One advantage the researcher had during this study was that the participants interviewed work in journalism and are used to interviewing others as part of their job. Therefore, they are inclined to be more comfortable in an interview setting than those who do not often engage in interviewing.

### ***Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews***

Due to the participants in this study living and working in more than 20 cities around the country, and the location of the researcher, face-to-face interviews were not possible. Telephone interviews were the most logical and secure way to conduct

the research. Even though traditional long interviews are conducted face to face, research has shown telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research. As McCracken (1988) has written, participation in qualitative interviewing can be time consuming; therefore the researcher may wish to do whatever is possible to maximize data quality while minimizing imposition on participants. In the present study, the researcher interviewed the participants while they were working demanding jobs, and there were occasions where an interview was rescheduled, postponed and even cut off due to the participant's schedule and responsibilities in the newsroom.

Telephone interviews can provide an opportunity to obtain data from participants who are difficult to access in person. (Tausig & Freeman, 1988). Another consideration is cost savings, and telephone interviews are a cost-effective method of data collection when compared to face-to-face interviews around the country. As Sturges and Hanrahan write, "this savings makes sense only when the data are of sufficient quality," (2004, p. 110).

The primary concern when comparing telephone and face-to-face interviews is the quality of the data collected. Creswell (1998) says the use of a telephone prevents the researchers from seeing the participants' informal and nonverbal communication but also says telephone interviews can be appropriate when the researcher does not have access to the participants.

### ***Participants***

In this study, the participants the researcher interviewed were individuals responsible for their television newsrooms' social media efforts. Because this is a developing position in newsrooms around the country, there are varying job titles. Some individuals are known as social media editors, social media producers or social media managers. Others are responsible for their newsrooms' social media accounts, but their titles include the word digital in them.

The researcher wanted to interview participants in a variety of television markets and not solely in one area of the country. The reason for this diversity is to gain a better understanding of how these new positions are functioning in television newsrooms across the country.

Initially, the exact number of participants was unknown because qualitative researchers continue collecting data until "saturation" or "redundancy" is reached (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher interviewed 23 individuals in these positions in small, medium and large television markets in order to explore a diverse population. In the discussion of findings, participants are referred to by a number to protect their privacy.

### ***Recruitment of Participants***

The researcher recruited the participants in a variety of ways. Because of the researcher's professional journalism and educational backgrounds, she knows former colleagues and students who are working at a numerous television stations across the country. She contacted these individuals via email and social media to

discover if their newsroom employs someone in a social media editor position. She started interviews with this initial group of participants. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participant if he or she knew of other social media editors in different markets, and many of them provided names and contact information.

In addition to this approach, the researcher found information about a social media conference held in the fall of 2013 with social media editors from television stations around the country present. The website included names of these individuals, so the researcher found contact information online for them and contacted them about participating in the voluntary study. The researcher used both recruitment techniques in hopes of obtaining a higher number of volunteers for the study.

### ***Procedures***

Individuals who volunteered to participate in the research were contacted via email by the researcher to arrange a time for the interview. Once a day and time were set, the researcher then emailed a copy of the consent form (Appendix A), approved by the University of Tennessee's Institutional Research Board, to each participant prior to the interview to review. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher informed each participant the interview would be recorded so the researcher could transcribe it. The researcher asked each participant if he or she had any questions or concerns about the research and explained that by verbally consenting to participate, they understood there were no foreseeable risks, their

answers would remain confidential, and participation in the study was voluntary. All participants provided verbal consent. The participants were interviewed via telephone with the participant in her or her office and the researcher in her office. The electronic copy of the consent form each participant received contained the researcher's contact information in case the participants had any future questions or concerns.

The initial recruitment email told participants they would be interviewed via telephone about their roles in the newsrooms. As McCracken (1988) points out, one of the dangers a researcher must confront with the long interview method is not to reveal the objectives of the research so the participant will provide "spontaneous and unstudied responses" (p. 27). Since the researcher wanted the true realities of the participants, they were not told specific questions in advance of the interview.

In order to build a level of trust with the participants, they were assured of confidentiality and told that all files would be secured, and the final report would not include any names or distinguishing factors that could lead others to identify their comments.

All of the interviews were recorded on the researcher's lap top computer using a sound recording and editing program known as Audacity. Each interview was recorded, so transcripts could be typed and systematically analyzed. Recording the interviews, instead of simply taking notes, allowed the researcher to concentrate on listening and responding to the interviewee. According to Hancock (1998), taped interview discussions flow better because the interviewer does not have to write



down the response to one question before moving on to the next. "Tape recording ensures that the whole interview is captured and provides complete data for analysis so cues that were missed the first time can be recognized when listening to the recording."

The researcher worked from a discussion guide (Appendix B) comprised of fifteen to eighteen open-ended questions. Discussion guides are indispensable with the long interview method according to McCracken (1998). He states that a guide ensures the material is covered in the same way for each participant by establishing a direction for the interview thus allowing the interviewer to concentrate on the words of the interviewee (p. 24). The role of a discussion guide is to serve as starting point for a conversation in which the course of the interview is determined mainly by the participants.

The first interview question was, "State your official title in the newsroom and then describe your role in the newsroom" most often followed by "What are some of your daily responsibilities?" This second question allowed the researcher to learn more about the daily responsibilities of social media editors. The next question asked the participants to discuss their station's' social media efforts and list the social media accounts their station has established.

Based on the data and the initial analyses of the first few interviews, the researcher refined the discussion guide for the remaining interviews. Using the grounded theory perspective, researchers are encouraged to modify interview questions "on the basis of emerging relevant concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.

207).

During the first interview, the participant discussed how often she posts to social media and how she trains others in the newsroom how to best utilize their social media accounts. This prompted the interviewer to ask about how the participant not only uses social media but also who is ultimately responsible for a station's social media plan. This question was included in subsequent interviews.

The remaining questions asked if participants had faced ethical dilemmas related to social media use and how they handled these situations. They also were asked about their stations' plans and efforts for future endeavors in social media.

In order to determine how many interviews to conduct, the redundancy measure was utilized, in which the number of interviews continued until there were clear themes and patterns in the comments of the participants (Taylor, 1994). A content comparison between the first five interview transcripts and the last five interviews showed a high level of redundancy among concepts and themes, so the researcher decided to work with the 23 collected and ceased further interviews. McCracken (1998) even states that eight respondents is usually sufficient for most research projects (p. 17).

Once the researcher determined that redundancy was being reached with comments, the researcher transcribed all remaining interviews. Additional categories and themes were identified to begin the analysis of how social media editors describe their roles and functions in the newsroom and how editorial decisions about content posted to social media sites.

The 23 interviews were conducted via telephone from February 13 to March 31, 2014, and each interview lasted from 25 to 75 minutes and yielded a typed transcript of about six to ten pages each. The researcher transcribed all 23 interviews. Transcription provided a full script of the interview, so the researcher could analyze the key themes surfacing from the text. The transcriptions also contributed to the credibility of the study since the researcher included excerpts from the transcripts in the findings section of this paper.

### ***Analysis***

Data were analyzed through the process of analytic induction, which consisted of examining the transcripts for themes and categories to develop a representation of meaning. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this process allows the researcher to conceptualize and reduce data in order to develop categories and themes. Goetz and LeCompte (1981) outline analytic induction in seven steps: 1) scanning of data collected in field notes to identify categories and attributes; 2) additional scanning of the data for other examples of categories; 3) creating typologies for categories; 4) determining the relationships that exist between categories; 5) creating hypotheses from the relationships discovered; 6) seeking examples that contradict hypotheses; and 7) continually refining hypotheses until all examples are accounted for and explained.

The researcher followed these steps of analysis and developed a series of themes and categories that answered all three exploratory research questions about

the roles and functions of social media editors in television newsrooms and how editorial decisions are made about content posted on social media.

### ***Open Coding***

The researcher coded all transcripts line-by-line, using an open coding procedure. Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this open coding procedure as the “analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). This process allows the researcher to uncover thoughts and ideas. During the open coding procedure, codes/concepts were created in a separate Microsoft Excel file. Following each interview, a separate summary list was created for each interview that contained all the concepts for that individual interview. As interviews were conducted, a master list of concepts was also created, with each concept labeled by participant (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc.). The researcher used consistent codes when possible to mark similar thoughts, ideas, and behaviors. As a result, when the lists were electronically alphabetized, patterns were more easily uncovered.

### ***Axial Coding***

Following open coding, the researcher conducted the axial coding process as concepts were collapsed and related to broad categories or themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Categories are the “cornerstones” of developing theory as they represent concepts in a broad or abstract manner. Generated through a process of making comparisons that note similarities and differences, categories provide the means by which theory can be integrated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As a result, an

outline, or categories and subcategories, emerged. The data were reassembled as the relationships among the categories and subcategories were further uncovered (Strauss & Corbin, 1988).

As noted by Strauss and Corbin (1998), each of the categories, derived from the data, represented the phenomenon, or helped to answer, “What’s going on here?” (p. 113). Each of the categories had sub-categories. During the axial coding process, the researcher followed Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) suggestion to ask “Why?” or “How come?” (p. 127). As a result, subcategories helped the researcher to create and further clarify each category by answering questions such as “when, why, where, how, and with what consequence?” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). These questions also assisted as the researcher identified contextual factors and linked them with process, or what is called the paradigm. While context does not determine experience or set the course of action, it does identify the sets of conditions in which problems and/or situations arise to which persons respond through some form of action/interaction and emotion (process), and in doing so it brings about consequences that in turn might go back to impact upon conditions. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 88)

As the researcher analyzed data for context, she continued to ask questions and make comparisons. These comparisons uncovered conditions, actions, interactions, emotions, and consequences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Conditions “allow a conceptual way of grouping answers to the questions about why, where, how, and what happens” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 89). In other words, the

researcher attempted to identify circumstances or conditions that lead participants to have a particular response. Responses made by participants to situations, problems, or events were noted.

