PROMOTING LOCAL TV IN A POST-NETWORK WORLD:

EXAMINING DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES

A THESIS

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BY

MICHAEL M. BROUDER

DR. ROBERT A. BROOKEY - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The overwhelming majority of U.S. broadcast television stations and their respective networks use social media extensively to promote the programming and personalities seen on their channels. Social media's reach and accessibility make it a valuable tool to drive audience tune-in, brand awareness, and ultimately increased revenue for the station. Facebook and Twitter, used by millions of U.S. consumers every day, are the primary social media platforms used by local television stations to reach potential viewers. The aim of this study is to observe the social media habits from a sample of thirty local television stations across the United States. Using a structured digital media critical analysis, comparisons from these digital texts will be drawn followed by a discussion of the differentiating factors among them. The proposed research will advance the scholarly discussion on the theories and practices behind the use of social media by television stations at a time when digital media consumption continues to advance at a rapid pace.

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CHAPTER 1: TV GOES SOCIAL

A Network's Nose for Social Media

In May of 2015, NBC network's *Today* host Matt Lauer climbed on his bicycle and journeyed over two hundred miles from Boston to New York to raise awareness for Red Nose Day, a campaign to support children and teens living in poverty. In addition to driving awareness to the cause, the multi-day promotional event was carefully orchestrated to drive viewership to a week of themed *Today* broadcasts with updates on Lauer's progress. Marketers of *Today* had spent the better part of the previous two years trying to soften the image of Lauer following the disastrous public departure of his former co-host, Ann Curry. Not only was her emotional breakdown on her final day broadcast live, but many viewers felt Lauer might have been behind Curry's ouster. Whether this is true or not, Lauer's image needed bolstering, and the Red Nose Day event was the latest in an effort to portray the longtime host as approachable and kind.

The campaign was widely promoted on the network, but it also included a request from NBC's network marketing executives to encourage their local news anchors to wear red foam noses and post photos of this on social media using the hashtag #rednoseday. The strategy behind this was the idea that the network would benefit from the exposure to the collective social media following of their two hundred-plus affiliate group. While it might be argued that there is a reciprocal benefit to the affiliate in helping to create greater tune-in to *Today* airing on their channel, not all local markets were eager to participate in the Red Nose Day stunt. I have a firsthand understanding of this as a senior-level marketing director at one local television station that was on the receiving end of this very request by NBC and *Today*. Local stations often have different promotional strategies compared to those at the network. For example, consumer research at one mid-sized station showed that their core audience prefers a more straightforward

newscast that is void of overt self-promotion (Norman Hecht Research, 2015). Therefore, the station's social media efforts are generally limited to posting news stories and not marketing messages. In the case of the Red Nose Day event that I was involved with, management reluctantly agreed to participate in the campaign and gently encouraged the anchors to don their red noses. Photos were posted on social media according to the network's wishes. While it can be agreed that posting funny photos for a cause would most likely not cause harm to the station's overall marketing efforts, it is one of many examples of the divergent paths and different goals of an entertainment-based network and its local news-focused affiliates, particularly as it is plays out in the social space.

The emergence of social media's role in television marketing is a byproduct of what Lotz (2014) describes as television's entrance into a *post-network era*. Long gone are the days of three broadcast television networks and viewing habits based simply on what the network happens to be airing that particular day. New technologies, including digital distribution, high-speed internet, digital video recorders (DVRs) and social media have each had a profound effect on virtually all aspects of the media industry. Rapid, fundamental changes are being observed across the industry, particularly in how television is produced, distributed, marketed, monetized and consumed. It could be argued, then, a call for a better understanding and meaningful context is also needed. While there have been some advances in the area of scholarly work in areas of modern-day television media consumption, many studies focus solely on how this affects decision making at the network level. With over $21 billion in local television advertising expected to be in play in 2016 (Pew Research, 2014), there is a justifiable need to better understand how *local* television stations navigate such a complicated new media landscape.

Analyzing every aspect of how television's business practices and viewer's behaviors have

changed since the emergence of these digital technologies is a significant undertaking, and exceeds the goals of this thesis. However, what can be accomplished is bringing greater clarity to how local television has been uniquely affected throughout this transition, specifically as it relates to the rapid evolution of social media. This following chapters will explore the similarities and differences between how social media is used at the local station level, and discuss how it differs among networks, markets and regions.

Television as We Knew It

How U.S. consumers watch television has changed a great deal since its inception over eighty years ago. When *The Indianapolis Star* (1927) declared that television, a *scientific dream*, had at last been realized, few would dare to imagine how this technological achievement might evolve from a technological "window on the world" to a multi-billion dollar economic, social and cultural industry.

While advances in television broadcast technology were seen happening simultaneously in the U.S. and Britain in the 1930's, it would still be a decade before advances in technology and the resolution of ongoing legal battles would allow television broadcasting in the U.S. to finally became a reality. U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt's keynote address at the New York World's Fair was dubbed, "the official birth of regularly scheduled television broadcasts in the United States" and former electronics company Radio Corporation of America (RCA) president David Sarnoff described television as "a new art, so important in its implications, that it [was] bound to affect all of society" (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). For that matter, television grew to be a "cultural hearth" which brought American families together not just to be entertained, but to provide a gathering place to witness the nation's triumphs and tragedies.

By the 1950's TV viewers were familiar with three broadcast networks and a network

programming model that remained relatively intact in terms of its offerings and its place in daily life, for three decades. By the 1960's, 87% of U.S. households owned televisions (Nielsen, 2000), and the family as a whole tuned in to watch a show as it was broadcast. The social commentary about the programming was understandably localized as well. Conversations were literally conducted at the workplace water cooler and over backyard fences. According to Lotz (2104), television was considered "the central communicative and cultural force in society" (p. 37). For many decades, three networks ushered in an era where audiences watched a program at set times and days, and often an evening's plans (dinner included) were scheduled around what might be airing that night.

Developments in technology appear to have played the most important role in shaping the current television landscape. Beginning somewhat innocuously with the introduction of the remote control in the 1960's, slowly the power to control what was "on TV" began to shift from the hands of the networks and local television stations to the viewer (Lotz, 2014). The paced quickened with the introduction of cable television, the video cassette recorder (VCR), digital video recorders (DVRs), interactive program guides, and now streaming services like Netflix and Hulu on TV's connected to the internet all made TV accessible virtually anywhere.

These emerging technologies affected the business of television as well. As new technologies began to fragment audiences throughout the 1990's, media conglomerates reacted by aggressively seeking to own several sectors of the media industry, including the development, production, sale and distribution of media. Commonly referred to as media *synergy*, Turow (1992) defined this as the "coordination of parts of the company so that the whole actually turns out to be worth more than the sum of its parts acting alone" (p. 685).

A mere decade ago, an average viewer would be hard pressed to imagine a viewing

experience where one could watch television where they want, when they want, and on a device of their choosing. Yet, that is exactly where we are today. High definition (HD) digital video is streamed over high-speed internet within seconds of a click on a user interface that is programmed to predict what an individual viewer 'might" want to watch. The decision as to where this video is displayed, whether on a 70-inch wall-mounted screen, a 9-inch wireless tablet, or even a 5-inch smartphone, is literally in the hands of the viewer, who is also afforded the opportunity to pause, play, rewind, and route video content to play on multiple devices at the same time in multiple rooms. The idea of "appointment television," where viewers make a conscious decision to watch a show at its originally programmed time slot is all but relegated to live sporting events, live newscasts or special event telecasts such as awards shows, season finales, and the like (Freedman, 2010).

In fact, saying that we simply "watch" television is a bit of a misnomer. In sharp contrast to the past, television is becoming much more than a passive experience, as content viewing now can occur on many other devices. Today, 84% of all smartphone and tablet users have used their devices as second screens while watching television (Nielsen, 2014a). These devices allow viewers to do many things, including interact with additional content. Audiences can easily search online for additional content about a particular show, and even join in on online conversations with other viewers. For the viewer, it means a more dynamic, engaging, inclusive way to experience and share a media event. For media marketers, however, this technological growth has fragmented audiences and made it more difficult to reach them. Technological innovations, the influence of the internet, and the emergence of social media have all played a part in the sweeping changes we are seeing in broadcast television at the network level (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). Content development, distribution and marketing all been affected by

fundamental shifts in how audiences consume media in general, and it provides a rich backdrop for the need to explore how local stations have been affected.

The Digital Transformation

As Lotz (2014) observes, various industrial, technical and cultural forces described above had a slow, but radical effect on television beginning in the mid 1980's and lasted into the mid 2000's, which she describes as a "multi-channel transition" period. The transition was gradual, but very disruptive to a decades-old business model, and the three well-established networks of NBC, CBS, ABC plus relative newcomer FOX, all struggled to keep up with a media consumption model vastly different than they were used to. By the beginning of the new millennium, television viewers were able to time-shift their viewing, skip commercials and create their own libraries of recorded media. What was once a "linear" experience, meaning programs were broadcast at a certain time on a certain channel, television became non-linear, allowing programming to be watched at a time and place of the viewer's choosing. The changes in consumer behavior throughout the multi-channel transition even called for a change to the very theories of what scholars held regarding the fundamental characteristics of television. For example, Williams' (2003) theory of *flow* and the nature of an intermixed stream of storytelling, advertisements and promotional announcements are disrupted with the introduction of control devices like the remote control and the DVR.

Amid increases in internet speeds and advances in video compression technology, video streaming service YouTube launched in early 2005, and allowed users to upload and view content on their computers and on their smartphones over existing 3G and 4G mobile technology. A few months later, Apple announced $1.99 music downloads on its iTunes service. These media services, combined with an increase in video-on-demand (VOD) offerings from

cable and satellite providers, ushered in a wave of "convenience" technologies that further disrupted traditional television viewing patterns. Access to media in the home became more accessible, mobile access of online content became more efficient, and newer portable technologies like laptops and tablets were being developed to take advantage of this shift in consumer behavior.

Unbeknownst to many in the television industry at the time, the early 2000's were landmark years in the emergence from the "multi-channel transition" period into the beginning of a "post-network" era. The introduction of new content distribution platforms, advanced consumer electronics, and shifting television viewing behaviors was neither orderly nor easy to identify. However, Bennett & Strange (2011) makes note of the difference between the former "linear" network era of television which delivered mass audiences in a shared viewing experience, and a new era of non-linear "digital television." By their definition, we are able to distinguish a post-network era of television as the proliferation of digital media spread across multiple platforms, including mobile phones, game consoles, and online services such as YouTube, Hulu, Netflix as well as computer-based media players such as Apple TV. Lotz (2014) goes on to further note that despite the sweeping technological changes affecting even the very definition of television, the perspective of the consumer as to what television "is" has not changed. In other words, television isn't dying, but it has changed practically every aspect of the business and behaviors that surround it.

Measuring the Post Network Audience

One fundamental, and very important aspect of television that was affected by the industry's entrance into the post-network era was how this new audience was being measured. Well before the multi-channel transition, Nielsen Media Research and other audience measurement

companies printed, distributed and collected again handwritten diaries from across the country to extrapolate data as to who was watching television. Since then, Nielsen introduced more advanced measurement systems and methods, including the electronic People Meter (1986), a more advanced Local People Meter (2002), as well as the Portable People Meter, being used to measure TV and radio consumption. Over the years, these measurement tools have been plagued with inaccuracies and biases (Marszalek, 2013), along with a fair amount of discontent by advertisers and broadcasters (Moreland, 1995). In the post-network era, Nielsen is under more pressure than ever to to develop new technologies and revise methodologies to keep up with the changing ways viewers watch television. As more consumers began time-shifting their viewing habits with DVR technology, the traditional method of limiting household ratings to a show's original broadcast was called into question, particularly by broadcasters who imagined an important segment of their audience was not being measured. A 2005 push by Nielsen to measure commercial ratings plus three-days of DVR viewing, was met with stiff resistance, this time from advertisers who pointed out Nielsen's inconsistencies in data amounted to buying on a currency with no intrinsic value (Lafayette, 2005). Despite this resistance, Nielsen has not only continued to track DVR viewership, but has rolled out new systems of measuring both streaming and mobile consumption; the company's recent association with Twitter is part of these new efforts. In February 2013, Twitter spent $90 million to purchase startup company Bluefin Labs, which combines television viewer data with Twitter user behavior metrics (Isaac, 2013). This is very valuable information for Nielsen, and not surprisingly, eight months later, Nielsen and Twitter jointly announced the launch of "Twitter TV Ratings," a measurement of total activity and reach of television-related conversations on Twitter (Nielsen, 2013a).

Evolving Behaviors: Social Media, Mobile and TV

On July 11, 2014, news broke that NBA basketball star LeBron James was traded from the Miami Heat back to his former team, the Cleveland Cavaliers. At their headquarters in Bristol, Connecticut, employees of cable sports network ESPN sent a push alert to 6.5 million phones. Instantly, more sports fans learned of the trade than the combined weekly circulation of *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today* combined. At one point, there were more people on ESPN's website and app than watching the network's signature program, *SportsCenter* (Thompson, 2015). Today, major media companies are searching for ways to reinforce their brands, build audiences, and monetize their programming at a time when more people than ever are using web, mobile and social media to interact with their content. In fact, Nielsen (2011a) suggested that social media has become one of the highest co-usage mediums together with television.

As early as 2009, the extent of knowledge about social media, or even an agreed upon definition of "social media" was elusive. Given the growing focus that business executives place on the value of social media, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) aimed to better define the concept, as well as differentiate the word's use among similar concepts like "Web 2.0" and "user generated content." They also saw the use of the internet and online communication taking on a more conversational and interactive mode of discourse, and it has only grown. Today, there are over two hundred million active Facebook users and almost fifty-three million active Twitter users in North America and these conversations has given birth to a real-time "backchannel" of opinions and expressions from an engaged audience, even becoming a participatory companion to the TV viewing experience (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). They observed that online conversations about television programming are happening before, during and after shows air, and drew comparisons to the "word of mouth" promotion once prevalent in the network era.

Social media use brings with it a near constant stream of social impressions, and television marketers are eager to tap into the insights hidden within the data that online and social media use generates. This data brings with it opportunities to study social and cultural processes and dynamics in new ways. For the first time, we can follow imaginations, opinions, ideas, and feelings of hundreds of millions of people. We can see the images and the videos they create and comment on, monitor the conversations they are engaged in, read their blog posts and tweets, listen in on their track lists, and if so inclined, follow their movements in physical space. The avalanche of information that comes with social media user data collection is generally unfiltered, or as Moe and Schweidel (2014) put it, decentralized, and extracting meaning from it is a daunting task. Still, the idea of leveraging "big social data" for marketing use is a rapidly growing strategy, with 70% of all IT decision-makers consider their organization's ability to exploit value from big data as critical to their future success (Columbus, 2015).

Television networks and their affiliates have not been able to ignore the power of influence that a connected, engaged audience can bring in terms of awareness and promotion of the content it airs. It has become commonplace for programs to display Twitter hashtags on screen, both as a prompt for users to join in on a conversation, as well as a declaration of a trending topic, worthy of following and sharing. Additionally, Facebook has emerged as a mainstream social media tool that allows for more dynamic ways for fans to engage with programming content and to take advantage of algorithms to increase its chances for being seen on other users' feeds. For example, once a person "likes" a person's or company's page, they are in essence agreeing to see updates from these sources on their own newsfeeds. Local television station marketers take advantage of this by posting news and promotional messages, contributing to a 360% increase in video posts showing up in people's newsfeeds (Peterson, 2015).

