Abstract

**Thesis:** Social Media and Weather Warnings: Exploring the New Parasocial Relationships in Weather Forecasting

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The emergence and popularity of mobile and social media have transformed the nature of the parasocial relationship between weathercaster and audience. Two experts and nine television viewers were selected for qualitative interviewing via non-probability sampling to gain an understanding of how respondents’ growing use of social media and other emerging media has impacted the relationship with the local television weathercaster. Additionally, these interviews explored the ways in which these relationships have ultimately changed how viewers receive weather warnings. Storms producing strong straight-line winds and multiple tornadoes in the Fort Wayne, Indiana television market provided a case study that illuminated the role of trust in the complex relationships between weather forecasting and new social media. Mobile and social media have increased the weather forecasters’ influence over the audience, while quickly allowing them to provide severe weather warnings.

This study demonstrates the popularity of social media among diverse age groups and that user demographics do not indicate any level of social media literacy. Second, as the literature suggests, this study confirms users’ trust in their weather forecasters as well as the information-seeking behavior displayed during severe weather. Third, this research finds that social media has transformed parasocial relationships. Finally, this study suggests that stations have not recognized nor taken advantage of these new parasocial relationships, and that they can do so by promoting TV personalities’ online social profiles.