### ***Credibility and Trustworthiness***

One of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers is that of internal validity. Positivist researchers are highly concerned with the internal validity of their studies and if they are measuring what they intend to measure. According to Merriam (1998), the qualitative investigator's equivalent concept, credibility, deals with the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality?" Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness.

The entire analysis process aims to examine the lived experiences and realities from the ones who produced the experience rather than imposition of other people's interpretations. It should be the interpretations of the participants in the phenomenon under study that define the commonalties of the lived experience in the phenomenon. It is not the researcher's own thinking of the phenomenon, the other researchers' experiences of the phenomenon, or the theoretical descriptions of the phenomenon that are under analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study, the researcher studied the phenomenon of social media editors in television newsrooms. In order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, the researcher took several steps to guarantee its integrity.

Member checks is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider the single most

important provision that can be made to strengthen a study's credibility.

Participants are asked to review the transcripts of what they said during the interview, and the emphasis is whether they think their words match what they actually intended to say. Therefore, after the interviews were transcribed, the transcriptions were e-mailed to the participants for review in order to guarantee that the comments of the participants were understood correctly. All but six participants responded and indicated their approval. The researcher contacted the participants who did not respond two additional times via e-mail, but never received a response. Three respondents offered minor corrections of factual points.

### ***Conclusion***

The current study was guided by the qualitative methodology explained in this chapter. The findings from this study, organized thematically, are presented in the following chapter. Excerpts from participant interviews are included in the findings for illustration and justification.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

After 23 interviews with participants around the country who are responsible for their television stations' social media efforts, the researcher found recurring themes in the data. The core category, or phenomenon, was the role of social media editors in local television newsrooms. Through interviews with participants, the researcher sought to answer several exploratory research questions: How do social media editors in local television newsrooms describe their role? What functions do they perform? How are editorial decisions made in the newsroom about what type of content and when content will be shared on social media sites?

Before providing data that answer the primary questions, a general description of the participants is provided. The list of television markets and their size rankings is listed in Table 1 on the following page. Participants had varying job titles, including social media editor/producer, digital content producer, interactive media director, web and social media manager, but all participants were in charge of their television station's social media efforts.

#### ***Characteristics of Participants***

Of the 23 participants, 15 of them work in one of the top 50 television markets, and 11 are in the top 25. Only one participant was not in a top 100 market. Out of the participants, thirteen were men and ten were women. All but three have a broadcast journalism or communication-based college degree, and 15 of them



**Table 1: Television Markets and Size Rankings**

<b>Television Market</b>	<b>Market Size Ranking</b>
New York, NY	1
Los Angeles, CA	2
Oakland, CA	6
Atlanta, GA	8
Seattle, WA	14
Miami, FL	16
Denver, CO	18
Orlando, FL	19
Pittsburgh, PA	23
Charlotte, NC	24
Indianapolis, IN	25
Cincinnati, OH	34
Greensboro, NC	46
Jacksonville, FL	47
Austin, TX	49
Richmond, VA (2 participants)	58
Knoxville, TN (2 participants)	59
Tulsa, OK	61
Dayton, OH	64
Huntsville, AL	82
Albany, GA	147

\*Source: Nielsen Ratings, 2014

graduated from college less than 10 years ago. One participant is still enrolled as a college student and started working at his station as an intern, but his position is now full time. Twenty of the 23 participants said they have held this social media position for less than two to three years at their respective stations. All but five of the participants report directly to the news director. One reports to the general manager, while two others said they report to an assistant news director or member of the digital content team.

While social media editors have been employed at national television networks for approximately five to seven years, their growth at the local level has not been as rapid. As mentioned previously, these social media positions are relatively new in local television newsrooms, and many of them were created within the past year or two. The researcher asked each participant how long he or she has held this position and how long the position has existed at the station. Participant 19 said his role is a “make it up as we go along” type of role because he was recently hired and there is not a job description for his position currently. Several other participants shared his sentiment.

*Participant 16: I actually just started last month, so I'm still trying to figure out a lot about what our station has been doing with social media, but I've already made some changes, and most have been well received.*

*Participant 10: About a year ago, our parent company made funding available for this position, and I was hired. Before that, producers shared in the role of creating and maintain our social media.*

There were a few participants (2, 12, 13, and 22) who said they had worked in the newsroom for eight to ten years in a variety of roles, and their current position had evolved during that time.

*Participant 13: I started about eight or nine years ago and was part time in the graphics department. I then moved to web department seven years ago and now I oversee all content posted on social media.*

In terms of how their positions evolved in their newsrooms, a couple of participants said they actually created their jobs after working in the newsroom in another position, most often dealing with the station's website.

*Participant 6: I created the position two years ago, and I've been here 15 years. I started off as an associate news producer in television and became a producer and then executive producer and decided I needed to change some things, and our newsrooms needed to be better organized with online and social media efforts.*

*Participant 13: I worked here part time for a year after interning during college, and I did a little bit of everything. I kept telling our news director that we needed more of a social media presence, and when he was able to fund a full-time position, I was hired.*

A few of the participants said they worked as reporters and/or producers in a newsroom before transitioning to their current role related to social media, but the majority of participants who graduated from college more than 10 years ago said their previous positions in a newsroom involved digital content and the web,

and they did not work as a reporter. Some of them also have transitioned to a management role.

*Participant 7: My title changed from social media editor to executive producer of social media because of my new managerial role. I now tell reporters about what they should post and how often. I have the authority to tell them what to do on social media. Our web team reports to me for their social media activities.*

*Participant 17: There are three of us on the social media and web team. I handle social media but I can handle the website if I need to since that is what I used to do. When I'm not around, the other two handle some aspects of social media, but ultimately, it's up to me to carry out our station's goals for social media.*

### ***Role in the Newsroom***

The goal of this research was to examine how social media editors at local television stations disseminate information and engage with their audience. Several exploratory questions guided the study, including how social media editors describe their role in the newsroom and what functions do they perform. The researcher started each interview by asking the participant to state his or her official title and then describe their role in the newsroom. The majority of participants said they are the “point person” for all social media efforts at their station and maintain their station's social media accounts.

*Participant 18: I'm constantly on our social media sites. I'm always looking at them. It's 100 percent of my job.*

*Participant 15: I'm keeping an eye on the social media trends in television news but also just in general. I oversee the social media strategy. I have conversations with the news manager and reporters and anchors about how best to use social media.*

Participants also mentioned how social media is part of everyone's job in the newsroom. Many had statements similar to these two.

*Participant 2: I work with almost every person in the newsroom. The goal is to be working with them and help them increase our station's social media presence. Social media isn't an island in the newsroom.*

*Participant 4: I am the primary person but social media is a job that everyone in the newsroom takes part of when they can.*

While the participants all mentioned one of their main responsibilities is posting to social media sites throughout the day, there is also delegation and management of others in the newsroom.

*Participant 5: We have a social media schedule that I create and assign, and then I delegate out the duties and make sure things are executed correctly. My role is everything from training new people and communicating with sales and promotions and coverage planning with live streams. It's quite broad. At a higher level, it's editorial judgment and strategy, and on a granular level, it's actually adding content.*

### ***Functions and Tasks in the Newsroom***

Overall, participants listed a variety of functions they perform when also describing their role in the newsroom. As indicated in Table 2, they are responsible for posting content to social media sites, developing strategies and best practices for social media use and training staff members about how to effectively use social media. Participants also mentioned how part of their role is to engage with audience members on social media and also figure out ways to stay current with social media and learn about new forms of social media.

#### ***Posting to Social Media***

All participants said they and other staff members post to a variety of social media accounts in their newsrooms, as indicated in Table 3, but the primary ones are Facebook and Twitter.

*Participant 23: Facebook and Twitter are the ones we spend the most time with because that is where our audience is, so we are too. They are different beasts, but we have a loyal following on each, so they drive what we do each day.*

Other social media accounts mentioned were Instagram, Google+, Tumblr, Pinterest and Vine, but the majority of participants said they were still figuring out how best to use these accounts to engage with their audience.

*Participant 14: We know Instagram is a growing medium, especially among younger people. We're trying to get to the millennials. We know they aren't on Facebook as much as their parents are.*

**Table 2: Tasks Performed by Social Media Editors**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Done By (# of participants)</b> <b>Total participants: 23</b>
Posting to social media	23
Training colleagues	23
Engaging with audience	23
Developing best practices	21
Strategizing goals	20
Attending story meetings	15

**Table 3: Social Media Used by Participants**

<b>Type of Social Media</b>	<b>Used by (# of participants)</b> <b>Total participants: 23</b>
Facebook	23
Twitter	23
Instagram	20
Pinterest	15
Vine	10
Tumblr	9
Google+	9



*Participant 11: We make Instagram more fun. We include photos and videos of our reporters and anchors, so it's not serious news. People go there to look at photos, not for news.*

Another participant (17) said he thinks Instagram will soon change its format to look more like Facebook and also sell ads, which will change his strategy for using it. He cited how Facebook purchased Instagram in 2012, so it would be natural for Instagram to eventually adopt some of Facebook's characteristics. Of the participants who have a Pinterest account, all of them said it is used primarily to post recipes that have been a part of a cooking segment of one of the television newscasts.