Evolving Relationships: Networks and Their Affiliates

The post-network era, by its very definition, marks a fundamental shift in how consumers watch, share and seek out the television experience compared to years past. And while a recent Nielsen measurement indicated that overall television viewership might be *increasing* (2011b), traditional broadcast networks, once a dominant audience driver, lament the fact that ratings for traditional prime time viewership is on the decline (Crupi, 2013). Because of this, networks are more aggressive than ever to develop marketing practices that target viewers and build brand loyalty. For local broadcast stations airing network programming, the challenge is even greater. Most local stations produce their own local newscasts to supplement network and syndicated programming, and rely on this programming to drive viewership ratings and lure local advertisers. Recent declines in audience ratings leading in from network primetime programming have put more pressure on local stations to promote their news product separately from the network. This is only one of several points of conflict that have emerged between local stations and the networks in the post-network era. Residual strains left over from changes in the network/affiliate reverse compensation model[i] in the 1990's are compounded by recent efforts by the network to re-air programs online soon after their original broadcast, plus a general reluctance by some networks to allow affiliates to explore alternative marketing models for network programming.

Each television network has more than two hundred local stations across the U.S. as their affiliates. Because of the collective audience reach of those local stations, those national networks rely heavily on their affiliates to promote network product both in outside media and on their own air. Each day, on-air promos are fed by satellite or made available to the station digitally to be inserted in local commercial breaks. When outside media is purchased, such as

radio, cable, newspaper, and highway billboards, networks will reimburse local affiliates up to 50% of all ad dollars placed by the station (Eastman, Ferguson & Klein, 2012). The media purchased by the station can also be used to drive tune-in for local news, but in order to receive reimbursement, a portion of the media must also be used to promote tune-in to network programming. This "co-op" agreement between the nets and their affiliates has been a standard for at least twenty years, but the networks have been slow to include digital advertising as "approved" outside media. This is the case despite copious amounts of research noting an overall increase in online advertising, totaling almost $43 billion in 2013 (Interactive Ad Bureau, 2014; Lunden, 2014). With an array of options, including animated banner ads, rich media, and video pre-rolls, and better ways to track engagement, many local stations have folded online advertising into their traditional advertising mix. Unfortunately, as local stations embrace advertising on services like Hulu, Pandora, and video pre-roll ads on YouTube, they risk not being compensated by the network.

Finally, broadcast networks have also begun distributing their programming in new ways, drawing viewers to their shows on many digital platforms, and not just the primary airings on broadcast television. For example, networks offer their programs for immediate viewing on their own websites and have secured relationships with cable systems and "over the top" delivery systems like Hulu and Apple TV to allow shows to be accessed just days after their primary airings. This tactic makes sense for the network, particularly because of the additional exposure shows can receive, even after its initial airing. Finally, social media plays a significant role in the extended engagement of network programming as well, as Nielsen (2014b) notes that tweets during original airings continue well after the show airs.

Social Media and Television

While there is little doubt that driving social impressions and engagement will benefit a brand's position, much debate still exists among scholars and media executives alike regarding social media's ability to directly affect television ratings. In 2013, Twitter and Nielsen Media Research conducted a joint study that showed a direct correlation between Twitter use and TV ratings (Nielsen, 2013b), yet there is no independent study, professional or scholarly, that supports or refutes this. To add, one might call into question the validity of the study purely on the basis of both entities' potential to gain from a positive outcome. Academic literature that does exist relating to new media's effect on television viewing is limited, but Pynta et al. (2014) conducted a study measuring brain-activity of subjects who used social media (Twitter and Fango) while watching television. They conclude that their findings are in line with Nielsen's own regarding Twitter usage and viewer engagement, and suggest that "higher levels of program engagement also bode well for advertisers, with advertising spots also likely to receive boosts in performance" (p. 78). Online *engagement* is an important tool in measuring the value and impact of social media marketing efforts insofar as it tracks a consumer's interaction with a person or brand. In the case of Facebook, engagement is measured in "likes", "shares", and "comments" to a particular post that appears on a person's newsfeed. In the case of Twitter, engagement is measured by "mentions", "retweets", or "@replies."

Beyond promotion, Harrington, Highfield & Bruns (2012) further noted ways in which Twitter is reshaping television, from audience viewing behaviors to the ways broadcasters produce programming with Twitter followers in mind. Several networks have been quite creative in engaging a show's social media fanbase. Shows like ABC's *Modern Family* polled its Twitter base to decide on which episode to air. In addition, the *BET Awards* live awards show even decided on which artists to feature at certain points of the broadcast based on the assumed tweets

that would be helpful in promoting broader tune-in (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012).

In addition to the discussion of social media's influence on television viewing, the very consumer behaviors that contribute to a person's decision to comment and interact in an online social space need to be better understood. Only then can organizations move from mere social media monitoring to a place where they can integrate and leverage social "intelligence" into their overall business strategies. Moe and Schweidel (2012) make note that posting comments in an online social space is voluntary and, understandably, does not represent the majority of opinions. Further, they note *extreme* opinions tend to be oversampled, with moderate opinions eventually being drowned out and replaced with negative opinions. This somewhat cautionary tale calls for social media researchers, marketers and strategists to have a "clear understanding of the motivations and social influences that drive participants in opinion environments like Twitter and Facebook, lest the conclusions drawn from social media monitoring would be flawed" (p. 65).

Despite the lack of consensus as to social media's influence on TV viewing behaviors, both networks their affiliates have invested heavily in time and resources devoted to social media. However, as social media use among the TV industry and their cherished viewers is skyrocketing, the divergent nature of their individual social media marketing strategies is also apparent. Varying programming models, competing promotional priorities, and corporate ownership mandates may each play a part in what causes differences in social media practices between networks and affiliates. As such, defining where the lines of demarcation exist and reflecting on the reasons behind it is a meaningful and worthy undertaking.

A Call for More Study

Other than discussion in the popular press, there has been little academic research regarding television's use of social media, particularly as it relates to local station promotion and

marketing. Several years ago, Webster (2009) noted the rapid integration of Twitter in media companies' marketing and promotional efforts, but it is Douglas Ferguson and Dale Blasingame, both former television professionals, who are the relatively lone voices in the analysis of social media use by local TV stations for promotional purposes. While valuable data was collected through Ferguson's research, especially pertaining to insights on the content of Twitter posts by marketing and news personnel at the station level, his findings are now several years old. For example, Ferguson notes that in 2008, only 44% of TV stations were "involved" with Twitter (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Today, that number is 99.3% (Papper, 2015). Additionally, both Ferguson and Blasingame's data does not take into account the *blend* of multiple social media platforms, including Facebook, or the station's obligation to promote the network's programming.

The study herein is more timely and broader in scope in order to shed light on how station-level marketing and news managers have evolved their social media promotion strategies, and how it may differ in form and function across the spectrum of markets sizes across the U.S. When exploring this, important discussions surrounding the current state of broadcast television promotion will take place, including the steady erosion of television viewership ratings over the past decade, corporate ownership of local television stations, and the phenomenon of generic brand promotion versus targeted tune-in promotion.

As of this writing, there are over 1,300 local commercial television stations in the United States (Federal Communications Commission, 2015), and access to a strategic sample of the marketing and promotion efforts at large-, medium- and small-market stations nationwide provides valuable information to researchers as well as media professionals. Not only does it reveal the theories and practices of local stations' social media efforts, but it also sheds light on

the unique challenges of being a network affiliate in the post-network era.

Theory and Method

While their programming philosophies differ slightly, national broadcast networks NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX and the CW all attempt to lure the audience that advertisers crave, often categorized as adults between the ages of 18 and 49 (O'Donnell, 2007). Local television stations, once paid by the networks to air their programs, and the network's only distribution platform for decades, were brothers in arms in a joint effort to promote that programming. Today, stations are now paying the *networks* for the rights to air their programming, first-run programming can be seen within hours of its original airing on several online services, and because of declining network ratings, an affiliate's local newscast can bring in more ad revenue than primetime programming. Thus, local television stations are rethinking their marketing and promotional efforts and becoming more self-reliant in terms of attracting audiences, particularly through social media.

The primary objective of my research is to investigate the social media marketing strategies of local broadcast television affiliates. As such, social media posts were reviewed as rhetorical texts being used for the purpose of marketing, and not necessarily the *effect* of those texts themselves. Therefore, I have chosen to approach the discovery and analysis of these social media strategies from the perspective of rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism allows for close textual analysis, plus the exploration and examination of persuasive strategies. In addition, rhetorical criticism is effective in providing greater understanding through the analysis of case studies (Hart & Daughton, 2004).

From a rhetorical perspective, it is also valid in this study to consider Kenneth Burke's concept of *identification*. The social media promotional messages that I observed are, by their

very nature, persuasive, and while they are disseminated widely, marketers engage the audience

on a very personal level, much in the same way as a consumer might interact with friends or

family. Burke points out the strong correlation between one's connection to a common

"substance" and the resulting ability to be persuaded, noting, "You persuade a man only insofar

as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying

your ways with his" (Burke,1969). Additionally, social media is *mass* media, and from that

standpoint, Althusser's conceptual framework of *interpellation*, the concept of media "hailing"

the subject and speaking to that subject directly, should be considered (2006). As digital

marketers craft promotional messages to attract audiences and ultimately drive viewership,

Althusser's conceptual framework provides a language through which we can identify and define

the influence that this new media exerts over the public.

   Lastly, while these are higher-level, even historical components within media theory, it is also

important to call upon the various aspects of modern digital branding and how today's marketers

are using interactive tools to not only listen in on consumer chatter, but digitally watch

consumers in action. Adamson (2008) noted that regardless of the era, there is a fundamental

need for marketers to gain insight into their customers' needs in order to generate business and

build brand strategies, and the current digital era now affords them the ability to watch what

people do, not just what they "say" they do.

   Local television stations use social media in a variety of ways, primarily for the purposes

marketing and to disseminate news stories. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to point

out that I am using the above theoretical foundations to support my analysis of those texts that

are dedicated to the advancement of the *marketing* efforts of the station and not an ideological

analysis of news texts intended to inform the general public.

From a practical standpoint, I observed the content of social media posts across each major

network affiliate's Facebook page and Twitter feed across select large, medium and small

television markets across the U.S. (see Table 1), as determined by the size of their respective

Designated Market Area (DMA) as measured by Nielsen Media Research. This designation

generally aligns with a city's metropolitan area, although in more rural areas, smaller cities are

combined to create a separate DMA. Definitions of "large" versus "medium" and "small" market

can be arbitrary, especially across different areas of the industry. In a general sense, large

markets are considered those within the top 20 to 25 DMA's, medium markets are considered

those ranked roughly from 25 to somewhere between 75 and 100, and small markets from

markets greater than 100. Occasionally, the term "major" market is used to designate top 5 or top

10 markets. For the purposes of this analysis, I have isolated markets 1-25 as large markets, and

markets 26-50 as medium markets, primarily because of the similarly in the size of newsroom

staffs within that grouping (Papper, 2016b). For the same reason, I then identify a "small" market

as one greater than 50. While it might have been simpler to randomly select markets across

Nielsen's 210-station local television market universe, the above markets are selected based on

several factors in order to reduce the potential for skewed results in observed social media

content. First, the selected markets include variety in terms of geographic location as well as

population. Additionally, since corporate oversight might dictate a station's social media efforts,

the sample includes diversity in station ownership. Lastly, some duopoly[ii] markets are included

in the sample with the understanding that a duopoly station might combine, duplicate, or cross-

promote content from two networks across both stations.

The timing of the observation of social media activity took place during two periods:

Monday, November 2, 2015, through Friday, November 6, 2015, and again from Monday,

Table 1

Social Media Observation List

Market	DMA	Call Letters	Network	Ownership
New York	1	WCBS	(CBS)	CBS Television
		WABC	(ABC)	ABC/Walt Disney Company
		WNBC	(NBC)	NBC/Universal
		WNYW	(FOX)	FOX/News Corporation
		WPIX	(CW)	Tribune Media
S.F.-Oak-San Jose	6	KPIX	(CBS)	CBS Television
		KGO	(ABC)	ABC/Walt Disney Company
		KNTV	(NBC)	NBC/Universal
		KTVU	(FOX)	FOX/News Corporation
		KBCW	(CW)	CBS Television
Indianapolis	27	WTTV	(CBS)	Tribune Media
		WRTV	(ABC)	E.W. Scripps Company
		WTHR	(NBC)	Dispatch Broadcast Group
		WXIN	(FOX)	Tribune Media
		WISH	(CW)	Media General/Nexstar
San Antonio	33	KENS	(CBS)	Tegna, Inc.
		KSAT	(ABC)	Graham Media Group
		WOAI	(NBC)	Sinclair Broadcast Group
		KABB	(FOX)	Sinclair Broadcast Group
		KCWX	(CW)	Corridor Television
New Orleans	51	WWL	(CBS)	Tegna, Inc.
		WGNO	(ABC)	Tribune Media
		WDSU	(NBC)	Hearst Television
		WVUE	(FOX)	Raycom Media
		WNOL	(CW)	Tribune Media
Green Bay-Appleton	68	WFRV	(CBS)	Nexstar Broadcasting Group
		WBAY	(ABC)	Gray Television, Inc.
		WGBA	(NBC)	E.W. Scripps Company
		WLUK	(FOX)	Sinclair Broadcast Group
		WCWF	(CW)	Sinclair Broadcast Group

February 2, 2016, through Friday, February 6, 2016. To ensure consistency in results across similar times during the broadcast day, stations within the sample located in the Eastern and Pacific time zones were observed at 6:00 a.m., 8:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., local time. Similarly, observations of stations located in the Central time zones in the sample took place at 5:00 a.m., 7:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m., local time. Additionally, FOX and CW stations that air local news during prime time (which would be an hour earlier than ABC, NBC, and CBS), were observed during their respective airtimes. These dates coincide with the first full week of the Nielsen ratings period, commonly referred to as "sweeps," and is a time where all stations are compelled to maximize their promotion, marketing and newsgathering efforts. For example, during sweeps months, local newsrooms commonly air in-depth news stories that have been developed for weeks prior to air, local promotion departments may create contests or promotional events as an incentive to watch programming, and the networks themselves often schedule special events and first-run episodes of their shows. The window of time for observations throughout each day is also purposeful, particularly the start time of 6:00 a.m. Facebook notes that 79% of smartphone users between the ages of 18 and 44 reach for their cell phones within fifteen minutes of waking up, with Facebook being the third highest smartphone activity (2013). It is anticipated, then, that the content observed during particular times across a wide portion of the broadcast day will yield more valuable information than a small window, or perhaps a random sample.

Data to be analyzed was collected from Facebook and Twitter posts from the stations' verified primary accounts. Twitter posts that were to be analyzed were tallied on the days and times mentioned above and categorized into five separate areas. The first of these categories, *News Promotion*, include tweets that used specific language that drives a consumer to watch a newscast on television. The second category, *News/Weather Content*, include tweets that can be

described primarily as news stories or weather updates, and contained no messaging that could be defined as promotional in nature. The third category, *Network Cross Promotion*, included specific mentions (promotion or otherwise) that related to network programming. The fourth category, *Engagement*, included posts that actively solicited viewer feedback, sharing or other kinds of online participation. Examples of this included links to online polls, opinion statements, or encouragement to like or share someone else's tweet. A final category, Miscellaneous, allowed for the categorization of a tweet that fell outside the four other defined areas.

Facebook posts were recorded on the same days and times as those posts on Twitter. A computer screen recoding program captured all posts that each station made and were archived for analysis. Posts were loosely categorized in similarly defined areas of *promotion*, *content*, *network cross promotion* and *engagement*. Because of the nature of Facebook's media embedding capabilities, additional observations were made related to Facebook Live streams and uploaded video clips.

Chapter Preview

Eastman noted that the impact of a television promotional message must be instantaneous, because television itself only occupies ephemeral moments in time (Eastman, et al., 1999). While he wrote this well before television's emergence into the post-network era, the message has never been more relevant than in our current, "140-character" social media marketing landscape. Greer, Ferguson and their contemporaries have documented network cable, network broadcast and local broadcast promotion and marketing tactics during television's multi-channel transition period, and briefly touched on Twitter and even Pinterest's emergence as a promotional and marketing tool (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Yet, to fully appreciate the scope of the changes in local and network television marketing in the post-network era, a deeper and more timely

exploration of the current promotional landscape is needed.

This body of work is a structured digital media critical analysis focused on promotional content contained within Facebook posts and Twitter feeds from local broadcast television stations, all during a period of time when all stations are hyper-focused on migrating audiences to various programming. As such, this will not provide an exhaustive examination and re-categorization of the social media texts themselves, nor will it take the shape of a quantitative digital content analysis. Rather, I have drawn comparisons from digital texts in the form of social media posts from across a wide spectrum of local television stations, and will discuss the differentiating factors among them. This provides a valuable snapshot of the current state of broadcast television promotion, and adds to the scholarly discussion of an industry affected by such rapid change.

Subsequent chapters will review social media content observed by local TV affiliates (CBS, ABC, NBC, FOX and CW) during a traditional broadcast television ratings period. The content of these posts will be compared across several areas, with special attention given to finding similarities and differences across networks, market sizes, types of embedded media, and types of programming being promoted. Additional reflection on local social media strategies and executions will focus on possible external forces, particularly surrounding station ownership. While the promotion strategies of *local* programming to *local* audiences might seem straightforward, network owned and operated (O&O) stations' marketing efforts may come with corporate mandates to promote the network instead. Similarly, multi-station ownership within the same market (duopolies) may have an effect on promotion strategies.

The final chapter will bring into focus these observations and advance the discussion of social media's effect on local television promotion. Since its emergence in the mid 2000's, social

media has been utilized more and more by television marketers and local newsrooms to attract, engage, and inform audiences. Additionally, the medium's ability to track its marketing effectiveness through the collection of consumer behavior and other data, while bringing expanded insights, is also challenging the very foundation of television ratings measurement methodologies. This data is crucial to the multibillion-dollar media marketplace and critically important to the successful operation of 1300 local commercial television stations across the U.S.

For decades, television viewing in the network era was a passive, collective experience. Programming was watched by millions at a time, and large groups, mainly families, watched simultaneously on a singular device. As viewing options increased and technologies afforded a much more convenient viewing experience, viewing patterned changed. DVR's, video-on-demand (VOD) and streaming services like Netflix fragmented TV viewership, creating much smaller niche audiences watching shows in a markedly nonlinear fashion. Today, among a flurry of new technology and program offerings, U.S. television networks and their local affiliates are strange bedfellows in what was once a much simpler, mutually beneficial relationship.

CHAPTER 2: LARGE MARKET OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

In 2004, a devastating tsunami struck off the coast of Indonesia, killing more than 230,000 people across 14 countries. It was also the defining moment in Veronica De La Cruz's career as a journalist. De La Cruz, then a young desk reporter for CNN, was tasked with connecting people who had been displaced by the tragic event and then generate news stories of the people reunited. The internet played a critical role in her efforts. According to De La Cruz, it was a revolutionizing moment because people "have a natural desire to share their personal stories," and the internet made it possible to reach out to them as well as give them a voice (Guthrie, 2014).

De La Cruz is a self-admitted early adopter of new technology and she realized the benefit of using the internet in her storytelling. Her career took off, taking her to other notable destinations in television news, including stops in New York City at cable news network MSNBC and NBC News. She eventually landed at San Francisco's owned and operated CBS affiliate KPIX-TV to help launch *Bay Area Nightbeat*, a 30-minute newscast which airs on their CW-affiliated sister station. *Bay Area Nightbeat* launched in 2014, labeled in a recent on-air promo as "built for speed," uses social media as key component in their newsgathering efforts, and features De La Cruz at the helm. The overall goal of *Bay Area Nightbeat* is to attract a younger demographic to local news, and recognizing the media consumption habits of that audience, the use of social media in the newsgathering process seems logical.

According to De La Cruz, the audience ratings for *Bay Area Nightbeat* are trending up, but like other stations around the country trying to produce similar fast-paced, younger skewing newscasts, finding the magic formula for ratings success is elusive. Still, the use of social media

is being recognized as a key component for local broadcast television stations to inform and more importantly, engage news audiences.

Veronica De La Cruz's home market of San Francisco is in the top five of all U.S. television markets, and offers ample opportunities to explore how major market television stations are using social media for newsgathering and promotional purposes. Large market stations generally have larger staffs, they have dedicated social media and digital content teams and are provided several avenues to obtain audience and marketing research. In this chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences in how the major network television stations in two large markets, specifically San Francisco and New York City, and explore how they have utilized social media in their newsgathering and promotion efforts. I will consider several factors in this discussion, including the issues related to social media use across different periods of time throughout the day, the content of social media posts themselves, as well as an exploration of the goals and objectives of the posts and the social media platforms stations choose to use.

Big Markets, Big Social Footprint

Ask the people who live there, and it appears the cities of New York and San Francisco have very little in common. New York Magazine calls San Francisco it's "dorky, behoodied, west coast cousin" with overpriced coffee and poor public transportation. Conversely, a notable San Francisco-based blogger/satirist countered by making reference to New York's unsightly mountains of garbage and harsh winters (Roose, 2014). While these coastal loyalists may never agree on whose city is best, there is one particular area where these cities are strikingly similar: both are tech savvy. San Francisco and New York lead all other U.S. cities in terms of overall social media use (Socialbakers, 2012) evidenced also in the manner by which New York's and San Francisco's television stations use social media to communicate to their audiences. When

these stations post digital content, millions see their message and engage with them.

The New York City television market reigns supreme as the largest broadcast television market in the country, reaching over 7 million households (Nielsen, 2016). No other market brings in more local ad revenue, pays the most for its talent, or is a more coveted career destination for aspiring, network-level news reporters and anchors. On the opposite coast, the San Francisco/Oakland/San Jose television market is considered by many in the industry to be just as prestigious. It may be only a third of the size of New York in total households, but the sixth largest television market commands similar salaries for their anchors due to similar cost of living. Additionally, the San Francisco market actually surpasses New York City in terms of total social media followers of local TV stations as a percentage of total households. It is not surprising, then, that social media is not merely considered a lightweight addition to the serious business of news in these markets. It is recognized as a central pillar that the newsroom, and its marketers depend upon to operate.

Sweeping Up Ratings Through Social Media

I observed social media posts from the New York and San Francisco markets during a traditional ratings month called "sweeps." Back in the mid 1950's, television ratings juggernaut Nielsen Media Research began the process of mailing out millions of diaries across the country as an attempt to measure audiences watching television. Once filled out, Nielsen would gather, or "sweep" them back up to tabulate the results, thus coining a term that the industry would use to identify the three major (and two minor) ratings periods that occur throughout the year. Since local advertisers use the results of these ratings periods when placing their buys, stations go the extra mile to execute special promotions and programming stunts to attract new audiences. Newsrooms also get into the act, creating in-depth stories and multi-part news series. In and

around sweeps months, promotional efforts by the station are ramped up to bolster the viewing of loyal audiences and recruit new ones. To do this, stations typically invest in the placement of outside media, particularly through radio, cable and digital advertising, but the strategic use of social media has grown to be a primary tool to provide content to consumers, increase a station's brand awareness, drive engagement, and migrate those audiences to other content offerings. A recent study notes that almost 80% of all smartphone users reach for their mobile device within the first fifteen minutes of waking up (Taylor, 2013), a fact which is not lost on the social media marketers at New York and San Francisco television stations. Since many local television stations see the greatest percentage of their revenue come from the hours spanning their morning news coverage, these local stations ramped up their efforts to reach them through Facebook and Twitter. Is a station's Twitter feed simply a second-screen news aggregator? Can the broad reach of a station's Facebook page truly be a viable tool to migrate audiences to another (and more profitable) station property? Can news brands be built on such a rapidly changing medium? Simple answers to these questions elude even the most veteran local TV marketers, and vastly different social media philosophies become apparent when one looks closely at large market practices such as those in New York and San Francisco.

From the very first day of the February 2016 ratings period, NBC/Universal owned and operated WNBC-TV and Tribune Media's WPIX-TV posted a steady stream of tweets during the overnight hours, up to and through the important 6:00 a.m. hour where local morning news tune-in often peaks. The content of the stations' tweets was diverse, ranging from simple story headlines with hyperlinks to the full story on the stations' websites, to embedded video weather forecasts that were pre-recorded and posted online. This tactic demonstrates a clear standard operating procedure in their newsrooms to devote resources, even during overnight hours when

social media use wanes, so they can be the go-to source for news. Whereas WNBC-TV and WPIX-TV were observed posting tweets with some regularity during the overnight hours, this is in relative contrast to their in-market competitors whose social media presence in the overnight hours dropped to a scant few. This appears to mirror the habits of the consumer— slow in overnight hours, and spiking in the waking hours. The one outlier was WCBS-TV, whose overall Twitter and Facebook presence throughout many mornings was surprisingly small.

As it relates to use of Twitter in the newsroom, the San Francisco market was remarkably more active, or better yet *interactive*, in the way stations informed and engaged followers first thing in the morning. Stations used a higher percentage of embedded video, retweeted network news stories, and promoted investigative series. They also eagerly encouraged viewers to watch live online streaming of their newscasts. During one morning, ABC-owned KGO-TV tweeted a remarkable eighteen times in the 6:00 a.m. hour alone— more than all other stations combined. One possible reason why San Francisco stations seem to have embraced Twitter so strongly as a news communication tool might lie in the fact that San Francisco commuters simply have more time on their hands in the morning to engage in social media. Earning its place on the list of U.S. cities with the longest commutes, San Francisco beats even New York City in time spent in traffic at over 78 hours a year in traffic jams (Gorzelany, 2015). An increase in commuters means an increase in mobile use which, according to Twitter brings with it a more engaged audience who tweet, share, click on links compared to non-mobile users (Twitter, 2013). Perhaps a simpler reason that users in San Francisco are more Twitter-centric may be the result of their city being the corporate home of such a high percentage of internet and technology firms, including Twitter. Either way, San Francisco TV stations out-tweet their New York City partners by more than 3-to-1 on an average day during sweeps.

Facebook: Different Platform, Different Content

In addition to Twitter, the use of Facebook in local news distribution and audience engagement is a key focus in today's newsroom as well. One reason is because of the sheer audience reach Facebook provides. According to recent Pew Research, 76% of all U.S. adults use social networking sites, with Facebook users leading the way by a margin twice that of all other social media sites (2015). Additionally, while news consumers are known to use Twitter more than Facebook to follow breaking news in real time, Facebook affords news producers a wider range of options to add embed video and images from stories, and most importantly, receive immediate audience feedback. As a result, newsrooms in New York and San Francisco were observed to create a majority of posts that solicit commentary, include hyperlinks, and graphics and video clips. All of this suggests the goal for newsrooms is twofold— create posts that contain news content that consumers are hungry for, and craft them in such a way such that it will boost engagement. This is a logical marketing strategy overall, but it also may be geared to tap into Facebook's built-in algorithms that will determine the likelihood of those posts appearing on a person's newsfeed.

Every day, as each one of Facebook's 170,000 daily active users in the U.S. logs on, one of the world's most influential, misunderstood, and ever-changing algorithms comes to life. It scans and collects everything posted in the past week by each of a user's friends, everyone they follow, and every Facebook page that person has liked. For the average user with a few hundred friends, that can be in the range of 10,000 posts. Then, according to Facebook's closely guarded formula, their newsfeed algorithm ranks them all in what it believes to be the order of how likely a user is to find each post worthwhile. Facebook tops all other websites in referral to news sites (VanNest, 2016), so this algorithm is immensely influential for content publishers looking to get

their posts on as many newsfeeds as possible.

For local TV news marketers, Facebook's update to its newsfeed algorithm in late 2013 seemed logical— Facebook wanted to favor what they deemed "high-quality content" in determining what would show up on users' newsfeeds. After polling users, Facebook determined "quality content" as being relevant, worthy of sharing with others, generally interesting, and not overly promotional in nature. Facebook then applied the results to the algorithm. Knowing that low quality posts would most likely not show up on consumers' newsfeeds, social media producers based in TV newsrooms began rethinking the kinds of posts that they should write.

While most television marketers would consider these changes to Facebook's newsfeed algorithm as positive, subsequent changes throughout 2014 and 2015 were seen to limit the efforts of television marketers to find effective tactics to get their posts seen, liked, and shared. For example, in an effort to cut down on people trying to rig the system, Facebook cracked down on pages that explicitly asked for likes, and comments. Television stations across the country were using this easy trick regularly, racking up tens of thousands of followers using Facebook as the point of entry for contests and promotions. Facebook also went after posts that overtly teased followers to follow a link. Newsroom copywriters are well-trained at writing in this style, but Facebook was not in favor of allowing "clickbait" to unfairly benefit the station. Facebook warned pages against posting "overly promotional" updates, saying that such posts would be shown to fewer people. For those who want to reach people on Facebook with a promotional pitch, they provided a simple option: buy a Facebook ad.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of Facebook's newsfeed to marketers. Facebook's aim, of course, is to create the most interesting stream of content possible, personalized for each of its 1.5 billion worldwide users. The "perfect personalized newspaper" is

how Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg termed it (Shontell, 2013), and for TV news stations, the

ultimate quest is to earn a place on the "perfect front page," and muscling in where other stations

want to be.

In 2015, yet another adjustment to the algorithm was announced, and this time it was

received as a huge opportunity for news marketers: Facebook said it would show more video to

people who liked watching video. Viral video views were growing steadily at that time, with

Facebook reporting twice as many people were watching video compared to six months

previous. In January of 2016, Facebook announced the launch of a new feature, Facebook Live, a

live streaming video feature, not unlike the separate Twitter-owned app, Periscope (Fitzgerald,

2016). This was the first time Facebook opened up live video streaming on its newsfeeds to its

general consumer base, but it wasn't the first time Facebook offered live streaming. Seven years

earlier, Facebook and cable network CNN joined forces to stream the U.S. presidential

inauguration on CNN.com, enabling its users to update their Facebook statuses directly from the

CNN.com Live player, where they also could see status updates from their friends and other

Facebook users (Time Warner, 2009). The effort netted a record 27 million live streams. Unlike

the live video streaming application Periscope, Facebook users can see the live stream embedded

in their current newsfeed without downloading any additional software, and they can comment

below the stream in real time.

Once Facebook Live was launched, reporters and anchors wasted no time grabbing their

mobile devices to begin experimenting with streaming video on Facebook. Savvy newsroom

personalities began responding back to comments and questions, creating a unique two-way

news experience that brought a new level of engagement and brand awareness. The experience is

live and unedited, and because it is recorded on a smartphone the video is shaky and the audio

substandard. This may not be a significant deterrent, however. Viewers are spending more time per day watching online media each year while time spent watching traditional TV shrinks ("Mobile Continues to Steal," 2014), making it safe to say that an unpolished media product is not a problem for traditional TV consumers watching media on mobile devices. During the 2016 February sweeps, Facebook feeds from most New York City and San Francisco stations were observed using Facebook Live to stream a variety of breaking news, behind the scenes and to a lesser extent, conversational interactions with their viewers. It was experimental, certainly, but the instant feedback in the event's comments seems to be overwhelmingly positive. Live streaming, especially with a live comment feature is affording newsrooms a level of engagement with their product which, up to now, have struggled to achieve.

Facebook Live and the Super Bowl

Super Bowl 50 marked the golden year for the National Football League's biggest spectacle. True to its form, the event drew huge audiences and unprecedented demand for advertisers and marketers to get in on the action. Played on Sunday, February 7th at Levi's Stadium just south of San Francisco Bay, Super Bowl 50 was the third most watched event in U.S. television history (Kissell, 2016). The game was special, pitting the Denver Broncos' veteran quarterback Peyton Manning against league MVP and young upstart quarterback, Cam Newton from the Carolina Panthers. Outside of this compelling narrative, the game was also significant because for San Francisco stations, the biggest game of the year was played in their hometown in the middle of the February sweeps period. Super Bowl 50 presented a unique opportunity to woo advertisers, build brand loyalty and showcase the myriad of local events in the week leading up to the big event.