Many participants also described how when they started their current positions, their stations had established social media accounts, but they were not necessarily used for news content.

*Participant 12: I can remember my previous boss creating a Twitter account in 2009, but we weren't sure what to post on there. Our station's Facebook page was first set up to show behind the scenes photos. We didn't post any news stories on there, and that has obviously changed, and now it's a big money maker for us.*

The types of content posted to social media are not the same for each type of social media. Various factors go into deciding what type of stories to post on social media and how to post them. As participants 1 and 6 explain, every story is different.

*Participant 1: You would want to have different posts for Twitter and Facebook because they are different. Some places might have them linked together, but we don't. We discourage that. People on Twitter think differently than people on Facebook. One hundred and forty characters on Facebook looks weird, so we discourage that.*

*Participant 6: Every story that comes in and every decision we make, we must run through the prism of social media. Is this a story that will work well for social media? Is it worthy of putting up on social media? If the answer is no, you move onto the next thing. If it's yes, then you ask which form of social media, how do you post it, as a photo? A link? As a question? A fill in the blank? A "Please like this post," or a "Please share this post."*

One participant compared Facebook and Twitter to two different types of rivers as an explanation for how he handles posting to them.

*Participant 9: Twitter is a much more of an immediate form of social media. It's a fast moving river. I post a lot of relevant and breaking news here. We do a lot of retweets. Facebook is a slower moving river. If I was to bombard people on Facebook as much as I do on Twitter, we'd get a negative reaction with the comments. The more posts we have each day, we notice the overall reach is lowered with an excessive amount of Facebook posts.*

The comments from the participants indicate that many of them know their audience and the types of stories and posts they want to see and those that they do not want to read. Several of them used phrases such as, "I know our audience."

*Participant 14: On Facebook, I craft something that I think is going to build engagement levels. If we post a story about Kim Kardashian on our Facebook page, people will rebel and post negative comments, so why should I waste time doing that? But I know our audience loves their pets. I know our audience. They also want to know about crime in their neighborhood but not necessarily a crime that happened in another state. It's about how it affects them.*

In addition, participants discussed that while news stories are important, they might not make it onto social media because people are not talking about them.

*Participant 12: We're going for talker stories. What are people talking about? Sometimes, it's newsworthy but sometimes, it's not. Viral videos of babies laughing and kittens playing, that's not news, but people love it and want to see it, so we post it on social media.*

*Participant 14: We put news on social media at times, but I have to be honest. During the State of the Union address, I posted a question about who people want as the next president, and it didn't do that great. People didn't comment. We posted it because it's important news, but people aren't going to Facebook for that. If they want to know about that, they'll go some place else.*

In addition to asking the types of posts on social media, the researcher also asked participants how often they post to social media. Obviously, all participants said they post numerous posts a day, but the rationale for frequency varied. Responses ranged from “every 30 minutes” to “every hour” to “only when there is something worthy of posting.”

*Participant 10: Last year, we tried to make sure we posted every hour no matter what it was. This was advice from our parent company. However, things have changed, and they are hammering on our posts being very engaged with lots of shares, likes and comments. So now sometimes I'll post every 15-20 minutes. When I look on there and see comments, likes and shares are dying down on Facebook, I'll post something new. On Twitter, we don't even worry about it, we just tweet as much as we want. We use an app that pulls some of our website headlines and automatically tweets it.*

*Participant 12: We try to post every 30 minutes to an hour on the site. If you've gone an hour without posting, you need to evaluate what you're working on.*

*Participant 13: We post to Facebook every hour. But in breaking news situations that goes out the window. Last week, we had a major snowstorm, and we were posting every 15 minutes.*

*Participant 6: We don't have a rule for a certain number of posts or tweets per day. If things are happening that are worthy of a Facebook post, we will post it on Facebook. It could mean that certain posts are 10 minutes apart, and we might go for two hours without posting something again.*

As indicated by participant 13 and others, breaking news situations create more frequent posts on social media. Participants also described how Twitter is used more for breaking news because that is where audience members go first when they hear about breaking news. Another topic that was discussed in relation to the

frequency of posts was the time of day when stations are experiencing more traffic on their social media sites.

*Participant 5: We have a lot of traffic early in the morning as people are getting ready for work and school. They want to know what happened overnight and about the day's weather. I also try to post more during the noon hour and then again later in the evening around 8 p.m. when people are home and want to catch up on things.*

### ***Training***

All participants discussed how one of their major roles is training and working with other newsrooms staff members. They described themselves as the “go to” person and “trouble shooter” when another newsroom employee had a question about how to do something on a social media site.

*Participant 16: I do a lot of informal training on a daily and weekly basis when people have questions about what they should post or even how to abbreviate words so they fit in a tweet, but I've led more formal training workshops, and we plan to do more of these in the future as social media continues to change.*

*Participant 20: Whenever someone new starts, it's my job to set up their social media accounts but also see what they already know about social media and explain what we're doing here, and how they will be a part of it. You'd be surprised that even young reporters coming out of college aren't really sure how to use Twitter effectively. They might have had an account while in college but they don't really use it.*

Almost all the participants said the on-air talent, anchors and reporters, were required or highly encouraged to have Facebook and Twitter accounts. In some markets, participants had passwords for all station talent as a way to manage them if necessary, but many participants said they only helped the talent set them up and then made suggestions about what to post and when to post on social media. Many acknowledged that it was more difficult to teach veteran anchors and reporters about social media and its growing importance in the newsroom.

*Participant 2: All reporters are encouraged to have their own social media pages, but it's not a requirement. Some of the older ones aren't as into it. I give them suggestions about what to post and when, and then show them the social media analytics, so they can see the proof that this really works. I show them what is successful and why.*

*Participant 5: Everyone has Facebook and Twitter. We set them all up. Once we've set them up, it's up to them to go and post. They have a lot of direct involvement with the accounts. We do have control over them, mainly just in case they get hacked or leave the station or we need to delete them for some reason.*

*Participant 10: Most talent has social media accounts. It's very much expected. We're still trying to work out guidelines and rules for that. When you're dealing with newsrooms, we have a range of ages. We have people straight out of college, and some of our veteran anchors have been here more than 20 or 30*

*years. Our parent company is handing down some expectations that we'll be able to put into place during the next year.*

Twelve of the participants said their station does not require the talent to have social media accounts at this time, but they are working to change that, and several mentioned how there is a push from their parent company to require all anchors and reporters to establish and also maintain social media accounts. Interestingly, one participant made the point that it is better to not have an account at all than to have one and never post to it.

*Participant 12: We don't require talent to have one, but it's heavily expected with Facebook. However, I believe that you shouldn't have an account unless you're going to post to it regularly. It's worse to have one and not use it then to not have one at all. That sends the wrong message to our audience, and it's not going to build any engagement.*

The types of posts anchors and reporters create on social media was also a topic that emerged from the interviews. Participants noted that because reporters are often away from the station and in the field, they were encouraged to tweet on Twitter about the three to four stories they are working on for the day. These tweets serve as teases for upcoming newscasts. Anchors also can tease stories for upcoming newscasts, but they are encouraged to post more on Facebook than Twitter.

*Participant 11: Management says reporters must tweet at least three times per day. Most do it more often than that. It was a rule but now they like it. Anchors*

*aren't in the field, so they don't have to post as often. They might post a photo of them on set or working on a story in the newsroom on Facebook.*

While participants discussed training others in the newsroom, several talked about conferences and workshops they have attended to receive training about social media, and many of them said they have frequent conversations about best practices for social media with colleagues at other stations that are owned by the same parent company.

### ***Developing Best Practices***

Devising a best practices or set of guidelines for social media use is a task many of the participants have undertaken or are in the process of developing. Eighteen of the social media editors interviewed said these best practices are in a written tangible form. Several participants mentioned how their corporate or parent companies have instructed them to create these best practices. Other parent companies have established best practices for stations to follow in order to have a uniform set of guidelines.

*Participant 5: We have best practices that were handed down from corporate, as well as best practices that we've tailored for our station at the local level. Corporate might send out guidelines for what makes a good Facebook post for example, but then we'll have specific best practices for how we want to implement those, what specific hash tags we're going to use, and how we feel we should use the post.*



*Participant 10: I've worked on a style guide. Corporate has also generated some guidelines such as don't say anything on social media that you wouldn't say on television.*

*Participant 2: We do have social media best practices. Most of it has to do with accuracy. We're going to have more guidelines to follow, and they closely follow the journalism best practices and ethical guidelines that we use for news.*

However, a few participants said they purposely do not have a set of best practices because social media changes too rapidly, and by the time they developed guidelines, some would be outdated.

*Participant 6: Everything changes so fast, that each time we put out a best practices, some of them are almost instantly obsolete. Nothing is written down, but it's more of an institutional knowledge. The core team will figure something out, and then let everyone else know. Having a social media bible, we haven't found it to be quite fruitful because things are changing so fast.*

When participants discussed their best practices, some also mentioned ethical guidelines and said the same basic ethical principles their stations have been using for stories that air on television or are published on the website also apply to social media posts. The researcher then asked a question about ethics and social media and if there are ethical issues specific to social media. Their responses indicate that ethical guidelines are the same for newscasts and social media.