Even though the game was broadcast locally on CBS-owned KPIX-TV, all of the

television stations in San Francisco went the extra mile to connect with local news viewers. Several stations broadcast live from temporary news sets erected in the *Super Bowl Village* erected nearby the stadium. Other stations live-streamed fireworks displays on their websites, while reporters recorded and tweeted video clips from music concerts. One station was observed flying their news helicopter over the stadium to spy on rehearsals of the halftime show. In the social media space, it was no different. All five local news stations eagerly uploaded content to their various social media platforms, and three stations— ABC affiliate KGO-TV, CBS affiliate KPIX-TV, and FOX affiliate KTVU-TV, took immediate advantage of the newly launched Facebook Live.

Because Facebook Live was only a few weeks into its release, the content of Facebook Live streams across the San Francisco stations varied greatly. The length of streams ranged anywhere from a minute or two in length, to over twenty minutes. Some of the streams were narrated, offering insight into what the viewer was watching, and yet others had no narration. ABC affiliate KGO-TV appeared to be very eager to embrace Facebook Live, posting an average of four live streams per day in the three days leading up to Super Bowl 50. The content focused on unique and trending topics such as behind the scenes preparations at the stadium, weather outlooks for the many outdoor evening events, and even viral footage of cable network Animal Planet's "Puppy Bowl"— a somewhat lesser known, but popular event featuring puppies frolicking on camera within a football-themed enclosure. To a markedly lesser extent overall, CBS affiliate KPIX-TV and Fox affiliate KTVU-TV did take advantage of Facebook Live, but not with any great regularity. They did, however, join others in showcasing behind the scenes access to the *Super Bowl Experience*, a vast interactive, football-themed activity space geared mostly towards young fans and families.

Since launching its livestream service, Facebook provided several suggestions to its users on how to best utilize Facebook Live and generate the most compelling and interactive content, including the tip to give fans early notice on when a live stream would begin and to make sure the signal strength of the mobile device is strong when streaming (Facebook, n.d.). Stations heeded these tips, and one other important one: talking back to fans throughout the stream. KGO-TV heeded the advice when the morning anchor team streamed for approximately seventeen minutes, engaging with fans who posted comments on Facebook during the live stream. The content of the live stream was simple: a behind the scenes tour of the KGO-TV studios. However, the engagement was significant. The stream was viewed over 22,000 times, liked by almost 700, and the event saw almost 400 comments and questions. Facebook made it clear that engagement and high-quality content will be rewarded by being positioned on a higher percentage of users' newsfeeds. In the case of KGO-TV's initial foray into Facebook Live, they seem to have benefitted from their efforts.

WABC-TV & KGO-TV: Same Ownership, Contrasts in Execution

In 2014, just in time for the May ratings period, the Disney/ABC owned and operated station group unveiled a new website platform on each of their eight stations, including New York's WABC-TV and KGO-TV in San Francisco. It was a project eighteen months in the making, and took advantage of a new "responsive design" which, for mobile users, afforded users a much richer experience. The term "responsive" comes from a website's ability to automatically scale text and images to be most readable within the environment on which it is viewed, whether mobile, tablet or desktop. The concept is not new. As early as 2000, web designers knew that the way users surfed the web was changing, as were the devices on which they did it. As such, web designers foretold their future, noting, responsive web design

represented a "fundamental shift" in how websites would be built for decade to come (Veen, 2000). The ABC station group websites were now built with a mix of flexible grids and layouts, so as a user switched from their desktop to a tablet or a smartphone, the website was easier to view and navigate. Perhaps more importantly, Google announced use responsive design as a signal for website rankings in search results, rewarding websites that are fully optimized for mobile platforms ("Now is the Time," 2015). The Disney/ABC ownership group saw immediate benefits, and growth in the use of their mobile websites tripled over the course of the year.

It's not unusual for large broadcast station groups to develop a singular internal system and roll it out to their stations. This can include a similar station logo design, common finance software, or even station music. Station groups have also been known to consolidate and roll out a singular website content management system and user interface. The efficiencies in consolidating web development, group ad sales, training and implementation are obvious, and with it often comes a common philosophy on how to best use these tools in local markets. This common philosophy may be communicated as very broad strategies (such as how many web story posts per day are optimal), to very specific best practices (such as the directive to all on-camera talent to promote corporate programming).

While it is a safe bet to assume that Disney/ABC execs communicated preferred digital and social practices to their stations, it appears the message was not received by all. Most striking was the observation that KGO-TV in San Francisco was significantly more aggressive in its use of Twitter as a social media communication tool than sister station WABC-TV in New York. Outside of such occurrences like breaking news or special events, KGO-TV regularly posts more tweets per day. KGO-TV also demonstrates a much more engagement-based Twitter philosophy— one that is much more focused on offering a variety of posts, not just news stories.

Examples of this include "selfie" snapshots of anchors between segments, video messages and short stories shot on mobile devices, plus promotion of special in-depth reports made just for airing in the sweeps ratings period. In contrast, WABC-TV generally adopts a much more utilitarian, news-only Twitter philosophy, posting links to web stories, multi-day weather forecasts, and occasionally a pre-recorded forecast shot professionally in-studio. One reason behind this may lie in the fact that San Francisco is home to Twitter and, coincidentally, a higher number of Twitter users than New York (Brandstotter, 2014). Another reason may lie in KGO-TV's strategy of retweeting its *on-air personalities* more than creating original content directly from the newsroom account. Not only do these retweeted posts bring a greater overall total and wider variety of tweets to KGO-TV's feed, the tactic also subtly encourages KGO-TV's 230,000 followers to follow other personalities, which widens the audience base further. Lastly, KGO-TV also surpasses its New York counterpart in terms of using it as a cross-promotion tool. KGO-TV's tweets regularly promote ABC network programming, alert viewers to upcoming streams on the live video app Periscope, and even prompt followers to follow specific anchors and reporters.

Twitter and Breaking News

Osborne and Drezde (2014) note that several social media platforms are used to communicate breaking news, but Twitter is shown to dominate all other social media platforms in providing timely news. Perhaps driving this home further, when Alabama-based newspaper *The Tuscaloosa News* lost power to its offices following a record-breaking tornado event, it forced journalists to rely on social media alone to post minute-by-minute updates. A newspaper, resorting to using Twitter as its only distribution platform during such extraordinary circumstances, earned the organization the Pulitzer Prize for breaking news (Reynolds, 2012).

Twitter's prominence as a breaking news tool for traditional television stations was also evidenced in New York City. This time, on a cold and blustery February morning.

February 5, 2016, offered New York City commuters a wet, miserable start to their day. This particularly gloomy morning turned deadly, however, when a 600-foot construction crane collapsed, crashing down on buildings, pedestrians and cars in the Tribeca neighborhood in lower Manhattan. Within moments, the news stations of New York City raced to the scene to cover the event, along with many police, fire and other first responders. As is usual during high-profile breaking news situations, each news station interrupted regular programming with live coverage from their studios. Similar efforts were used in the social media space. WCBS-TV was the first to post a text-only tweet noting the breaking news, followed by WABC-TV three minutes later. WPIX-TV and WNYW-TV tweeted four minutes later, and WNBC-TV finally tweeted their own breaking news alert a full 17 minutes after WCBS-TV.

What is interesting to note are the different roles Twitter played in the coverage of this event among the stations. Throughout the morning, market leader WABC-TV tweeted 23 times about the event, posting many compelling photos from eyewitnesses. Additional tweets addressed concerns for the many commuters coming into the city during a normally busy weekday morning, particularly alerting of street closures and potential dangers of gas leaks that were being investigated. The social media tactics employed by WPIX-TV and WNBC-TV were similar— twelve and fifteen tweets apiece, each passing along photos and promoting live coverage on TV. Fox affiliate, WNYW-TV's coverage seemed sparse by comparison, with only six tweets throughout the morning, driving followers almost exclusively to tuning to live TV coverage. The New York City station that used Twitter in the most complete and comprehensive way was by far, WCBS-TV. Not only did they break the story first (always a bragging point

among newsrooms), but they tweeted a total of 31 times during the morning hours with a wide

variety of content, including several photos not seen on the feeds of the other stations. Most

notably, WCBS-TV included several eyewitness accounts, quotes from the mayor, and stories of

heroism from first responders. Although WCBS-TV generally commands almost a third fewer

followers than WABC-TV's total of 290,000 followers, they appear to be producing far more

complete and engaging coverage.

WPIX-TV: Social Media with a Twist

Most large market newsrooms staff 7 or 8 digital content producers across a typical

broadcast day to develop web content and organize social media efforts (Papper, 2016b). Other

members of the newsroom are typically assigned social media responsibilities during off hours.

These efforts include those typical to newsgathering— monitoring other stations' efforts,

communicating with reporters and anchors to create content in the field, and discussing tactics

with producers to maximize cross promotion. All of this is aimed at developing content that

engage followers while promoting content on the station that drives awareness, demand and

viewership to the channel, plus traffic to websites and mobile apps.

At Tribune Media-owned WPIX-TV, social media staffing levels are similar, with one

exception— a separate, dedicated social media producer that reports directly to the marketing

department, and not the news department, as is the norm (V. Mountzouros, personal

communication, June 12, 2016). This particular employee works side by side with station brand

managers, consumer marketers and creative staffers, and is tasked with the sole responsibility of

driving station awareness and building audiences across its distribution platforms. Journalism is

noticeably absent from the role. According to WPIX-TV station research, it became evident that

an extremely high percentage of the station's viewers also engage with the station's other digital

platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and streaming media on the station's website. This, along with demographic data that showed a high percentage of station viewers residing in hard-working neighborhoods, prompted the social media producer to develop a promotional campaign that relied almost exclusively on digital assets to spread the word. Dubbed #pixpowerwomen, the campaign included behind the scenes interviews and candid moments featuring female members of the news team noting their passion for covering local news. Aside from only a few on-air promos and subway posters, the campaign lived primarily online and drove viewers to WPIX-TV digital assets. There was no tune-in message— only a message about hard working local women journalists aimed at an audience to which the station knew they could relate. While this is only one of many tactics in WPIX-TV promotion and marketing efforts, the station showed recent ratings growth, especially in morning hours, surpassing CBS-owned WCBS-TV and Fox-owned WNYW-TV.

Promotion: Digital to Digital or Digital to TV?

Melissa Crawford, WNBC-TV's vice president of marketing, took the stage at the 2015 Promax/BDA Station Summit along with several other local station marketers to comment on how the rapid acceleration of technology has affected the way television marketers reach audiences. The Station Summit is a yearly event for television station marketing and promotion professionals to meet with networks, program syndicators, and station group owners to discuss trends, share insights and best practices. Crawford passed along recent research that confirmed what many assumed— that digital media consumption is driving viewers away from the television (Edison Research, 2015). In front of her counterparts from across the country, she boldly explained how, in this increasingly fragmented media landscape, local TV station marketing directors need to abandon once tried and true promotional thinking when dealing with

digital media consumers.

Crawford shared how WNBC-TV once embraced a relentless, laser-focused strategy of using all available on-air and off-channel resources to drive tune-in to traditional television. Over the past decade, this meant using emerging digital and social media in this effort. According to Crawford, however, the message was all wrong. For example, in traditional local TV news marketing, the primary objective is to entice viewers to watch a particular newscast at a particular time, quite often several hours later that night. Whether on radio, highway billboards, or web video pre-roll ads, the message "Watch tonight at 11" is generally delivered the same way, regardless of the medium.

Crawford told the group that WNBC-TV had begun migrating away from this kind of message, replacing it with one that catered to the "always-on" digital consumer— actually *giving* the consumer the promoted news story (or at least a part of it) immediately. Put another way, rather than trying to get a potential TV viewer to put down the digital media device that they were currently using and turning on a legacy medium like television, her suggestion was to go ahead and tell the consumer the story was only one click away. In the case of WNBC-TV, a reporter would pre-record a message telling the web or mobile consumer about the story, and told the viewer to click to be taken directly to the station's website to see the story, or at least a portion of it. Once at the website, further messaging would prompt viewers to tune in to more content on the TV news later that night. In this sense, traditional tune-in messaging took a digital detour.

Her idea was radical and it raised eyebrows throughout the room. The logic was sound, however— while a basic tenet of marketing is to take your message to the masses, it is important to take into account the behaviors of the consumer within the medium where they are receiving

the message. Crawford recognized the fact that consumers of digital media are increasingly able to get content when they want it, and to deny a potential TV news viewer the instant gratification of retrieving the media does that consumer a disservice. That said, even Crawford some apprehension at the theory. She went on to say this practice may, over time, actually *erode* customer loyalty, and instead of growing an audience, even become a contributing factor in seeing TV viewership shrink. Conversely, she also recognized that by giving a viewer a complete, positive user experience, the station has the potential to rise above being an advertiser, and become a valued content provider. Melissa Crawford has taken a big step in breaking the mold of traditional tune-in marketing by promoting "digital content to digital content" as opposed to "digital content to television." She acknowledged that not everyone at her station is convinced this is the right path, and time will tell if this strategy will pay off with increased TV viewership, reminding everyone that growing station revenue is paramount.

Throughout the observed sweeps period, Crawford and WNBC-TV employed this tactic on Facebook quite often, but not exclusively. Perhaps it was to appease a protesting news director, not comfortable with promoting news content that lives away from the television set. I believe the more realistic answer is that WNBC-TV, and an increasing number of stations, are showing a willingness to craft their digital marketing message to better fit the behaviors of the digital consumer. Unfortunately, that's not where the money is. As more local TV viewers abandon traditional viewing habits for *always-available* content on alternative digital platforms, stations are stuck in the reality where they are hyper-dependent on advertising revenue that is tied to traditional viewing.

Large Market Summary

The pressures of producing and marketing local news in the nation's largest television

markets are immense. The competition for viewers equates to a battle for ad dollars, where the slightest growth (or slip) in ratings translates into huge revenue windfalls to the victor. Cue the nation's top digital content producers, news personalities and promotional minds to exploit any resource they can to inform, entice, and engage with audiences. The rapid growth of social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook, has created a new digital battleground in the fight to lure traditional television viewers in large markets of New York and San Francisco. Large staffs and skilled employees in these markets churn out compelling content twenty-four hours a day.

Large markets also come with the added benefit of social audience research, providing a work environment full of informed, savvy content creators who then have the ability to take strategic risks with their social media tactics. And while there is a certain amount of experimentation allowed at the station level, corporate ownership groups also provide valuable guidance and best practices for newsrooms and promotion departments to follow, although not all stations appear to blindly follow the corporate lead.

Newsrooms' rapid fire use of Twitter in alerting audiences to breaking news in real time is contrasted with the conversational give and take of Facebook. Both increasingly provide the ability to embed video, but Facebook appears to get the most attention— allowing newsrooms in large markets to add a much richer level of audience engagement, which Facebook, in turn rewards by passing station content on to other local audiences.

Finally, the recent emergence of Facebook Live has afforded stations yet another opportunity to engage with audiences in a way that further blurs the line between Facebook and legacy television. Mark Zuckerberg is seeking to usher in the new "golden age" of video (Honan, 2016), and large market television stations seem happy to help see his vision realized. On the surface, it appears to be a symbiotic relationship. For stations, video clips on Facebook Live help

increase brand exposure and engagement and may offer an opportunity to lure viewers to the television set. Conversely, Zuckerberg knows that big market stations have large staffs to keep a steady stream of live, compelling original content. For him, that means consumers stay on Facebook for longer stretches, and more eyeballs on ads that he sells.

Aside from isolated success stories, there does not seem to be a magic formula in large markets such as New York and San Francisco on how to use social media in promotion, branding and curating local television news. Six months into the launch of Facebook Live, and more than six *years* following a broader emergence of social media use for business, stations employ a dissimilar range of tactics. They all seem to agree on one thing— more and more potential TV audiences are getting their news in the *social* space, and getting them to experience that content in the *television* space is harder than ever. Is this true nationwide in medium- to small-markets? Do traditionally smaller staffs in these markets make it harder to exploit new digital media offerings from Facebook and Twitter? In the next chapter, I will examine if the "wild west" of using social media to promote and brand TV news gets even wilder.

CHAPTER 3: MEDIUM MARKET OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

August 11, 2014, was a rather ordinary morning for most employees at Tribune Media's duopoly WXIN-TV and WTTV-TV, except for a select group of anxious senior managers who were gathered in the station's spacious conference room. The key leaders of news, marketing, advertising sales, engineering and finance were alerted the night before of the emergency meeting, but no additional information was given. What they didn't know was that Larry Wert, Tribune Media's president of broadcast media, was flying into Indianapolis to make a major announcement.

The group was rightfully nervous, as big announcements seemed to happen often at Tribune. Just two years earlier, Tribune Company emerged from a difficult four-year stretch of bankruptcy proceedings, which included the sale of the Chicago Cubs professional baseball team, and iconic local brand and valuable programming asset for flagship Chicago station WGN-TV and national cable superstation WGN America. Tribune had also recently inked a $2.7 billion deal to acquire the Cincinnati-based Local TV, LLC and its 19 television stations, essentially doubling its total portfolio of broadcast stations. And only a few days prior to the Local TV, LLC announcement, Tribune finalized the spinoff of its entire print division, including the venerable Chicago Tribune and Los Angeles Times, which came with layoffs of several hundred employees across the country. With such bold, sweeping announcements, the managers of Tribune Media's two Indianapolis-based broadcast stations couldn't begin to imagine what news the president of the Tribune's powerful broadcast division had for them.

Always energetic and affable, Larry Wert entered the room and strode purposefully into the conference room, joked as to why everyone looked so serious, and matter of factly made an

announcement that would forever change the Indianapolis television landscape: Tribune Media had acquired the CBS Network affiliation from local competitor WISH-TV. The announcement was staggering. WISH-TV had been the CBS affiliate for almost 60 years, but was now left without a network affiliation. It was a programming, ratings, and revenue windfall for Tribune's properties in Indianapolis, and adding to the enormity of the situation, Wert ordered the station to build a newscast for the newly named "CBS4" in four short months. It was a herculean task, and within hours, Tribune Media tapped into its vast corporate resources to assemble a team of engineering, programming, financial and marketing consultants to assist in what would be a whirlwind project. Alongside the fully-functional newsroom for WXIN-TV, another separate, complete newsroom infrastructure was built, including a new set and the hiring of dozens of reporters, producers, and support personnel. Amid a flurry of behind the scenes preparations and harried rehearsals, CBS4 and their new news launched on January 1, 2015, and with it, added an unprecedented fifth newscast to the Indianapolis television market.

The decision behind CBS pulling its affiliation from then LIN Media-owned WISH-TV was born out of difficult negotiations surrounding its affiliation contract, specifically as it relates to reverse compensation payments from LIN to CBS. According to industry sources, LIN was unwilling to bow to CBS's demands for increased affiliate fees (Swiatek & Lindquist, 2014), prompting the network to shop its affiliation rights to Tribune Media. With solid network ratings, including those that come from lucrative *NFL on CBS* broadcasts of Indianapolis Colts football games, Tribune Media was more than willing to pay the affiliation fees that CBS demanded, and simultaneously locked up affiliate contracts in its other markets where it owned CBS-affiliated stations.

Not surprisingly, WISH-TV saw many changes in the year following the affiliation

change, including several staffing and programming changes: the assignment of a new general manager and news director, plus the decision not to renew contracts of several of its anchors and reporters. Despite the overall reduction of its newsroom staff, WISH-TV actually *expanded* the total news hours it produces, mostly because of the need to fill holes in its programming lineup after losing its CBS affiliation. Sweeping changes such as these traditionally result in an immediate drop in audience ratings, and in many dayparts, especially at 11p.m., this was the case. However, one full year after the affiliation change, WISH-TV has surprised many industry observers with ratings that demonstrate an appetite for local news that exceeds a that of a mid-sized market, and even those that are much larger.

Indianapolis is the 27th largest television market according Nielsen Media Research, and bucks the trend among local TV news stations both in terms of total news hours offered as well as total news viewers. Until last year, the national trend has been to decrease its total hours of news per week (Papper, 2016b), however Indianapolis has seen a significant *increase* in news hours in the past five years, mostly due to the addition of newscasts by WTTV-TV as noted above, WISH-TV and Fox affiliate, WXIN-TV. Fox offers over 60 hours of news per week, ranking in the top five of stations nationally. Because of this, Indianapolis viewers choose from among five stations that air an 11 p.m. weekday newscast. New York, by comparison, has three.

Just over a thousand miles to the south lies another television market that has seen its share of ownership shakeups. San Antonio, Texas, is the nation's 32nd largest market, and since the mid-1990's, the market has seen more than *ten* ownership changes, bringing with it staff consolidation, changes in senior management, and importantly, changes in how local viewers have their newscasts delivered.

Market leading ABC affiliate, KSAT-TV, has been the most stable of the San Antonio

stations in terms of media group ownership, being part of the Graham Holdings Company

portfolio (formerly Post-Newsweek), for over twenty years. By contrast, KENS-TV (CBS), the

very first station to sign on in the market, had been held by no fewer than six station groups since

local owner Harte-Hanks Communications sold the station to E.W. Scripps Company in the mid-

1990's. After the sale, Scripps immediately traded KENS-TV to the Belo Corporation as part of

a controlling interest swap with the cable channel, Food Network. In 2013, newspaper/TV giant

Gannett Company acquired Belo, only to split and be assigned under the newly created media

company, Tegna, Inc. While the aforementioned media chess match was unfolding across town,

longtime Fox affiliate KABB-TV and NBC affiliate WOAI-TV were valuable pieces in a series

of station swaps spanning twelve years that included five separate companies. In the end, it is

Sinclair Broadcasting who owns not only KABB-TV and WOAI-TV, but also operates CW

affiliate KMYS-TV under a shared services agreement (SSA). Television ownership duopolies,

prevalent in many mid-sized markets, have been created primarily out of a nationwide trend of

media ownership consolidation.

Sizing Up Social Media

With only 100,000 television homes separating them, Indianapolis and San Antonio are

similarly sized in terms of total population, and are also comparable in terms of local ad

spending (Borrell Associates, 2016). In the social space, however, Indianapolis has a noticeably

higher total of social media followers than San Antonio. Stations in the two markets are

separated by roughly 400,000 total followers on Facebook, and 300,000 followers on Twitter, a

30% and 20% difference, respectively. This could be a result of numerous factors, but one likely

reason is because there are simply more news *stations* in Indianapolis. The CW station in

Indianapolis, WISH-TV, has chosen to continue to produce its own newscast following its

affiliation change. KMYS-TV in San Antonio, a long time independent station, currently does not.

In this chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences in how television stations in these two comparably-sized U.S. television markets have utilized social media in their promotional efforts. As in the previous chapter noting efforts in large markets, I will consider several factors in this discussion, including the issues related to social media use across different dayparts, the content of social media posts themselves, as well as an exploration of the goals and objectives of the posts. Additionally, I will explore some differences in promotional tactics in these mid-sized markets, particularly due to duopoly ownership.

Media Consolidation and the Duopoly

When deconstructing the various social media habits of mid-sized markets, it is important to first understand various outside influences that might affect the staffing and strategic direction of these efforts. Logically, a driving force behind the strategic direction of a station comes from its local senior management. This makes sense, as these individuals understand their market best, with existing relationships within the local community and a keener sense of the forces driving local business. In a perfect world, a local decision maker would use this intelligence to guide the efforts of the station, including promotion and marketing. This is not always the case, depending on the ownership structure of the station, particularly if it is a duopoly. There is often a call for strategic alignment to the corporate vision.

TV station duopolies are a byproduct of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules relating to media ownership in order to promote competition, localism and diversity. Three rules have steered this, particularly newspaper/television cross-ownership, local TV ownership limits, and local radio/television cross ownership. A number of studies have been conducted to

analyze how these rules and resulting consolidation affect content, consumer behavior, and profitability, but these studies have been conducted with mixed results. For example, Gal-Or and Dukes note that media profits and advertising rise in markets with less consolidation (2006). Separately, Dukes (2006) contradicted this with his own study noting that advertisers may actually be *better off* with media consolidation. In terms of news content, the FCC commissioned their own study, noting that TV stations cross-owned with newspapers or radio stations indeed provided more news than other stations. However, to even a casual observer this content is not always unique, meaning stations in consolidated media markets often repurpose the same stories across more than one channel. For example, a station may choose to send a reporter from one station who will simply swap out their branded microphone flag for the other station, and send back two stories to be broadcast separately. While there have been several studies relating to news content, advertising, and profitability due to media consolidation, it is important to note there is a notable absence in research relating to how cross-ownership has affected overall station promotion, particularly social media use.

Structure, Workflow and Social Efforts at Duopoly Stations

Local television stations with combined newsrooms can collect and share content in many ways, and each of them have an impact on how the consumer receives the news and its subsequent promotion. Exactly how these combined newsrooms structure this effort is dependent on several economic, competitive, structural and even brand-related factors. For example, Indianapolis-based WXIN-TV (FOX) and new CBS affiliate WTTV-TV make up Tribune Media's duopoly. Both stations have strong local brand recognition and enjoy solid ratings, especially in prime time. Simply combining newsrooms and co-branding a singular newscast would certainly bring significant cost savings, but it might also diminish the equity of each of the

stations' brand position in the market. As such, Tribune decided to house two *separate* news operations under the same roof. Operationally, there are two distinct assistant news directors who oversee different newscasts for each station, with daily operational and editorial oversight from a singular vice president of news. Indianapolis TV viewers watch two distinctly branded newscasts, complete with different graphic treatments, that emanate from two separate studios. That is not to say there is no sharing of resources between the stations. While each newscast has main anchors that appear almost exclusively on that station, reporters in the field can often be seen on either, taking advantage of the efficiency of only having to send one crew to a story. This structure is strategic for that market, finding a sweet spot between operational cost savings, while still maintaining a station's identity.

The WXIN/WTTV duopoly newsroom model is somewhat rare, and not all duopoly newsrooms see such brand and operational separation. A much more consolidated newsroom is the norm, with a very streamlined staff producing news for two stations. Following the 2008 merger of Honolulu, Hawaii, stations KGMB-TV and KHNL-TV, Raycom Media essentially eliminated one newsroom entirely and began simulcasting identical morning and evening newscasts across both stations. The only difference between the newscasts is the corner logo displayed on-screen. This model saw the elimination of almost seventy newsroom positions (Chiem, 2009). In other mid-sized and smaller markets, a slightly different model exists where a dominant news station may produce a standalone newscast for another station, aired at a different time. The producing station uses their own anchors to deliver the news across multiple stations. And while efficient, it often leads to somewhat confusing promotion. For example, in Chico, California, ABC affiliate KRCR-TV produces a 10 p.m. news for the market's Fox affiliate, but brands it as, "KRCR News Channel 7 on FOX 20."

Aside from newsgathering, newsrooms also tend to share digital content and social media across multiple stations, demonstrating efficiencies in local staffing and content creation. In both Indianapolis and San Antonio, duopolies WXIN-TV and WTTV-TV, plus KABB-TV and WOAI-TV share the same website content management systems (CMS), but are "skinned" with logos, graphics and color schemes unique to each station. The layout and story content is practically identical, with the exception of select customizable areas for video clips and other items unique to the station.

In the social media space, duopoly stations are also observed simply posting stories on both stations' newsfeeds. This is especially true in breaking news situations. For example, in the aftermath of a hostage situation in San Antonio, duopoly stations KABB-TV and WOAI-TV simultaneously streamed a station reporter live from the scene on Facebook Live. To maintain station anonymity, the reporter did not hold a branded microphone or wear branded clothing. An almost identical scenario plays out on Twitter. Perhaps because Twitter is used by stations as more of an immediate, virtual news ticker with short bursts of stories, duopoly stations are observed to push station tweets to both stations' accounts simultaneously. The textual content and embedded images that are posted are identical, demonstrating a simple cut-and-paste by the social media or digital content personnel at duopoly stations.

Staffing for Digital Content in Mid-Sized Markets

In 1995, an internet revolution was taking shape. Widespread access to the internet was growing, and today's mainstay internet brands were launching in rapid succession, including Ebay, Amazon and Yahoo. Most importantly, a new web browser, Microsoft's Internet Explorer was also launched, making the act of surfing the web easier and more accessible than ever (New Media Institute, 2014). It was also the year that the very first website for a local television station

was launched. At Chicago-based WGN-TV, creative services director Rick Felty understood the value of engaging with the local audience. He was also a self-admitted early adopter of new technology and at the time was tinkering around with a rudimentary website for the station. Quite humbly, *www.wgntv.com* launched in 1995 as a labor of love created by a lone marketing director, and drew a small following made up mostly of curious coworkers. Today the website and associated digital platforms push content curated by a team of seven full-time "digital-only" employees and attracts approximately four million visitors to its website every day (WGNTV.COM Analytics, 2016). Today, over 97% of all television stations have websites, and almost 40% of them are devoting significant resources to create original content for those sites (Papper, 2016a).

While large market television stations utilize anywhere from seven to ten full-time employees to create and manage the dissemination of digital content, medium-sized markets employ staffs roughly half the size to do the same. The titles of these individuals vary from executive producer of digital, digital content manager, or social media producer. Additionally, these employees can be found in a variety of departments, including marketing, creative services, news, and in some cases advertising sales. Staffing levels aside, local television stations focus squarely on the strategic use of their digital assets, specifically their main website and social media, to reach consumers with information and a way to remain engaged with the station's brand. As such, a station's digital content manager now has a seat at the table alongside other senior managers in developing and implementing strategies to engage audiences and drive the business forward.

The Evolution of Social Media Use in Mid-Sized Markets

In the few years since social media's emergence in 2007, television stations in mid-sized

markets, including San Antonio and Indianapolis, looked at the web and social media enthusiastically, but in rather simple terms. Originally, these platforms were thought of simply as an alternate distribution platform to house stories that were being generated for the station's televised broadcasts. Even more, it was considered a useful promotional tool used to encourage potential audiences to put down their mobile device and turn on the television. Taking a valuable early snapshot of Twitter use in the San Antonio television market, Blasingame (2011) studied thousands of tweets from television stations in San Antonio and noted that 92% of them were strictly promotional in nature. In the five years since this study, we now see the opposite— the overwhelming majority of Twitter posts by television stations in San Antonio (and Indianapolis as well) are content-driven. Practically all station tweets contain a photo or embedded video, plus hyperlinks to to stories on the station's main website. By contrast, purely promotional tweets are almost nonexistent, and very rarely do they urge the audience to watch a traditional television broadcast. The exception to this are tweets posted by station talent, or on a night where special live programming was being aired, such as a sporting event, news event or awards show.

A similar scenario exists when observing station use of Facebook. During the February 2016 sweeps, all of the stations in Indianapolis and San Antonio were seen incorporating a blend of social media content, but like Twitter, only a very small percentage of this content was structured to build audience interaction and engagement, using it instead as a news aggregator. One example of this was a series of posts by CBS affiliates WTTV-TV and KENS-TV during the 2016 Grammy Awards telecast noting winners of major categories. Rather than try to use Facebook to lure viewers to the television, these and posts simply included a textual announcement, accompanied with a pre-made "congratulations" graphic of the award winner.