*Participant 1: We use the same ethical standards for our social accounts as we would on the web and the same goes for TV. We're not going to post a picture of*

*a bloody body in a war zone if it's too graphic. If it involves a suicide, we generally don't report on that, so we're not going to post on social media either.*

However, several participants discussed how there are issues unique to ethical guidelines and social media posts. Journalists do not usually endorse or support specific causes or political candidates publicly, but social media has created a "grey area."

*Participant 10: On their Twitter, it will say, "Retweets aren't an endorsement." No, that's not acceptable. It's unethical because you're not going to say something on a newscast that is a negative opinion about someone or something, and you can't do that on social media either. Some reporters forget this and feel Twitter is their personal platform, but if the account is tied to the station, then we have a problem.*

*Participant 15: We've had discussions about separation of personal and company accounts. If their Facebook or Twitter account has the station's call letters in it, it's our property.*

*Participant 23: There are definitely some grey areas with ethics and social media because just by "liking" a page on Facebook, some audience members think that is showing favoritism or supporting a certain group, so, we basically have to "like" everything and everyone or not "like" anything.*

### ***Engaging with Audience***

All participants discussed ways they engage and interact with their audience, with several referring to an engaged audience as a loyal audience. Many participants talked about how they respond to questions and comments posted on social media.

*Participant 10: We have a huge focus on Facebook. It makes up about 92 percent of our social media work. It's where most of our fans and web traffic are, and people love to talk to us on Facebook. I have conversations back and forth. I answer a lot of programming questions, complaints, where can I find more information. I try to respond to each question on there.*

However, answering questions is just one form of engagement. Participants said they also shared content posted by users, whether it was information, images, videos or opinions. Some stations worked social media opinion polls into daily newscasts and asked viewers what types of stories they should cover.

*Participant 1: I'll work with our afternoon producer to generate a question earlier in the day about something happening in our community and what they think about it. Then, I'll actually appear on the 4 p.m. newscast live in the studio to share some of what our audience members are talking about. We promote this on social media, so people will hopefully tune into our live newscast to possibly hear or see the comments they posted to social media. It lets them know that we are engaged with them and care about their opinions.*

*Participant 8: We ask for input from our audience, which is how we engage with them. It's not just asking them to like a certain post. One thing we like to*

*do is ask yes or no questions such as, "Do you agree with this idea?" We know the more people engage with a post, Facebook will rank it higher in a news feed. Everyone who uses Facebook, whether you're a news station or Pepsi, is trying to find out better ways to get fans to engage with your posts, so they'll keep coming back to your Facebook page. We have to be authentic.*

Multiple participants discussed how engagement is necessary because the fundamental goal is to drive audience members to their websites and newscasts online and on television.

*Participant 22: Ultimately, we want audience members to like our posts on Facebook, share them and most importantly, click on the link that takes them to our website. We want them watching our newscasts online, so of course they are seeing the ads.*

While the participants discussed ways they each engage with the audience, they also discussed the importance of having the reporters and anchors contribute to this process by responding to comments and questions.

*Participant 19: We want our talent engaged with the audience because that is who they see and hear every day and know their faces. However, reporters and anchors have other job responsibilities out in the field and on air, so they can't do it nearly as much as we do, but it's still important for them to engage.*

### ***Attending Meetings and Analyzing***

While the majority of the participants said part of their job is be a part of the morning and afternoon editorial meetings with reporters and producers to learn

about the stories the station is covering that day, they now have an active voice in these meetings, a more recent change that has occurred in newsroom culture.

*Participant 13: During the past year, social media is a huge part of our daily discussions with everyone involved about what we're going to post on social media that day. In our morning meeting, we go over social media successes from the day before and talk about how many likes did we pick up, what was our best tweet. If one of our reporters did something great on social media, we give them a shout out.*

Another theme that developed during the interviews was how participants used analytics to show how their social media posts are working. One of their newer roles involves short and long-term strategic planning and handling analytics.

*Participant 7: We can do a lot of things on social media but if you can't track it, then it's not worth it. We need to know what posts are working, what's the best time to see one and on what form of social media.*

*Participant 22: I never thought I would care about numbers as much as I do. We've always known ratings for television newscasts are important, but social media is different. I feel we have more control. We're going after a certain numbers of likes, shares, comments and retweets. We need to reach a certain number of our audience each day for our posts to be successful.*

### **Strategizing Goals**

Toward the end of each interview, the researcher asked each participant about goals they, their stations and parent companies have for social media in the

future. Responses fell into three main categories: create more social media followers and fans, increase social media use throughout the newsroom and start using newer forms of social media.

Some participants said their station has a definitive amount of Facebook fans or Twitter followers they want to obtain during the next year. Others, however, said there is no set amount, but they want to experience an increase.

*Participant 13: For the end of 2014, our goal is to get 150,000 likes on Facebook. Our goals are more about growth and expanding it to other social media sites. We're hoping our content will get us there.*

*Participant 1: We're always wanting to increase followers on social media, but we don't have a specific number. Also, a goal for my position is to be in more newscasts and contribute social content to those. They've also added a morning reporter who does what I do. She talks about what is trending on social media.*

Participants said they have used different tactics to increase the number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers. The most common practice was to sponsor a contest where people could “like” a Facebook page or become a follower on Twitter, and once they did either of these, they were entered into a contest to win a prize, such as an iPad, television, money or even a trip. While these contests quickly increase the number of overall likes and followers, they do not always prove to be a long-term way to engage audience members. Several participants said their focus was less on creating more likes and fans and concentrating on the audience members they already have and keeping them engaged.

*Participant 12: We used to do those contests and they helped us build the foundation for our fan base, but now we have to focus on keeping those fans. It used to be that all fans saw our posts on Facebook, but that has changed and now they don't. Our content has to be strong, and our posts do better with only 100,000 compared to a station in this market with 500,000 fans. They can brag they have more likes but no one is interacting or engaging with them.*

*Participant 10: When it comes to Facebook fans and Twitter followers, we're in the upper 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in our parent company. We have very high engagement levels. And one thing we pride ourselves on is that we never have held a contest to gain more likes. For instance, "Like our page for a chance to win a free iPad." We have the capability to do that but chose not to. If we buy these fans, people don't care about our station. Down the road, these fake fans are going to hurt our engagement.*

Instead of sponsoring contests, some participants said their social media content and engagement with their current audience members is what will increase their fans and followers.

*Participant 6: Of course, numbers are at the back of our minds. Right now, we're approaching 100,000 likes on our Facebook page, but we're not telling people during newscasts to like us on Facebook. We're doing strategic things to get our brand out there and posting interesting stories that people want to see, like and share. We have the "Field of Dreams" mentality that if we build it, they*

*will come, so we want to create social media sites that people want to come and visit and talk about and share. And we'll get page likes based off of that.*

They also said they need to ensure there is adequate coverage on social media at night and on the weekends. Several participants said other positions in the newsrooms post to social media overnight and on the weekends, but there can always be more posts and more engagement (in the form of replies to comments and questions) on social media.

*Participant 10: We're working on a social media strategy plan that we're planning to submit to corporate. We're trying to figure out what resources we have to better staff our people, and part of that is going to be how to handle weekend events. I work Monday-Friday from 8-5, and there's a lot that happens on the weekend that would be good for social media, so we're going to set it up so that people who are weekend producers will now take on additional social media posting responsibilities.*

"Getting everyone on the social media bandwagon" (Participant 23) is a goal many participants expressed.

*Participant 1: Social is just part of the daily routine. It's not a fad. It's here to stay. Everyone in the newsroom has to figure out how to work with it, and utilize it to work for them in terms of getting story ideas and tips from our social followers. They see the value in that.*

*Participant 22: I think we were all in the dark a couple of years ago about how this whole social media thing is going to work, but we've experimented and*



*learned a lot. Not everyone gets it yet or sees the importance. It's like trying to turn a really big ship around in the newsroom. We want to make sure some of the older newsies don't fall off as we do. We want to keep everyone on board.*

As described earlier, one of the participants' roles was to stay informed about current forms of social media but also investigate new forms. Many participants said that part of their job is to research the "latest and greatest" (Participant 1) social media networks and determine if they should be on them.

*Participant 21: We have Google+, and I've played around with the Google hangouts function to have a small group chat about a particular issue in our community, and I'm looking into other ways we can use it.*

*Participant 7: Social media changes. Facebook has updates, so how is that going to effect us? Are we going to get on Vine? Why or why not? Do we decide now or just keep an eye on it? These are questions I ask myself a lot.*

*Participant 11: We know Instagram attracts a younger audience, so I'm trying to promote it more and get our staff to add more photos. I feel that we're missing that generation with our current social media efforts.*

When discussing goals, the topic of challenges also was presented. Many participants said they "wish there were more hours in the day" (Participant 22) to accomplish everything they would to do with social media. Top responses included having more people who are trained to post on social media at night and on the weekends along with have more staff members dedicated to engaging with audience

members because “It’s hard to respond to every single comment and question on social media and ‘like’ what all our fans are doing and posting” (Participant 23).

### ***Editorial Control and Gatekeeping***

The goal of this dissertation was to study social media editors in the context of gatekeeping theory, which conceptualizes the role of editors as influencing the selection of news content through their personal preferences and assumptions. The final question asking how editorial decisions are made in the newsroom, what type of content and when content will be shared on social media sites will now be addressed.

#### ***Decisions about Social Media Posts***

Almost all participants said they decided what content to post on social media sites, and no one else in the newsroom had to approve what they posted. However, most participants said they often solicit suggestions and have discussions in the newsroom about what to post and when.