Impressions Versus Engagement

There's an old saying when it comes to increasing sales and building audiences: If you want to catch fish, fish where the fish are. Put another way, it's easier to increase sales by placing one's ad messaging in a place where it would be seen by the most people— wherever that place may be. In a strict sense, mass-media is sound advice. As broadcasters in the early 2010s began to notice a slide in traditional TV viewership, combined with an increase in social media consumption, the logical path for television marketers was to join the trend and race to increase the station's social media base, particularly on Facebook and Twitter. Stations aggressively drove television viewers to their Facebook page by displaying station and anchor Twitter handles in a barrage of promotional messages, inside and outside their newscasts. The goal was simple and focused: increase the social base, and use it to drive viewership to traditional television. Over time, many stations' social footprints grew, but it was difficult to determine if there was any relationship between a station's social media following and its influence in television viewership. By some metrics, an increase in gross social impressions brings some marketing value, especially in terms of elevating a station's overall exposure. But today, stations are observed using social media to tap into the changing behaviors of their audiences, and striving for a deeper level of consumer *engagement*[iii]. As mentioned earlier, social media engagement is an important measure of a consumer's interaction with a person or brand in the social media space. Facebook and Twitter define this in slightly different ways, based on the nature of their individual platforms. Facebook, for example, generally measures engagement based on *likes* and *shares*, whereas Twitter measures engagement based on *retweets*, *likes* and *@replies*, which is the process of tweeting directly to another user. Stations continually strive to increase their social engagement by creating polls, cross-posting other users' content, and simply writing social media headlines and content in a more conversational way.

Another way stations in Indianapolis and San Antonio have increased engagement on Facebook and Twitter is through contests and promotions. Online sweepstakes and promotional campaigns, while eye catching to a consumer, require stations to comply with state or federal laws and can often tap valuable station resources in the execution of the promotion. Still, KSAT-TV in San Antonio and WXIN-TV in Indianapolis have each been recognized as stations who have used social media (Facebook in particular) in innovative ways to drive audience engagement, increase followers and even generate non-traditional revenue for the station. KSAT-TV devised a 12-day holiday Facebook contest that brought in more than $30,000 for the station, plus 8,000 new likes to the station page. WXIN-TV created a Facebook 'Fan of the Day' sweepstakes social media sponsorship package, which reportedly brought in $6,000/month for the station — a total of $72,000 in extra revenue for the year ("Major Sponsors Sign," 2015).

Snackable Content

One recent way newsrooms in Indianapolis and San Antonio have captured the attention of social savvy consumers, especially on mobile, is through the use of shorter, "snackable" pieces of content created to draw them into a story. In today's fragmented, distraction-rich lives, television stations have to work harder and faster to grab the attention of their target audience, particularly older millennials. The average millennial is spending 5.4 hours on social media per day, and that time is largely spread out in short stints of scrolling (Taylor, 2014). While that may seem like a long time, the average attention span of an adult has actually shrunk to around eight seconds, or roughly the amount of time to read two or three tweets (McSpadden, 2015). Taking this into consideration, TV journalists and their marketing counterparts have begun cutting down their stories into a much shorter, bite-sized segments, giving rise to the buzzword, *snackable* media. By creating snackable content, today's consumer-savvy stations are engaging millennials

on their terms. They play to their audience's shrinking attention spans and gain traction during those few moments people spend scrolling throughout the day. Mindful of the user's mobile experience, media is literally being consumed at arm's length, with dozens of media posts scrolling by with a few flicks of a thumb. As the scrolling stops, embedded video plays automatically (with muted audio), and remains muted until the video is tapped. If that media does not capture the attention of the audience, the scrolling process begins anew. Editors of mobile-friendly video content have adapted new ways to appear more attractive in this environment.

All stations in Indianapolis and San Antonio were observed posting these short snippets of video to their social media outlets. Their "snackable" clips were generally short (less than 60-seconds), often included bold imagery, and many included simply animated text to stand out and allow the consumer to easily follow along. Good snackable content can be easily and quickly understood without tapping on the clip itself. An excellent example of this was observed from Indianapolis Fox affiliate WXIN-TV, who created a short video to remind viewers to set their clocks forward in observance of U.S. daylight saving time. The one-minute, seven-second clip was not narrated, but used animated text, video clips and photography to note the history and trivia about the 100-year old, bi-annual event that affects almost all U.S. residences.

Throughout November 2015, only a handful of stations created these digital-only, snackable news stories, but the trend spread quickly early in 2016 as stations noted several benefits from creating content specifically to be seen on social. First, snackable video supports actionable engagement that drives website traffic and lifts brand awareness much more than a static frame, or a piece of edited video that requires a narrator to tell the story. This requires steps that a mobile user may not be able to take. And while creating snackable content requires an

incremental step in the newsroom workflow, mobile media strategists note that creating digital-only content like this is easily sharable, scalable across a variety of devices (mobile, web, desktop and apps), and tells a complete story in a smaller timeframe (Middough, 2014).

Facebook Live

Increasingly throughout newsrooms across the U.S., on-camera talent are picking up their mobile devices and streaming everything from behind the scenes tours to entire newscasts, demonstrating a willingness by producers and talent alike to tell stories in a different way. Since its rollout in the beginning of 2016, Facebook Live and similar streaming apps like Instagram, Snapchat and Periscope have proven to be much more than a novelty. It has, as the New York Times puts it, "catapult[ed] technology into the center of news— and [has begun] to inexorably alter much of television news as we know it" (Manjoo, 2016). Recent high-profile events, such as the horrific moment of a gunman's point-blank shooting of police officers in Dallas, Texas, and a Black Lives Matter leader streaming his own arrest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, were both streamed live on Facebook and Twitter's streaming app Periscope by eyewitnesses. Because of social media's reach, and the vast number of people with the ability to easily shoot and instantly stream live video, these events were thrust into the national spotlight. It has also prompted many industry thinkers to reflect on how this new technology is altering newsgathering as we know it, including former CNN president Jonathan Klein who declared Facebook Live essentially becoming "the most intelligent cable news network ever built. (Manjoo, 2016)"

As noted in previous large-market observations, Facebook Live was used extensively during coverage of big events like the Super Bowl, allowing stations to bring audiences access and information well outside traditional broadcast news slots. The effort netted stations tens of thousands of views per session in markets like New York and San Francisco, but would smaller

markets far from these big and bustling coastal cities see similar results? Would they simply adopt the best practices observed elsewhere? As it turns out, mid-sized markets like Indianapolis and San Antonio have taken a rather creative approach to using Facebook Live as part of their presentation of the news and events from their markets, and it appears they have been rewarded for their effort.

Weather generally dominates local news coverage, especially in Indiana where extremes are the norm. As thunderstorms rolled into the western parts of Indiana in late spring 2016, WTHR-TV meteorologists Angela Buchman and Sean Ash broke into late night television programming to notify viewers of approaching severe weather to the area. These on air "cut-ins" generally last just 30-seconds, and air during commercial breaks. If events warrant, cut-ins can last several minutes or more. On this night, when not on the air, they took to Facebook Live with continuing coverage of the weather event, but with a much more conversational approach. WTHR-TV's digital content staffers acted as photographers on four separate Facebook Live "sessions" each lasting an average of 12-15 minutes in total. In addition to shooting video, these staffers were able to monitor feedback from viewers and ask the meteorologists questions. This created a conversational, almost *personalized* level of engagement, garnering positive viewer feedback. WTHR-TV's four videos, spanning the entire weather event were viewed almost 100,000 times.

In contrast to using Facebook Live during breaking weather situations, WOIA-TV and sister station KABB-TV, have begun experimenting with streaming *entire newscasts* on Facebook Live. The execution of these streams took the appearance of "raw video" with long stretches of video with no direct interaction with the camera. WOAI-TV's views-per-stream were generally lower than breaking weather streams like those seen by WTHR-TV, presumably

because of the more disassociated, voyeuristic nature of the video stream, as well as fact that the WOAI-TV has 150,000 fewer Facebook followers. While no other station in San Antonio and Indianapolis streamed entire newscasts, other stations in San Antonio did use Facebook Live to stream long potions of select newscasts. This was observed by San Antonio ratings leader KSAT-TV, which streamed full half-hour segments of their morning news, featuring their morning anchor responding directly to the "streaming" camera during commercial breaks. KENS-TV conducted a similar stream of their early evening newscasts.

Mornings Mean More (Social) Media

The idea of TV program "dayparting" is familiar to even the most casual of viewers. The idea is a simple one, where networks and their stations schedule particular programs in certain times of the day geared to attract the demographic most likely to watch. For example, children's programming dominates the lineup on Saturday mornings, coincidentally when a high percentage of kids are home. Similarly, TV stations digital teams are using dayparting as a method by which to plan the rollout of daily social media content, and morning hours are key for newsrooms.

Four out of five smartphone users check their phones within the first fifteen minutes of waking up, and 80% of those say it's the first thing they do in the morning (Stadd, 2013). Additionally, video consumption on smartphones peaks in the morning hours, again around the noon hour, and once again in the evening ("For Devices," 2015). This coincides with observations of TV stations in San Antonio and Indianapolis, but only in the morning. There is parity among almost all stations with regards to the total amount of tweets and posts in the morning, with an average of five posts per hour during the 7:00 a.m. hour, presumably coinciding with the high volume of smartphone users at that time of day. Conversely, this

number goes down significantly in the early evening hours, with all stations averaging only two or three posts on average leading into the 7:00 p.m. primetime hour. Tweets and posts leading into the late news hour of 10:00 p.m. vary wildly, with some stations posting upwards of five posts in the hour, and others with one or none at all.

While most posts can be categorized as primarily as a steady flow of news content throughout the day, regardless of the daypart, there are some observations that suggest a shift in content philosophy, or possibly a shift in staffing levels and newsroom priorities. For example, San Antonio duopolies KABB-TV and WOAI-TV were observed posting the same content in evening hours across both stations' sites, and retweeting/reposting the same content from their own sites, several hours earlier. This was not seen when observing the Indianapolis duopoly stations, WXIN-TV and WTTV-TV. While these two stations presumably share similar levels of newsroom resources to produce their daily newscasts, there were clearly a different amount of social media posts in total, and the posts did not appear to be the same text simply posted to two separate feeds.

Medium Market Summary

The job of a social media marketer at a mid-sized local television station must bring with it equal parts frustration and opportunity. The pressure to drive traditional television ratings is just as high as one might expect in any market, including the need to bring higher engagement to the station's social media platforms. However, staff sizes at TV stations' "digital" departments can be half of that as seen in large markets. This results in less resources to provide original content for the station, especially during off hours. On the other hand, one observation coming from mid-sized markets is that they are willing to take more calculated risks in their efforts, meaning stations seem either more willing, or have the freedom to experiment with alternative

social media executions. This was demonstrated in several ways, including KABB-TV (FOX) adopting a Twitter posting strategy where the station rarely posts original content itself, opting instead to retweet the posts of their reporters and anchors. Another observation included Indianapolis station WRTV-TV (ABC) posting many Facebook Live entries of varying lengths, seemingly in an effort to find a balance between how much time is needed to maximize live user engagement, and still provide content that is compelling over a long period of time.

Because of a general lack of consistency observed in how local stations utilize social media, it appears there is little overt, structured corporate involvement in the social media promotion strategies in mid-sized markets. This, in turn, puts more control of social media strategies in the hands of the station. What emerges, then, is a picture of a more *entrepreneurial* approach to how a station navigates the relationship it has with its viewers and their rapidly changing media consumption habits. The next chapter will explore social media tactics, structure and philosophies in smaller television markets. Will digital staff sizes be leaner still, resulting in even more creative social media practices, or will there simply be less content created overall? Will the smaller audience sizes in these markets allow stations to engage on a more personal level, something presumably more difficult to do in larger markets? Do stations in smaller markets rely more heavily on resources and guidance from their ownership groups and their network affiliate groups?

CHAPTER 4: SMALL MARKET OBSERVATIONS

Introduction

Gottfried and Shearer note that over 60% of adults get news from social media (2016), with Facebook and Twitter as two of the top three sources. Combine that with Facebook's stated 'mobile first' mantra in 2012 and their newly announced 'video first' strategy in 2016, and it is not a stretch to legitimize social media as an emerging tool for actual newsgathering as well (Guynn, 2016). Social media's presence in the news cycle is nothing new. It has actually broken some of the biggest national and international events in recent history. One of the earliest examples of this came in 2009 when a Twitter post captured the immediate aftermath of a stricken passenger jet which has just crash landed in an icy Hudson River in New York City. Mass posting of photos and information of the incident appeared close to 15 minutes before the mainstream media alerted viewers and readers. The first recorded tweet about the crash, by user @highfours, "I just watched a plane crash into the hudson rive [sic] in manhattan," came just four minutes after the plane went down and gave the world an immediate, first-person account to a live breaking news event.

According to Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin and Kjarval, the immediacy of using Twitter to track news in real time is one of the primary reasons that people say they use it, and is the reason it is the most common form of news that is followed (2015). Local television stations across the country have observed and adapted to this, and have restructured their newsgathering workflow to include social media, including Twitter and Facebook. To the outside observer, these new "front line" tools to distribute breaking news content have benefitted the quality and scope of breaking news coverage, and some might say overall consumer wellbeing. An illustration of this can be seen by contrasting two major breaking weather events affecting

southern Louisiana. The first event, Hurricane Katrina, destroyed much of the New Orleans metropolitan area in 2005, occurring just eight months before Twitter was launched. The other event, catastrophic flooding across much of southern Louisiana in the summer of 2016, and considered by many as equally as devastating as Katrina, particularly affected particularly Baton Rouge, just 90 miles to the west of New Orleans. Local TV stations, tapping into the inherent power of their mass-media reach, were instrumental throughout both events in informing residents of the coming dangers, guiding them through the event itself, and providing valuable tools to assist in the aftermath, but the latter event incorporated social media in a way that was not available in the events of Katrina, eleven years earlier.

At $108 billion, Hurricane Katrina was the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history. What the sustained 175 m.p.h. winds didn't destroy, the water that rushed in behind over 50 failing levees did. In 2005, social media's reach was far smaller than it is today, and millions had very few resources to stay informed of the dire situation approaching their city. As the storm hit, only people with battery-powered radios and TV's could receive WWL-TV's broadcasts from their temporary studios 90 miles inland. Even then, their broadcasts were critical in informing the public of current emergency relief efforts *after* the event occurred. With only their websites as an alternate news distribution platform, local stations had little other means to communicate to the general public.

Contrast this with the recent catastrophic flooding across southern Louisiana in August of 2016, occurring almost eleven years to the day of Hurricane Katrina. As 31 inches of rain fell across the area over 15 hours, the damage left tens of thousands homeless and more than a dozen dead. During Katrina, viewers witnessed only the footage that station crews were able to gain access to, but during the 2016 event, people witnessed dramatic rescue efforts in real time and

personal video accounts of people trapped because of rising waters. One widely seen example of this came when WAFB-TV reporter Robbie Reynold shot dramatic video of a rescue of a woman and her dog from her submerged vehicle. The video was posted to Facebook and quickly became the most engaged post in the *world* for a short time (Greeley, 2016a). More importantly, perhaps, local stations used social media to alert viewers across a wide geographic area to shelters, relief efforts, and links to online resources for victims. Several stations posted animated weather radar loops noting areas of heavy rains in real-time as the multi-day event unfolded. Additionally, Twitter users included local media stations in their own tweets, encouraging it to be retweeted by the station to their wide base of followers. For example, user @gyptzy alerted WWL-TV that local ham radio operators were needed at shelters. WWL-TV retweeted this, assisting in the effort.