*Participant 1: I am my own editor. We might discuss things about when it’s best to post but we use our news judgment.*

*Participant 5: On a day-to-day basis, I make the decisions about what is posted. If there are specific editorial questions to be answered about whether a post would be appropriate, I would run it through the newsroom channels, starting with my news director. We only involve the general manager if it’s really controversial or we haven’t dealt with something before.*

While almost all participants said they had the freedom to post content when they

wanted without any prior review, two participants said their newsrooms have a different editorial policy.

*Participant 2: Our policy in the newsroom is that nothing goes on social media unless one other person has looked at it. We have a peer editing process.*

*Participant 22: I always ask one of the producers or a member of the web team before I post, even if it's something small. It's better to be safe than sorry. I think part of it though is I'm still new to this area, and I want to make sure I am posting something our audience will want to read about.*

Only one participant (4) referred to himself as an actual gatekeeper in the newsroom, and even then, he said his driving force behind posting content is whether or not the audience will like it and engage with it. All participants discussed the importance of engagement and said they have learned to post content on social media that will generate a response from their audiences. The greatest consideration when posting content to social media was representing audience involvement.

*Participant 7: So a car accident or a shooting might lead the newscast but those stories are not going to be the kind of news that's going to generate engagement on social media. Social media is a different platform than TV and the Web. Even though we all work together, my audience is different than theirs.*

Among the participants interviewed, there were varied responses about the types of stories that attract more audience engagement on social media, in terms of Facebook likes and shares and retweets on Twitter. Some participants said local news stories and events gain more attention on social media than national or international ones, but others said national stories and even stories from other markets do better because of their unique news value.

*Participant 3: The stories that do the best for us on Facebook are often not local stories. They will be some crazy story about how a massive sinkhole in Florida swallows a house or some crazy criminal in New York does something stupid.*

*Participant 12: I don't think about local versus national stories on Facebook. I think, "Will this story do well?" Our website is local with some national news mixed in, but Facebook is so much about interest. We have a lot people who like our page but don't live in our area, and those people are just as valuable as the ones who do. I'm never going to say we need to post more local news on Facebook because a lot of times, it's boring. I feel no obligation to the local community on Facebook.*

Participants also said there needs to be a balance of positive and negative stories so the audience members are not bombarded with depressing content.

*Participant 4: Earlier this week, we had a children's minister who was arrested for child porn. That's a story that got a lot of hits on Facebook. Once we put it on our Facebook, it generated 4,500 separate clicks just from our Facebook*

*page. It generated a lot of traffic to our website because they saw it on Facebook first. As sad and tragic as they are, people tend to respond more to those types of stories on Facebook. However, we don't post only negative and sad stories on there because it would just bum people out.*

Many participants said the goal of their social media posts is to drive audience members to their website with advertisements, and then drive them to watch their local newscasts throughout the day.

*Participant 4: We try to make sure we do a short and concise post that teases them to our website. The ultimate goal is to use social media to drive people to our website. We try to keep our posts local. We put bigger national stories at times depending on how important of a story it is for people who live in our area. We keep it as local as possible.*

Many participants said they carefully craft how they phrase content for social media sites because they only get one chance at getting an audience member to click on a link, "like" a post or share it. Some participants said every headline generated on their station's website is then automatically tweeted on Twitter. Others said they use Facebook to generate more audience engagement and rely on Twitter for breaking news posts. The diversity of the markets selected can be noted in how some participants discussed their specific communities.

*Participant 10: Our followers on Twitter are much more liberal, not just political but with their personal beliefs. For example, yesterday was National Drink Wine Day. I thought it was funny but I was nervous about putting it on*

*Facebook because I wasn't sure how people would react. I put it on Twitter and tweeted with a graphic. "It's National Drink Wine Day! Cheers!!" It got retweeted more than 150 times. People loved it. On Facebook, I would never say "Cheers!" because the people are more conservative. I put a lot of thought into how I would phrase it. I would never want our audience to think we were promoting alcoholism. So on Facebook, I posted, "Ha! So apparently it's National Drink Wine Day" and we put the same graphic up there. People responded well. We only had one person respond that it's sinful.*

An interesting concept that several participants mentioned is how the relationship between content shared during a newscast and on social media has come full circle.

*Participant 6: I've noted recently that it used to be things that we put in our newscast, we'd post to social media. Now, we are using social media to ask things and do things that then make it onto our newscasts, and then we spit them back out on social media. For example, the local police department tweeted a photo from a citizen showing the officer pushing a man in a wheelchair. His wheelchair battery had died and the officer was pushing him. They also posted that to their Facebook page, congratulating the officer on a job well done. I saw that and turned it into a post for our Facebook page, and it's getting a 1,000 likes. I tell our news producer this, and she gets the story in our newscast.*

Engagement is a “two-way street” (Participant 8), and participants said it is important to acknowledge how the audience is engaging and interacting, whether it is sharing weather photos from a recent snowstorm (Participants 6, 10, 13 and 15) during a newscast that were posted to social media or simply “liking” an audience member’s comment on a post.

*Participant 11: We interact with our audience. We’re big on replying to them, liking their posts if they are thanking us for something. Wishing one of our anchors happy birthday, you know we’ll “like” that and comment back. We definitely have built a good sense of community.*

Ultimately, participants indicated that audience members are the driving force behind the content they post on social media.

*Participant 23: If I post something on social media, and it doesn’t generate that many likes, shares or comments, then I’m doing something wrong. I carefully think about each post and how I introduce it. I know my audience and community. Yes, we’ve posted things before that didn’t do well or generate much interest, but we’re learning from those mistakes. It comes down to really understanding our audience and engaging with them.*

*Participant 6: I encourage my staff to post in the moment. React in the world around you. When things happen, as social media people, we have to act as the public would. Be surprised when the public is surprised, happy when the public is happy, and be poignant when the time comes to be poignant.*

### ***Summary***

In summary, the comments from the 23 interview participants who edit, produce, manage and maintain their television stations' social media, revealed that individuals in these positions have a variety of roles in the newsroom, including:

1. Posting to social media
2. Training others in the newsroom
3. Engaging with their audience
4. Developing best practices
5. Strategizing short and long terms goals
6. Staying current with social media trends
7. Researching new forms of social media and the best approaches for implementing their use in the newsrooms

Participants have a great deal of editorial control with their social media posts but they are not isolated in the newsroom. They have discussions with other staff members about the types of content they posted on social media and solicit suggestions and feedback from all levels. The guiding force for the content they post on social media stems from what they have learned their audience wants to see and read about it. They judge their success on social media in terms of engagement levels with their audience, which are measured by the number of likes, shares and comments.

While social media sites have been online for a decade now, it has taken time to figure out what types of posts work best on social media, and content can vary



based on the market size and location. Many television stations have created these social media editor/producer/manager positions during the past two or three years to assist with expanding their social media presence and reach. The newsroom culture is changing, and posting content on social media is now part of the job description for numerous positions in the newsroom, even though it has been a slow start. Future goals include increasing social media followers and fans, increasing social media use throughout the newsroom and start using newer forms of social media as effectively as possible.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

This final chapter will provide a discussion about the findings of this research and the implications it has for television newsrooms and other groups. Limitations and directions for future research are addressed as well.

#### ***Key Findings***

The goal of this dissertation research was to study the evolving role of social media editors in local television newsrooms in the United States. The first two exploratory questions were designed to determine their role and function in the newsroom. Using the theory of gatekeeping, the researcher also examined a third question about how editorial decisions are made in television newsrooms in regards to the content posted to social media sites. Thematic data from 23 interviews with participants at television stations around the country revealed that social media editors are responsible for numerous functions and are challenging the traditional gatekeeping role in the newsroom.

For the first primary question about how social media editors in local television newsrooms describe their role, most responses centered around being the “point person” and “social media guru” in the newsroom who is responsible for maintaining the station’s main social media accounts, as well as setting up accounts for anchors and reporters and training those individuals about best practices for social media use. The participants see themselves as the contact person for social

media content, suggestions and questions from others in the newsroom and the audience.

The second question asked what functions social media editors perform, types of daily tasks, as well as long-term projects. The most significant functions they perform are posting to social media, training staff members, engaging with the audience, developing best practices, strategizing goals, attending editorial meetings, and researching new forms of social media.

The third and final question addressed was how editorial decisions are made in the newsroom about the type of content and when it will be shared on social media sites. All participants shared comments about how audience engagement and interaction drive the types of content they post to social media. While breaking news and hard news stories continue to be important content to share, social media sites are not replications of websites, and audience members want to see and read about stories that are not necessarily news.

### ***Discussion***

While still relatively new in television newsrooms, the position of a social media editor/producer/manager is expanding at a rapid rate. More than half of the participants who were interviewed said they were hired during 2012 or 2013, and they are the first individuals in their newsrooms to hold this position. It is not surprising that television stations and other media outlets are hiring people to serve in this role as social media continues to grow, and the general public continues to embrace its various forms. According to the Pew Research Center, as of September

2013, 73% of adults who have online access were using social media, a number that has risen greatly from only 8% in 2005. Of the online adults, 71% were on Facebook, 19% had a Twitter account, and 17% were on Instagram (Pew, 2013).