In large scale breaking news events, social media appears to be an effective tool in every station's news gathering effort, affording newsrooms and marketing departments large and small the ability to communicate, inform and engage huge sections of the populace. While newsroom and marketing staffs in smaller markets may not be as large and often less seasoned than their large-market counterparts, the relative reach and effect of their efforts due to social media are the same. In this chapter, I will explore the social media habits of two small market local broadcast television stations, New Orleans, Louisiana and Green Bay, Wisconsin— two markets which are similar in size, but possess unique geographic and cultural characteristics. Additionally, I will observe staff roles and possible industry forces which might affect how broadcast television stations in these markets use social media in their daily efforts.

Markets in Contrast

New Orleans is a city that has faced its share of cultural, economic and social turmoil

over the past decade. Eleven years after Hurricane Katrina, some of the areas affected are still abandoned, and the current population notes over 100,000 fewer people living in the city than before the storm. Despite these societal and cultural setbacks, New Orleans as a television market has been largely stable, with a 40-year dominant legacy station and until recently, many years of stable ownership. WNGO-TV (ABC) and WNOL-TV (CW) have been a Tribune Media duopoly for over twenty years, and WDSU-TV (NBC) has been owned by Hearst Television for sixteen. Only recently have ownership changes affected WVUE-TV (FOX), who became part of a Shared Services Agreement (SSA) between local owner Louisiana Media Company and operated by Raycom Media in a deal brokered in 2013, and longtime market leader WWL-TV (CBS) was owned by Dallas-based Belo Corporation since 1994, but is now owned and operated by Tegna (formerly Gannett) which purchased Belo, also in 2013. WWL-TV remains the dominant station in New Orleans, commanding the lion's share of both the market's ratings and revenue. For almost 38 years, the Tegna-owned station has lead all newscasts across all dayparts, an unprecedented streak in modern local television. That streak ended in the summer of 2016 as Raycom-operated Fox affiliate WVUE-TV beat WWL-TV at the coveted 10 p.m. time slot, albeit by the slimmest of margins (Greeley, 2016b). Still, it was a relative newcomer to the market that achieved this feat. WVUE-TV's 10 p.m. newscast premiered in 2010, compared to WDSU-TV and WGNO-TV, who have had newscasts in that time period for decades.

One thousand miles to the north lies Green Bay, Wisconsin, a metropolitan area that in many ways has very little in common with New Orleans. Most famous as being the home of the Packers, one of the National Football League's most storied franchises, Green Bay is known for its affordable cost of living, moderate quality of life, skilled workforce, and strong, diversified economy. Additionally, its population is younger, experiences less violence, is more religious,

and is much less racially diverse than New Orleans, with a population that is over 80% white (Sperling's Best Places, 2016).

The contrasts between these two cities are also apparent when comparing the cities as television markets. Whereas New Orleans has been relatively stable in terms of ownership and ratings, each station in the Green Bay television market has experienced the challenges of different corporate ownership, all in just the past five years. In a complicated series of station swaps, WBAY-TV (ABC), WLUK-TV (FOX), and WFRV-TV (CBS) all came under new ownership as a result of Media General's purchase of Lin Media in 2013 and the subsequent hostile takeover of Media General by Nexstar Broadcasting Group in 2016. Today, WBAY-TV is owned by Gray Television, WLUK-TV is owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group, and WFRV-TV is owned by Nexstar. Separately, NBC affiliate WGBA-TV, owned since 2004 by Journal Broadcasting, came under control of the E.W. Scripps Company when they purchased Journal in 2013.

It is worth pointing out that when a station comes under new ownership, the viewer often sees little in terms of immediate, dramatic changes to the product. Behind the scenes, however, station employees are often faced with many challenges. A station's senior management is often the first to go, usually the general manager, and is usually replaced by a corporate-aligned executive. More often than not, a station also has to deal with a change in some of the back-end operational systems as well, including day to day financial reporting, commercial trafficking, payroll, and human resources systems. Additionally, depending on the new company, some of these responsibilities may be centralized in other markets as part of a regional hub, resulting in additional layoffs, forced retirements, and other changes to preexisting job structures.

Despite such turmoil in the Green Bay television ownership landscape (WBAY-TV has had

three owners in as many years), two stations have remained competitive through it all. With years of momentum behind it, market leader WBAY-TV has been dominant for years and continues to be the top rated and top grossing television station in the market. Fox affiliate WLUK-TV, while number two in the market, has increased its news hours per week in recent years, and has enjoyed several years with strong ratings at 9:00 p.m. and in the morning hours, and is the broadcast home of highly-rated Green Bay Packers football games. WGBA-TV and WFRV-TV each fall well behind their competitors in the ratings.

The Small Market Social Media Scorecard

While WBAY-TV holds most of the market's TV ratings and revenue bragging rights, the highest share of social media followers and engagement belongs to the market's number two station, WLUK-TV. With over 125,000 fans on Facebook and 30,000 followers on Twitter, WLUK-TV tops WBAY-TV by over 15,000 total followers/fans, and surpasses the total combined number of social media followers at the NBC and CBS affiliate (and its duopoly CW Network sister station). WLUK-TV also dominates the total number of social media actions, which includes retweets, comments and shares, with almost 972,000, 29% of the market's 3.3 million total. WBAY-TV follows next with over 746,000. To illustrate the significant gap between these two dominant stations and the rest of the Green Bay television market, WKSZ-FM, the Woodward Communications-owned Top 40 *radio* station comes in third place in the social media engagement rankings, and surpasses each of the remainder of television stations in the market with just over 222,000 total social media actions ("In Green Bay," 2016).

New Orleans is a modestly larger television market than Green Bay, with just over 200,000 more television homes. In terms of social media followers, however, the gap is considerably larger. With over 1.2 million total social media fans and followers on Facebook and Twitter,

New Orleans has over three times that of amount of Green Bay (412,000). Mirroring the ratings

landscape, legacy CBS affiliate WWL-TV leads the market with 277,000 total Facebook fans,

with WVUE-TV (FOX) and WDSU-TV (NBC) in a virtual tie for second place with just over

222,000 Facebook fans each. Tribune Media-owned duopoly stations WGNO-TV (ABC) and

WNOL (CW) trail considerably with 137,000 and only 7,500 followers, respectively. WWL-TV

and WVUE-TV have an almost identical amount of Twitter followers, with all other stations

falling behind, with WGNO-TV and WNOL-TV again trailing by a large margin.

As mentioned previously, longtime market leader WWL-TV has seen WVUE-TV close the

ratings gap between the two stations. The same scenario plays out in terms of total social media

engagement. While WWL-TV leads the television market in total social media fans and

followers, WVUE-TV actually surpasses WWL-TV in engagement and actions (Depp, 2015).

WVUE-TV's 2.5 million social actions in the last six months account for a full 28% of the

market's total social actions.

When asked about their success in the social media space, WVUE-TV digital content

director noted the strategic *separation* of broadcast content and digital content, particularly when

it is presented in the social space. In other words, it is was less about repurposing for Facebook

and Twitter news content originally created for TV. Digital content teams at stations were

instructed to post stories and write headlines that would engage an audience on Facebook, even if

it didn't fit into the editorial news model established for TV. Striking that balance appears to be

successful for WVUE-TV. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre (2011),

there are seven fundamental building blocks of social media, and understanding how they

interrelate allows business strategists to formulate plans to realize growth. Five of those seven

elements relate to an interpersonal engagement with an audience, whereas only one of the seven

included an aspect referencing the need to foster a "membership." In other words, social media is not about providing a service, but nurturing a relationship. What WVUE-TV has done in the social space is invested more in the aspects of interpersonal engagement than strict news dissemination. This is in contrast to all other stations in New Orleans and Green Bay, who rely more on utilizing social media more as a newsfeed than a tool of social engagement.

All Hands on Deck: The Team Approach to Small Market Twitter Use

Regardless of market size, the fractured nature of digital news consumption has local television stations across the U.S. scrambling for ways to structure news, sales and marketing departments in order to develop content, grow the station's brand reach and ultimately monetize the effort. Several media companies are rethinking the entire broadcast news model in order to efficiently report the news, instantly distribute it across multiple platforms, and fold in social media in a seamless effort. Frank Mungeam, Vice President of digital content at Tegna noted, "We recognize our audience increasingly doesn't distinguish screens: they might get something from our newscast, or from our mobile app, or from being a fan of our local station's Facebook page, or an Instagram video" (Wang, 2016). Tegna, along with an increasing number of other local television station groups, have earnestly begun to beef up staffs to develop original news for its digital distribution sources, recognizing that news stories told on digital platforms cannot simply be repurposed "TV news" for mobile or web. Large ownership groups like Tegna have essentially reinvented the traditional newsroom structure to include more "multi-platform" editorial staffers to create and push unique aspects of the same news story simultaneously across web, mobile, and on traditional television. Reinventing the television newsroom of the future in a manner that Tegna has may be plausible in a large market, flush with talent and resources. However, can a small market station remain nimble, relevant and efficient in this dramatically

changing news environment? Stations in smaller markets such as New Orleans and Green Bay have not made these dramatic changes, and appear to fall short in their ability to push large quantities of original digital content compared to stations in larger markets. They have, however, demonstrated a creative resourcefulness not seen in large markets, particularly in how they use social media.

On average, all stations in the New Orleans and Green Bay television markets post far fewer original messages on Twitter than their medium- and large-market counterparts. This is consistent across all dayparts and days of the week, including days with breaking local news or notable national events. By comparison, on a typical news day the total amount of tweets by a large market station can easily exceed 20-25 posts or more in total during the 6 a.m. hour *alone*. Medium markets post just slightly less total tweets, in the neighborhood of 17-20 or so per hour. When adding the total number of tweets by *all* stations in small markets, totals rarely exceed 15 per hour, with averages closer to only 10 total posts per hour. Higher-performing stations generally tweet more than lower-performing stations, suggesting that higher rated stations have larger staffs, but that is not always the case. Some small market stations appear to have perfected the art of the retweet— taking content posted by the station's reporters or network and passing it along via the station's social media accounts. In fact, on one day in the February 2016 ratings period, Green Bay's third place NBC affiliate, WGBA-TV, posted nothing generated from their own newsroom, but only tweets from national networks NBC News, MSNBC and even CNN throughout a large part of the day. More often, small market stations smartly balance tweets originated from the station's digital content staffers alongside select retweets from reporters, meteorologists and network partners. This allows for a wider variety of content from which to choose, shows a particular "do more with less" resourcefulness, and may also demonstrate a

fairly strategic approach to their social media efforts. Aggregating reporter and network tweets requires less effort overall, but also allows station talent to gain additional exposure for their personal accounts, increasing their followers, and expanding the social reach of the station.

After observing the habits of Twitter use by stations in Green Bay and News Orleans, one sees the extreme level of *inconsistency* in their efforts, particularly in terms of tweet content, and regularity of posts. Some stations were observed demonstrating a consistent pattern of tweets per daypart with predictable content in those tweets, generally in the form of weather and traffic tweets in the morning, followed by 1-2 tweets per hour of local news stories and the occasional cross promotion to network programming or a push to drive TV viewership tune in. This strategy was observed for a handful of days, but was then followed by days with virtually no tweets throughout the day. This was observed in both the New Orleans and Green Bay markets. Other oddities were observed, including select stations which avoided the opportunity to tweet in the hour immediately prior to a high-value daypart (such as late news or prime time), yet the station elected to release a barrage of tweets *two* hours before.

Small Market Use of Facebook and Facebook Live

For years, the ultimate goal of a local television marketer has been easy to describe, but more difficult to execute: drive and maintain ratings on traditional television in order to generate advertising dollars for the station. Stations have often practiced purchasing advertising space on other media including radio and cable TV in order to attract audiences, but local stations considered their *own* air as the most effective way to migrate audiences to their newscasts— an undisputed practice for decades (Tyler Eastman, Newton, & Bolls, 2003). Steadily, however, TV viewership has shrunk (Crupi, 2015) and online users are spending more time on the service each year, currently almost an hour a day (Stewart, 2016). As discussed, Facebook is very aware of

this, and is showing no signs of slowing its efforts to use video to engage audiences, and some might say replace traditional television in total. Like their counterparts across the U.S., station newsrooms and their social marketers have shifted significant resources to utilizing the growing reach of Facebook and Facebook Live.

All of the major affiliates in Green Bay and New Orleans post a wide variety of content on their Facebook pages with an eye on informing and engaging audiences. This content includes video posts— brief pre-recorded video messages from anchors and reporters. Many of these messages appear in the morning and contain messages from station meteorologists passing along weather conditions for the day. Additionally, all stations post "snackable" news content in the form of simple video and graphic animations that can tell a story easily, especially on mobile devices. Some posts include promotional messages that attempt to drive viewership to an upcoming newscasts, and others still, contain no discernible "news" content and are simply viral posts repurposed from other websites. The majority of all Facebook posts from stations in Green Bay and New Orleans are links to the stations' websites, and for good reason: it pays. The top eight social media sites, including Facebook and Twitter, drive over 30% of all traffic to websites, and this number is higher at local television stations (Wong, 2015). Local stations can monetize this traffic, and guide users to other stories on the station's website.

While all stations in the Green Bay and New Orleans markets post similar content to Facebook, there are wide discrepancies in the frequency and percentages of the *kind* of content they post. While some stations demonstrate creative thinking in their approach to using Facebook, other stations appear to use Facebook sparingly, and even others as an afterthought. The respective ratings leaders in Green Bay and New Orleans, WBAY-TV and WWL-TV demonstrate a rather conservative approach in the content and frequency of posts to Facebook:

news, weather, and traffic stories with most linking back to the station's website. Few instances of Facebook Live were seen. For example, during a one-week span in the February 2016 sweeps period, WWL-TV only posted three live feeds, each rather brief, and only featured a message from the two main anchors, shot on set, delivering an off the cuff promotional pitch to the TV broadcast about to begin.

WBAY-TV posted a wide variety of news-related content, including local and national stories, but very few posts appeared to be geared towards driving engagement. Compared to other stations in the Green Bay market, WBAY-TV generally posted fewer times a day, often less than one post per hour, and very rarely overnight. Clusters of posts generally appear only during the morning, midday and evening hours— traditionally high social media usage dayparts. This tactic reflects either a digital staffing shortage in the overnight hours or a strategy to only focus resources during dayparts when social media use is highest. Instances of Facebook Live on WBAY-TV's feed were practically nonexistent, except for one series of short feeds from the station's entertainment reporter on the night of the station's highly viewed annual Academy Awards show.

By contrast, New Orleans NBC affiliate WDSU-TV actively posted a healthy mix of entertainment and viral posts repurposed from other sites. These are mixed in with traditional local and national news stories, but at a much greater percentage than seen on other stations' Facebook feeds. The station is clearly looking to post content that will get a reaction and encourage engagement, which Facebook uses to gauge if a story is worthy of appearing on other users' newsfeeds. WDSU-TV does not hide this. One clearly non-news post titled, "Who Killed Selma Hayek's Dog?" received a comment asking, "Is this news?" only to be answered by a post by the station's Facebook administrators noting, "Just like many TV stations' Facebook sites,

WDSU offers a wide variety of content." WDSU-TV also embraces the short, mobile-friendly "snackable" video clips to not just deliver the news, but also to promote tune in of special reports in evening newscasts.

The remaining strategies demonstrated by Green Bay and New Orleans stations seem to diverge widely. Green Bay's WFRV-TV (CBS) posts seem void of clear direction. There are often clusters of posts in the middle of the day when traditional social media use is low, and few when one would expect it, generally in the late afternoon, evening, and morning hours. Some days, the WFRV-TV feed goes for hours without a post, and even when the station takes to Facebook Live, the stream receives little in terms of views. In Green Bay, WLUK-TV sits on top of the rankings in terms of social media engagement with a high volume of posts with many more local stories than their competitors, and will drop in select viral stories that would seem to see higher engagement and comment. The station did not appear to embrace Facebook Live at a level seen by other Green Bay stations, however. Aside from a small handful of lengthy weekend Facebook Live feeds (up to an hour or longer), WLUK-TV most often preferred to post much shorter pre-recorded videos, often a minute or less, all shot on a mobile device, and each including a reporter standup.