Many television stations realize there is a growing audience on social media, and reaching out to this audience through a variety of ways is a purposeful move to drive fans and followers to their websites and their newscasts. Newsrooms are treating their traditional television newscasts, websites and social media accounts differently. News content that airs during a newscast might appear on the station's website and/or social media, or it might not. More specifically, content posted on social media is not a duplication of stories and information on a station's website. Participants in this study said their audience wants more than "just the day's headlines" on social media, especially on Facebook.

Research numbers from the Pew Center support this finding. In a 2013 survey of more than 5,000 adults, researchers found that most adults do not go to Facebook seeking news out. The vast majority, 78%, read news content when they were on Facebook for other reasons, and only 4% said it was the most important way they get news (Pew, 2013). This study's findings show how newsrooms are creating content on social media that is not necessarily news. Posts on social media about National Drink Wine Day or a video of puppies and kittens playing is not newsworthy when applying traditional news values, but these types of posts generate audience engagement and create positive feelings toward a news station,

which could then lead audience members to think more favorably about a television station and what it produces on a variety of platforms.

The Pew Center's survey also found Facebook news consumers who "like" or follow news organizations or journalists show high levels of news engagement on the site. About a third, 34%, of Facebook news consumers have news organizations or individual journalists in their feeds. Those who do are more likely to see the site as an important way to get news than those who do not have news organizations in their feed. They are also nearly three times as likely to often click on news links (27% versus 10%) and discuss issues in the news with others on Facebook (11% versus 4%). They are twice as likely to often post or share content (16% versus 7%) and "like" or comment on stories (29% versus 15%). These numbers support this study's findings about how important audience engagement is because participants said they measure the success of their social media posts by how often the audience members are liking it, sharing it and commenting on it.

The influx of social media in television newsrooms has resulted in a variety of individuals serving as gatekeepers. While creating and posting content to social media is the primary role of a social media editor, multiple roles in the newsroom from anchors, reporters, producers and website managers also post to social media, and are therefore gatekeepers as well. Social media editors maintain control through training and supervising, and they also seek advice, and in some cases permission, about what content to post, but ultimately, they are their own editors.

The results of this study suggest that social media editors are eroding the traditional gatekeeping function in the newsroom. Individuals in these positions are integrated into the editorial workflow of the newsroom and work closely with multiple positions. There is little evidence of isolation from a traditional newsroom structure. They are active participants in story meetings, and almost all of them have a professional and/or educational journalism background.

White (1950) and other scholars' (Shoemaker and Reese, 1991) research showed that journalists' subjective opinions, experiences and attitudes determined the type of stories they selected for publication or distribution. While these factors continue to be at play, this current study reveals that the opinions, experiences and attitudes of audience members are what social media editors value and consider greatly when posting content on social media. This is a major departure from traditional print and broadcast news, in which the editors and producers selected the news content. Editors and producers are no longer the sole gatekeepers of news. Audiences now decide what they will read and where they will go for news.

While a theme of previous research that examined the role of social media editors in newsrooms was that social media editors faced a somewhat hostile environment with other newsroom staffers (Currie, 2012), none of the comments made in this current study indicated this type of working environment. While the participants did mention that some anchors and reporters are not as open to using social media, the majority of them indicated that since taking their positions, there has been a cultural change in the newsrooms and growing acceptance of social

media. Perhaps this is because parent companies are directing stations to use social media effectively and creatively to attract fans and follows. Also, analytics are proving that social media can help determine the types of stories audience members want to know about.

Some social media editors still face doubt from colleagues about the importance of social media, but a majority feel their stations have made significant improvements to their social media content within the past six months to a year. They are not dictators in regards to posting on social media because they want everyone in the newsroom to be a part of audience interaction and engagement on social media. They also want their audience members to see them and their stations as personable and dynamic, not faceless and detached.

When trying to locate individuals in this social media position at television stations across the country, the majority of them are in the top 25 markets. This is not surprising because larger television markets would usually generate more revenue and have funding for such positions. Situated in larger population areas, these stations have more viewers, and therefore, their social media content would need to be robust and engaging.

Social media editors use a variety of social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to share stories, images, video and conversation, and they are striving to integrate new ones into their daily routines. However, many of them worry about spreading their efforts too thin among a diverse group of social media accounts, which would create a negative experience for their audience.

Similar to Brill's (2001) observation of website editors, many social media editors see their success in audience data, analytics they can justify to support their efforts to management. Others measure success in the less-tangible aspects of comments or interactive discussions. They also are reconceptualizing their gatekeeping role as partnership between the audience and themselves just as Singer (2014; 2006) found with online editors.

The impact of social media is growing in television newsrooms along with the influence of social media editors and the influence of the audience they represent. This study reveals social media editors are in transition, coping with a rapidly changing news environment and facing pressures from their colleagues and audience members. It is a difficult task to constantly train colleagues and keep up with the demands of audience engagement. This greater audience role challenges the traditional gatekeeping function of news editors.

### ***Implications***

Editorially, the traditional gatekeeping function of the media is weakened as a significant number of news consumers turn to family, friends and acquaintances to alert them to items of interest. Essentially, a person's social circle takes on the role of news editor, deciding whether a story, video or other piece of content is important, interesting or entertaining enough to recommend. News organizations must realize this if they have not already and learn ways to capitalize on audience interaction and engagement.



Social media will continue to influence how all journalists perform their jobs, and this study shows how television newsrooms are adapting to an evolving newsroom dynamic. As social media sites increase and transform, so do the public's interest and dependence on them.

The researcher remembers a time during her undergraduate career in the mid 1990s when a news director at a local television station was a guest speaker in an introduction to broadcast journalism course. She talked about how during the next year, her station would need to hire a full-time website manager to maintain the website instead of having various positions in the newsroom contribute to this growing medium. The same is now true for television newsrooms and social media. Instead of relying only on producers, assignment editors or website managers to post the majority of content to social media and engage the audience, stations will need to find funding to hire people for these social media editor positions.

Having one person in the newsroom to serve in a social media editor role will provide a centralized location for all questions, suggestions and concerns about social media. Instead of multiple people doing what they think is best for social media, efforts should be consolidated into one position that then oversees the newsroom's social media efforts. This does not mean the social media editor is the only person trained and knowledgeable about social media. It is quite the contrary. The social media editor can serve as an expert source about social media who shares this knowledge throughout the newsroom, so everyone understand the importance

of social media and the types of content to post that will generate the most audience engagement.

For the stations that already employ people in a social media editor position, they must continue to support their efforts and bring everyone in the newsroom on board. Stations should require their on-air talent to establish and maintain social media accounts and actively post and engage with the audience. Continuous training must happen with newsroom staffers about the types of content the audience wants to see.

In addition, and perhaps over time, newsrooms will need to employ multiple social media editors/producers/managers or even a social media team, depending on their size and location. Some larger stations already have a social media producer or manager who manages other staff members. Several participants mentioned how even though there are peak times for their social media to be seen online, news happens 24 hours per day and seven days a week, so there needs to be adequate coverage and content posting to social media on nights and weekends when the newsroom has the fewest staff members in it.

Almost all of the participants interviewed in the study discussed developing best practices and guidelines for social media, and this is a task they should continue to perform and also ensure current revisions are made as social media changes. Many parent companies are requiring their individual stations to devise these best practices, and the parent companies themselves also have a version. It will be important for stations to develop guidelines that are specific to their markets just as

they have done historically with style guides and codes of ethics. These best practices should be shared with sister stations in other markets as a way to learn about new ideas for generating audience-driven content.

Finally, this research has implications for journalism programs and their students. While traditional forms of media writing and reporting along with editing, production and media law and ethics are necessary in any curriculum, social media and online journalism are transforming the ways reporters do their jobs, and this cannot be ignored in the journalism programs that are preparing future journalists. The majority of participants in this study graduated from college less than 10 years ago, and for one third of them, it was five years ago or less. Several participants mentioned how they or their undergraduate colleagues might have planned on a career in reporting and/or producing, but they could not find jobs for these positions. Many new positions in television newsrooms require applicants to be well versed in social media. Being knowledgeable about social media does not mean simply having a Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Vine account. Journalism students need to know how to effectively use social media in their reporting, but also, as this study suggests, they need to learn what type of content results in a successful social media post.

One suggestion for filling this curriculum void at colleges and universities is to have professional journalists and social media editors work with university faculty to teach courses about social media in the newsroom. Current faculty members will not have the experience necessary to incorporate elements of social

media content and audience engagement, therefore, a reliance on journalism professionals who work with social media on a daily basis would prove a useful collaboration for students who will be the future social media editors in newsrooms around the country.

### ***Limitations***

As with any exploratory study, there are limitations to what can be examined because of the evolving nature of the phenomenon being studied. In this case, social media editor positions are so new to television newsrooms and are often in larger markets. Overall, it was difficult to find television newsrooms that employ social media editors/producer/managers. As noted above, they exist more in larger markets because these stations usually generate more revenue and can afford to create and fill positions such as these. Even when the researcher discovered them, it was initially hard to establish contact with them due to their hectic schedules and numerous messages they receive daily. Some interviews the researcher had planned never happened, most often because the participant was unavailable due to a breaking news event. All in all, the 23 participants who granted interviews were quite generous with their time and extremely helpful with their comments, and the researcher is tremendously grateful for their openness and candidness about their positions in the newsroom.

Some of the participants interviewed also have other responsibilities in the newsroom related to digital content. In addition to their social media duties, they also work with the website and mobile applications. The researcher was only

studying social media and interview questions only dealt with their role in relation to social media, but one has to wonder what influence their other job responsibilities not directly related to social media would have on the role and gatekeeping function in the newsroom.

Finally, the traditional long interview method with participants is conducted in person, and this was not possible with this research study. In this study, telephone interviews were used because of the enormous coverage area of the participants, from East Coast to West Coast and many locations in between. Unless the researcher had a significant amount of time and money, in-person interviews would have been near impossible. However, as indicated in chapter 3, using telephone interviews instead of face-to-face interviews has revealed no significant difference, and telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004).

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

Social media is still a relatively new research area in any research paradigm, and it will only continue to grow. This study provides a foundation for a number of research possibilities involving social media editors and journalism.

As the number of social media editors will inevitably continue to grow in newsrooms around the country, a replication study could determine how other markets are utilizing these positions as they add them during the next few years. It would be interesting to see how these smaller markets engage with their audience and if the same editorial decision making process is followed.

Also, a follow-up study with the same group of participants in this study would prove useful to see how their roles and functions continue to evolve in the newsroom. Many of the current participants said they hope to launch new social media sites during the next year, so information about the type of content they post to these accounts would be useful.

Social media editors also are employed at newspapers, magazines and online publications around the country, and a study similar in scope to this current one would be beneficial to see if social media editors who work for those forms of media have similar roles, functions and editorial decision making processes.

In addition to professional media outlets, many universities and colleges have student-run television stations where weekly and daily news newscasts are produced, along with student newspapers and news websites. How are these students using social media? Are they engaging their audience in similar or different ways? Students who work at these stations and publications are learning to be reporters, producers, editors, etc., so are there any social media editor positions or the need for this type of position in student-run newsrooms?

The current study only provided insights and comments from social media editors and no one else in the newsroom. It would be helpful to also interview news directors, reporters and anchors about their social media roles and functions to see if they align with what social media editors believe these other members' responsibilities are in regards to posting social media content and engaging with the audience.

Finally, as not to ignore the main reason social media editors post content in the first place, a study of the audience members would be quite insightful. While the Pew Research Center numbers are helpful, actually asking audience members what types of content they want to see and do not want to see and why, as well as, why do they share, like and comment on certain posts and not others, would allow a researcher to see if what social media editors think they know about their audience is actually true. Interviews with audience members about why they choose to like a certain news station's Facebook page or follow a journalist on Twitter would prove beneficial for academics and professionals.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

This study makes no claims to generalize its findings beyond the 23 participants studied. However, it is reasonable to assume that the role of social media editors in television newsrooms is developing and will continue to expand. Individuals in these positions are responsible for a variety of roles and functions, and many others in the newsroom depend on their expertise, training and suggestions to carry out their daily tasks. There is a need for positions like these in media organizations, and they are challenging the traditional gatekeeping role by relying heavily on audience interest and engagement in decisions about posting content to social media and not on traditional news values.

This study has filled a gap in the body of knowledge related to the role and gatekeeping function of social media editors in television newsrooms. The findings contribute to other previous research and can be used to understand and improve

how social media content is effectively produced in television newsrooms and best shared with an engaged audience that wants to “like” and “retweet.”



## References

- Alejandro, J. (2010). Journalism in the age of social media. Retrieved June 14, 2014  
<http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/journalism-age-social-media>
- Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research*, 10, 378-395.
- Bowman, D. (2010, March 30). Tweaking the Twitter homepage. Retrieved March 31, 2014 from <https://blog.twitter.com/2010/tweaking-twitter-homepage>
- Bradshaw, P. (2008, December 4). Model for the 21st century newsroom pt.6: New journalists for new information flows. Retrieved June 7, 2013 from  
<http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2008/12/04/model-for-the-21st-century-newsroom-pt6-new-journalists-for-new-information-flows>
- Brill, A. M. (2001). Online journalists embrace new marketing function. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 22, 28-40.
- Canter, L. (2013). The interactive spectrum: The use of social media in UK regional newspapers. *Convergence: The Journal Of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 19, 472-495.
- Carlson, D. (2010, March 5). At last: The full story on how Facebook was founded. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-facebook-was-founded-2010-3#we-can-talk-about-that-after-i-get-all-the-basic-functionality-up-tomorrow-night-1>
- Cassidy, W. P. (2005). Variations on a theme: The professional role conceptions of

- print and online newspaper journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82, 264-280.
- Chang, T. K., & Lee, J. W. (1992). Factors affecting gatekeeping selection of foreign news: A national survey of newspaper editors. *Journalism Quarterly*, 69, 554-561.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research*, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Creswell, J. W. (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Currie, T. (2012, August). *Social media editors in the newsroom: A survey of roles of functions*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, IL.
- Daniels, G. L., & Hollifield, C. A. (2002). Times of turmoil: Short and long-term effects of organizational change on newsroom employees. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79, 661-680.
- Defleur, M. I., & Ball-Rokeach, S. (1982). *Theories of mass communication* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Longman.
- Denscombe, M. (1998). *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.
- Donohue, G. A., Tichenor, P. J., & Olien, C. N. (1972). Gate-keeping: Mass media systems and information control in Kline, F. G., & Tichenor, P. J. (Eds.) *Current perspectives in mass communication research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

- Ellis, J. (2010, July 8). The Big Soup: Anthony De Rosa on becoming Reuters' social media editor and the ambient wire for news. Retrieved June 13, 2013 from <http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/07/the-big-soup-anthony-de-rosa-on-becoming-reuters-socialmedia-editor-and-the-ambient-wire-for-news/>
- Facebook (2014). About Facebook. Retrieved February 2, 2014 from <https://www.facebook.com/facebook/info>
- Fletcher, D. (2010, April 22). Facebook looks to get personal. *Time*. Retrieved January 14, 2014 from <http://content.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1983721,00.html>
- Gade, P., & Perry, E. (2003). Changing the newsroom culture: A four-year case study of organizational development at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80, 327-347.
- Giles, R. (1995). *Newsroom management: A guide to theory and practice*. Detroit: MI: Media Management Books.
- Gleason, S. (2010, March). Harnessing social media. *American Journalism Review*. Retrieved from <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=4860>
- Goetz, J., & LeCompte, M. (1981). Ethnographic research and the problem of data reduction. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 12, 51-70.
- Google (2014). Learn more. Retrieved March 15, 2014 from <http://www.google.com/+learnmore/>
- Gordon, R. (2009). Social media: The ground shifts. *Nieman Reports*, 63, 7-9.
- Gurwitsch, A. (1974). *Phenomenology and the theory of science*. Evanston, IL:

- Northwestern University Press.
- Hancock, B. (1998). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Trent Focus: University of Nottingham Press.
- Hermida, A. (2012). "Social journalism: Exploring how social media is shaping journalism. In E. Siapera & A. Veglis (Eds.), *The handbook of global online journalism* (pp. 309-328). Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hirsch, Fred (1977). *The Social Limits to Growth*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Howe, J. (2011). *Social Media and News Consumption* (Master's Thesis). Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA.
- Jenkins, M. (2012, Feb. 3). I'm more than a Twitter Monkey. Retrieved June 22, 2013 from <http://zombiejournalism.com/2012/02/im-more-than-a-twitter-monkey>
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 59-68.
- Keller, T., & Hawkins, S. (2009). *Television news: A handbook for reporting, writing, shooting, editing and producing*. Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway.
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *The elements of journalism*. New York: Random House.
- LaMothe, B. (2011, May 16). Anatomy of an online community manager job posting. Retrieved June 12, 2013 from [http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/online-community-manager-job\\_b4013](http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/online-community-manager-job_b4013)

- Leach, J. (2009). Creating ethical bridges from journalism to digital news. *Nieman Reports*, 63, 42-44.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lowrey, W. (2003). What influences small newspapers to decide to publish online news? *Newspaper Research Journal*, 24, 83-90.
- Luckie, M. (2010, April 6). What exactly is a social media editor/manager? Retrieved June 19, 2013 from [http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/what-exactly-is-social-media\\_b413](http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/what-exactly-is-social-media_b413)
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview*. Newbury Park: CA: Sage.
- McGee, M. (2014, August 16). EdgeRank is dead: Facebook's news feed algorithm now has close to 100K weight factors. *Marketing Land*. Retrieved May 28, 2014 from <http://marketingland.com/edgerank-is-dead-facebooks-news-feed-algorithm-now-has-close-to-100k-weight-factors-55908>
- McLellan, M. (2009, July 30). Social media: Expanding horizons of traditional news organizations. Retrieved June 14, 2013 from [http://www.knightdigitalmediacenter.org/leadership\\_blog/comments/social\\_media\\_expanding\\_horizons\\_of\\_traditional\\_news\\_organizations](http://www.knightdigitalmediacenter.org/leadership_blog/comments/social_media_expanding_horizons_of_traditional_news_organizations)
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Myers, S. (2011, September 2). Social media editor role expands to include fighting misinformation during breaking news. Retrieved June 22, 2013 from <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/making-sense-of-news/144848/social-media-editor-roleexpands-to-include-fighting-misinformation-during-breaking-news>

Neuman, W. L. (1991). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Newman, N. (2009, September). The rise of social media and its impact on mainstream journalism: A study of how newspapers and broadcasters in the U.K. and U.S. are responding to a wave of participatory social media and a historic shift in control towards individual consumers. Retrieved June 2, 2013 from [http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/The\\_rise\\_of\\_social\\_media\\_and\\_its\\_impact\\_on\\_mainstream\\_journalism.pdf](http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/The_rise_of_social_media_and_its_impact_on_mainstream_journalism.pdf)

Nielsen (2014). Ratings. Retrieved from <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports.html>

O'Dell, J. (2011, January 24). The history of social media [infographic]. Retrieved June 5, 2013 from <http://mashable.com/2011/01/24/the-history-of-social-media-infographic>

Oriella PR Network. (2011). Clicks, communities and conversations: The state of journalism in 2011. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from <http://www.oriellaprnetwork.com/research>

- Oriella PR Network. (2012). The influence game: How news is sourced and managed today. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from <http://www.oriellaprnetwork.com/research>
- Oriella PR Network. (2013). The new normal for news. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from <http://www.oriellaprnetwork.com/research>
- Papper, B. (2013). Newsrooms staffing stagnates: TV staff size up but number of newsrooms down. Annual Radio Television Digital News Association survey. Retrieved July 31, 2013 from [http://www.rtdna.org/channel/staffing\\_profitability](http://www.rtdna.org/channel/staffing_profitability)
- Parmelee, J. H. (2013). Political journalists and Twitter: Influences on norms and practices. *Journal Of Media Practice*, 14, 291-305.
- Peters. M. (2011, September 15). Facebook subscribe button: What it means for each type of user. Retrieved January 14, 2014 from <http://mashable.com/2011/09/15/facebook-subscribe-users/>
- Pew Research Center. (2013, March 18). *State of the news media 2013*. Retrieved July 23, 2013 from <http://stateofthemedias.org/2013>
- Pew Research Center. (2014, March 26). *State of the news media 2014*. Retrieved April 4, 2014 from <http://stateofthemedias.org>
- Pinterest. (2014). Press. Retrieved March 5, 2014 from <http://about.pinterest.com/en/press>
- Reed, S. (2011). Sports journalists use of social media and its effect on



- professionalism. *Journal of Sports Media*, 6, 43-64.
- Rusli, E. (2012, April 9). Facebook buys Instagram for \$1 billion. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2012/04/09/facebook-buys-instagram-for-1-billion/>
- Sanghvi, R. (2006, September 5). Facebook gets a facelift. Retrieved January 14, 2014 from <https://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook/facebook-gets-a-facelift/2207967130>
- Sano, D. (2009, February 18). Twitter creator Jack Dorsey illuminates the site's founding document. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2009/02/twitter-creator.html>
- Schramm, W. (1949). The nature of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 26, 259-269.
- Schultz, B., & Sheffer, M. L. (2010). An exploratory study of how Twitter is affecting sports journalism. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, 226-239.
- Shoemaker, P. (1991). *Gatekeeping*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1991). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2009). *Gatekeeping Theory*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Singer, J. B. (2006a). Stepping back from the gate: Online newspapers editors and the co-production of content in Campaign 2004. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83, 265-280.
- Singer, J. B. (2006b). Partnerships and public service: Normative issues for

- journalists in converged newsrooms. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 21, 30-53.
- Singer, J. B. (2014). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New Media & Society*, 16, 55-73
- Sippey, M. (2013, January 24). Vine: A new way to share video. Retrieved from <https://blog.twitter.com/2013/vine-a-new-way-to-share-video>
- Sloan, P. (2011, December 22). Pinterest: Crazy growth lands it as top 10 social site. CNET News. Retrieved February 2, 2013 from <http://www.cnet.com/news/pinterest-crazy-growth-lands-it-as-top-10-social-site>
- Social Media [Def. 1]. (n.d.) *Merriam-Webster Online*. In Merriam-Webster. Retrieved February 14, 2014 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/socialmedia>
- Sreenivasan, S. (2011) SocMedia editors [Twitter list]. Retrieved July 25, 2013 from <https://twitter.com/sree/socmedia-editors>
- Stovall, J. G. (2011). *Writing for the Mass Media* (8<sup>th</sup> edition). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Sturges, J. E., & Hanrahan, K. J. (2004). Comparing telephone and face-to-face qualitative interviewing: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 4, 107-118.
- Tandoc, E. (2014). Journalism is twerking? How web analytics is changing the process of gatekeeping. *New Media & Society*, 16(4), 559-575

- Tausig, J. E. and Freeman, E. W. (1988) The next best thing to being there: Conducting the clinical research interview by telephone. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 58, 418–427.
- Taylor, R. (1994). Qualitative research. In M. Singletary (Ed.). *Mass Communication Research*. New York: Longman.
- Travers, K. (2011, Sept. 5). The role of the social media editor evolves. Retrieved June 12, 2013 from <http://www.editorsweblog.org/2011/09/05/the-role-of-the-social-media-editor-evolves>
- Tumblr (2014). About Tumblr. Retrieved March 15, 2014 from <http://www.tumblr.com/about>
- Twitter (2014). What is Twitter. Retrieved February 2, 2014 from <https://about.twitter.com/what-is-twitter>
- USA Today. (2008, December 8). *USA Today* names social media editor and social media analyst. Retrieved June 19, 2013 from <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/socialmedia/post/2010/12/usa-today-names-socialmedia-editor-and-social-media-analyst-creates-socialusatoday/1>
- Westley, B. H., & MacLean, M. S., Jr. (1957). A conceptual model for communications research. *Journalism Quarterly*, 34. 31-38.
- White, D. M. (1950). The 'Gate Keeper': A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 383-396.
- Wilson, K. (2008). In your Facebook. *American Journalism Review*, 30, 12–13.

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2010). *Mass media research: An introduction* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Zak, E. (2012, January 6). 4 questions with Liz Heron, the New York Times social media editor. Retrieved June 12, 2013 from [http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/4-questions-with-lizheron-the-new-york-times-social-media-editor\\_b9723](http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/4-questions-with-lizheron-the-new-york-times-social-media-editor_b9723)

## Appendices

## **Appendix A**

### **Verified Informed Consent Statement**

**Allyson Beutke DeVito**

#### **Examining the Roles of Social Media Editors in Television Newsrooms**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. The purpose of this research study is to examine the roles of social media editors in television newsrooms. The procedure in this study is to conduct a 30 to 45-minute telephone interview and ask a series of questions about your role as a social media editor.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to participants. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide not to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime during the interview or after the interview without penalty by contacting the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, then your data will be destroyed. If you are younger than age 18, please notify the researcher and do not participate in the study. By signing below, you confirm that you are age 18 or older.

One potential benefit of this study is that the author plans to seek publication of findings. This can help extend the body of knowledge to other researchers and practitioners. By agreeing to be interviewed and offering your consent, you acknowledge that findings may be published. Published findings will not identify you in any way.

The interview will be recorded using a digital audio device, and your comments will remain confidential. What you say during the interview will be transcribed by the researcher or other transcribers and possibly included in a research report. Other transcribers will sign a confidentiality pledge stating that they will not discuss the information or names with anyone else.

All files will be secured and locked in the researcher's office, and only the researcher will have access to these files. The final report will not include any names or distinguishing factors that could lead others to identify your comments. All files will be kept for at least three years after completion of this project and then destroyed.

If you want more information or are interested in the results of this study, please contact:

Allyson B. DeVito, Ph.D. Candidate  
School of Journalism and Electronic Media  
College of Communication and Information  
University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, TN 37996  
859-556-2635; adevito@utk.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the UT Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

Please indicate your consent to participate by signing below.

I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily agree to participate in this  
(print your name)  
research by completing this interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)

## **Appendix B**

### **Discussion Guide**

Describe your role as a social media editor.

What are your specific duties?

Describe a typical workday for you.

How long has this position existed?

How long have you been in this position?

What is your background?

How does your job incorporate journalism?

Do you have social media best practices in your newsroom? If so, please describe them.

How often do you post to social media?

How do you engage with your followers and/or the audience?

What types of ethical dilemmas do you face in making editorial choices?

Who is responsible for maintaining individual reporter Facebook and Twitter accounts?

Are reporters and anchors required to maintain social media profiles? How do you assist them?

Who decides when to post breaking news content on social media?

Why was the decision made to hire a social media editor?

Who does your position report directly to?

Who makes the decisions about what content and when to post information on social media?

How do you interact with other newsroom staff members?



## Vita

Allyson Beutke DeVito is a faculty lecturer in the Division of Instructional Communication and Research in the College of Communication and Information at the University of Kentucky. Since 2011, she has taught CIS 110/111/112 courses, which are part of the UK Core Curriculum and emphasize writing, public speaking, interpersonal & intercultural communication, and group communication skills.

Before starting the University of Tennessee's Ph.D. program in communication and information in 2006, DeVito worked in broadcast and print journalism as well as media relations. A native Floridian from Alachua, Florida, she earned her bachelor's (1998) and master's (2000) degrees from the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications and worked at National Public Radio affiliate WUFT-FM as a reporter, producer and anchor. She has received Florida Associated Press awards and a Society of Professional Journalists Mark of Excellence Award for her reporting.

For her master's work, DeVito produced a documentary that was screened at state and national film festivals. *Behind Closed Doors: The Dark Legacy of the Johns Committee* tells the story of a Florida legislative committee designed to weed out communism and homosexuality at state universities during the 1950s and 1960s.

DeVito served as the communications coordinator for UF's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for five years. She was editor of the college's alumni magazine and oversaw the production of graphics projects, website development and special events.

She also has taught at Eastern Kentucky University since 2011 and has instructed close to 1,000 students at four universities in a variety of disciplines, including media writing, feature reporting, radio and television reporting, online journalism, media law & ethics, mass communication & society, and public speaking.