Of all the local television stations across Green Bay and New Orleans, it seems that it is the offbeat content on WVUE-TV's Facebook feed which propels it over WWL-TV in terms of all-important metric of audience engagement (Depp, 2015). WWL-TV actually surpasses WVUE-TV in total followers and fans, but the number two station in the TV ratings leads all station in the market with over 28% of all social media interactions. Chris Finch, the digital content director at WVUE-TV, says the station's Facebook strategy doesn't mix broadcast content with social. "We try to find a story that we know is going to reach out to the audience we know is on

Facebook," WVUE's feed is usually quite different from the feeds of the other stations in the market, typically including more unusual, less "newsy" content that's inherently more shareable.

Lastly, like most stations in small markets, WLUK-TV's entire social media and digital content producers are based in the news department and are focused squarely on developing stories for the station's website and social media outlets, including Facebook, plus cull stories from around the web to generate engagement. That said, WLUK-TV also recognizes the importance of using Facebook to help spread brand messages and locally-produced viral content, including Facebook Live streams. These efforts prompted WLUK-TV's marketing department to create a separate "FOX11 Behind the Scenes" Facebook page which contains mostly promotional content from the network, Facebook Live streams and lighter local-interest and viral videos. Rather than immediately post these "promotional" videos to the markedly news-centric main page, the digital content editorial staff chooses content it deems appropriate and repurposes it on the station's page.

Getting into the Act at the Oscars

The 2016 Academy Awards broadcast on ABC saw its smallest television audience since 2008 (Fitzgerald, 2016), but the annual event set records in the social media space. By the time actor Leonardo DiCaprio took home his long-awaited first Academy Award, the television audience had waned considerably, but the Twitter conversation spiked with 184,000 tweets. The vast popularity of an event like the Oscars is newsworthy in its own right and generally warrants a mention by every TV news outlet, but some interesting observations of how this event was covered by small market stations, especially on social media, are worth noting.

WBAY-TV in Green Bay and WNOL-TV in New Orleans, both ABC affiliates, were the stations in their respective markets that aired the broadcast. Interestingly, WBAY-TV did not

utilize their Facebook or Twitter feeds with Oscar-related posts, opting more for a Twitter-based "live-tweet" strategy on Facebook Live. A WBAY-TV reporter streamed brief updates and commentary on the goings-on from the event several times throughout the evening. Averaging at around two minutes each and shot from the reporter's cubicle, this strategy did not attract much in the way of views and engagement. The New Orleans ABC affiliate, WGNO-TV, took a more traditional approach, with a steady offering of Oscar-related posts on Facebook (and re-posted to Twitter) that included winner announcements in real-time, plus popular photos from the red carpet and commentaries on the ceremony itself.

Even stations that did not air the event were active in the social space, choosing to be part of the conversation with their fan base over any risk of sending viewers to the live broadcast on the competition. New Orleans NBC affiliate, WDSU-TV, was particularly active on Facebook, posting "congratulations" messages to award winners on their newsfeed in real-time, and New Orleans CBS affiliate, WWL-TV, posted no fewer than ten Oscar-related posts throughout the evening and into the next morning. The remainder of stations in both markets generally ignored the event, posting considerably less posts related to the awards, other than those that were considered newsworthy, specifically actor Leonardo DiCaprio's first Oscar win. Notably, Green Bay stations WGBA-TV (NBC) and WLUK-TV (FOX) posted photos of local icon and Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers and actress/wife Olivia Munn who appeared at the star-studded event.

<div align="center">**Small Market Summary**</div>

Small market television stations appear to be in a perpetual state of needing to do more with less. Digital and social staff headcount at these stations are generally smaller than their medium- and large-market counterparts, and are often made up of employees who are at the very

beginning of their careers. Recruiting fresh, skilled talent can be difficult in a smaller market, as is retaining skilled talent after they've been sufficiently trained. These employees often leave for bigger markets after only a few years in search of higher pay and greater responsibilities. As a result, turnover in small markets can feel continuous, requiring managers to regularly re-train new employees, or settle for less-skilled recruits.

All is not bleak in small markets, however. The environment described above appears to create a culture that is more collaborative and creative, where calculated risks are being taken in their social media and digital content efforts. In this collaborative setting, responsibilities are spread over a wider group of contributors which are pulled together and shared on the main station page, to the station's collective benefit. Small market stations seem unafraid to use new social tools, particularly Facebook Live, in unique ways, showing a willingness to take risks that a station in a larger market. Sometimes small market social media efforts can appear misguided and a little haphazard. However, some of their best practices would be well suited being adopted in larger markets. One example of this is the practice of aggressively repurposing the social media reports of the *reporters* and other talent from the station as the primary source of station social media content and promotion. This may be a necessity at a smaller market, but it has the effect of bringing more personality (and brand connectivity) to the station's social efforts, regardless of market size.

As stated earlier, there is a fairly wide gap in ratings and resources between top performing stations and poor performers in small markets. Put another way, strong stations appear to utilize social media smartly, and stations that struggle in ratings generally seem to struggle with using social media well. That said, no small market station was immune from appearing to wander off course. Is this because of a lack of a well-communicated or constantly-changing local digital

strategy? Is it a result of poor managerial follow up, or possibly regular employee turnover?

Perhaps it is simply the kind of *entrepreneurial* approach to social media that makes smaller

markets a dynamic, vibrant proving ground for fresh ideas? Either way, smaller markets seem to

have a high percentage of free-thinking multitaskers who fill a wide variety of roles and valuable

new ideas that can bubble up and benefit the parent company's station group. It is interesting to

ponder on the idea that the very kind of nonlinear thinking found in small markets may very well

be what is necessary industry-wide to ensure the survival of local broadcast television as a

whole.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

As stated earlier, this body of work has focused on the observation of news and

promotional content contained within Facebook posts and Twitter feeds from local broadcast

television stations, particularly during a period of time when those stations are hyper-focused on

migrating audiences to various programming. This final chapter will draw comparisons from

these digital texts across the wide spectrum of local television stations in large, medium, and

small television markets. Each of the stations observed produce and air local newscasts, they are

all affiliates of major television networks, and all are staffed with dedicated personnel to create

multiple instances of digital content every day, including social media posts. Understanding the

differentiating factors among these variables provides a valuable snapshot of the current state of

broadcast television promotion at the local level, and adds to the scholarly discussion of an

industry affected by such rapid change.

Subsequent to the review of these texts, there are a several key observations that have

emerged regarding the structure, strategy, and execution of social media content distribution and

promotion at local television stations:

1. Since its introduction in the mid 2000's, there is a noticeable decrease in the use of social
   media for the expressed purpose of tune-in promotion.

2. The level of social media *entrepreneurship* demonstrated by a station appears to be
   inversely proportional to size of the market in which the station is located.

3. Corporate ownership certainly plays a role in a local station's social media strategy,
   structure and executional philosophy, but local stations appear to be at the mercy of their

unique market and local ownership influences in determining a rightful course of action with social media.

4. Facebook and its streaming video spawn Facebook Live receive a significant percentage of social staff resources to manage and maintain. Twitter seems to receive much less. Are there long term risks to this?

Observation 1: Moving from Promotion to Engagement

In sharp contrast to just a few years ago, the use of social media's mass audience reach by television marketers appears to have shifted from that of a *promotional* model to that of an *engagement* model. In other words, stations appear to be steadily shifting away from simply using social media as cross-promotion vehicle to migrate audiences to the television. Instead, social media content from stations is increasingly story-based, written in such a way as to solicit feedback, "shares" by the consumer, and links to the station's website. This is significant, as it is fairly well documented that since the time of social media's emergence, television networks not only used social media to connect with their audiences (Coffey & Cleary, 2011), but Greer and Ferguson (2011) note that commercial stations were more likely than public stations to post tweets promoting newscasts. Blasingame (2011) may have been the first to notice a shift away from Twitter as a pure promotional platform, observing that while stations in San Antonio primarily used Twitter for promotional purposes, the greater potential for Twitter was for the immediate flow of breaking news.

Today, local television stations today are using Twitter almost exclusively as a news aggregator. This is the case across all stations regardless of market size, ownership, or position in the market rankings. Exceptions to this were during periods of extreme local interest, including local breaking news and special events, and all stations seemed to use Twitter to remind

followers of additional news coverage available from the station on other platforms. It's also interesting to note that when the stations did use Twitter to promote station programming, it was often to promote a station's live stream, or other *web-based* offering. This seems to indicate that stations are finding it more desirable to migrate audiences from "digital to digital" as opposed to "digital to TV." Other select cross-promotion efforts, when they were observed, were for traditional TV sweeps news stories— usually a special investigation that would air during an evening newscast. In smaller markets, these cross-promotion tweets were simply the on-air promotion (made to run on TV) embedded in the tweet, but in medium- and large-markets, separate videos were made with large, simple text and animation, made to be effective on mobile. These video-based tweets were smartly scheduled in the hour (sometimes minutes) immediately prior to the newscast in which the story would run.

When stations weren't using Twitter or Facebook to push news content, they used it simply to engage with their audiences. These posts were more organic and unscripted, and featured lighter moments that reinforced a more personal "relationship" the station shared with their viewers. Stations in Indianapolis and San Antonio especially seemed to embrace this, with anchor "selfie" photos, behind the scenes video commentaries, rallying cries for local sports teams, and even links to "bloopers of the month" videos. While these posts may seem to appear off-the-cuff, there is clearly a strategy (and many station personnel) behind this. At the 2016 Promax/BDA Station Summit, John Kukla, Vice President of Creative Services for KDFW-TV (FOX) shared best practices in this exact area, urging station marketers to create social media posts that showcase the true personality of their station talent. In his words, these social posts must be honest, open, and embracing of interactivity, even if it is unflattering or self-deprecating.

He notes this effort strengthens the emotional bond with the consumer, and as a result, builds brand loyalty.

One might argue that over the past few years, local TV stations have become wiser to the purpose that social media was intended: a way to interact and engage with friends, family, and potentially a much larger audience. As companies continue to enter into this social environment in new ways, it would seem that the *business* benefit of this new mass media is starting to come secondary. In the beginning of the Web 2.0 era, television stations considered social media as *mass media*, a tool by which to build traditional TV ratings through promotion. Local stations are now focusing their efforts to build relationships first, and let the benefits of consumer brand loyalty do the "promotion" instead.

Observation 2: Social Media Entrepreneurship by Market Size

Large market television stations generally have more people in their ranks, they pay their employees more money, and they are able to hire employees with more experience than their medium and small market counterparts. According the RTDNA, large market stations average almost eight full-time employees devoted to the station's web and digital upkeep. Medium size markets have almost half of the staff size, and smaller markets have even less (Papper, 2016c). As such, one might surmise that large market stations would be better equipped to perfect the art of social media marketing by taking a more aggressive, *entrepreneurial* approach to their social media effort. Put another way, is social media success easier to achieve in a larger market due to the higher quality resources and research available to them? Interestingly, this does not appear to be the case.

In spite of the prevalence of highly-paid, well-seasoned professionals found in great numbers at large market television stations, the strategies executed in these markets actually

appear *conservative* compared to their medium and small market brethren. For example, immediately following the launch of Facebook Live in January of 2016, stations across the country scrambled to find ways to incorporate this new streaming technology into their social repertoire. Stations in New York City and San Francisco immediately began using Facebook Live as a way to broadcast behind the scenes video, but the majority of them were somewhat simplistic in nature: short video snippets from the newsroom noting "what we're working on" for that evening's newscast. That's not to say the stations did not use Facebook Live in unique ways. KPIX-TV (CBS) posted a 30-minute video of a roving camera traveling through a station-sponsored hospitality event the week of the Super Bowl. Their crosstown competitor KGO-TV (ABC) streamed video of halftime rehearsals for the game. Putting the novelty of this kind of video aside, it was actually medium and small markets that showed a greater sense of creativity in terms of using Facebook Live. Indianapolis market leader WTHR-TV (NBC) was quick to begin streaming what they call "2-way" Facebook Live streams knowing that they would be able to talk back to viewers in real time. This is seen especially during breaking weather situations, where meteorologists mention online viewers by name during the stream, creating a more interactive experience. KSAT-TV (ABC) took this a step further in San Antonio and streamed *entire* morning newscasts on Facebook Live from a small camera propped on the news desk. During breaks, co-anchors would address the camera and give personalized greetings to viewers of the stream, and return to newscast anchoring duties once commercial breaks were over. In Green Bay, WFRV-TV (CBS) streamed in a similar way throughout their morning newscast, but with a much lower quality of production. This leads one to assume that while smaller markets demonstrate a more aggressive approach to adopting new social media technologies like Facebook Live, occasionally, the execution is less polished.

What small market television stations sometimes lack in overall studio production quality, big budgets and technical polish, they seem to make up in savvy. There is a noticeable, forward-thinking orientation in their social media strategies that are not often seen in large markets, and it may actually begin with the age of the talent pool in many smaller market stations. In these markets, many of the positions are entry-level, and are often filled by recent college graduates all too familiar with social media best practices. Dan Spangler, Director of Creative Services at WLUK-TV (FOX) in Green Bay put is best when he said, "[If] you want to know how to best connect with someone on social media, ask a millennial. Or better yet, hire one" (phone interview, September 1, 2016).

Observation 3: Ownership Effect on Social Media Strategy

Tegna, Inc. is a year removed as the digital and broadcast television spinoff of Gannett, and has been quite vocal regarding its vision of how to reinvent how its 46 television stations (including seven duopolies) develop, distribute and promote news and other digital content. Touting its "digital first" model, Tegna stations are redefining department structures, re-training and beefing up digital staffs, and in some cases offering buyouts to ensure their success. The process is not entirely one directional; Tegna has also surveyed its employees for new ideas and have even asked some of these forward-thinking employees to travel the country to train and test out these new ideas. In a relatively short time, this progressive thinking has made its way into the social media strategies at their stations. According to Emily Mower, director of marketing at Tegna's station in Norfolk, Virginia, the company has turned a long standing and generally agreed upon brand strategy upside down. The station's common marketing practice of cultivating its brand position first as a way to attract customers has now changed to one where the company

is charged with creating *customers* first (particularly through social media) and then allowing

them to contribute and build the station brand" (Mowers, 2016).

While Tegna has made headlines with their far reaching and highly coordinated plans,

there was almost no indication of a common social media strategy across *any* ownership group

during the period of time stations were observed, including the two Tegna television stations

observed for the purpose of this analysis: WWL-TV (CBS) in New Orleans and KENS-TV

(ABC) in San Antonio. To be fair, these stations were part of a spinoff that saw several new

corporate appointments *during* the observation period, so a unified Tegna effort would not have

been in place. Still, it is striking to see so many stations adopt such diverse methods and

strategies in their social media promotion, regardless of ownership or market size.

One would expect that a network owned and operated station to be well connected to that

network's priorities. As such, one would expect to see similarities in how network programming,

along with high-value local news content is created and promoted. In New York and San

Francisco, *each* of the major network affiliates are owned and operated by their respective

network, but there are practically no indications of likeminded social media strategies among

them. For example, during a standard weekday, WABC-TV (ABC) in New York rarely tweeted

in the hour leading into primetime, whereas KGO-TV (ABC) in San Francisco used this

particular hour of the day to tweet often. This may indicate any number of things, including one

station feeling that entertainment-minded audiences are not looking for news content

immediately before primetime, and another reacting to a natural post-workday spike in social

media habits in the late afternoon. It could also simply mean that, due to scheduling, social

media staffers are between shifts at that hour. Regardless, this was only one of many examples

that seemed to indicate that there was little coordination between these important stations, and

perhaps that the network plays little role in communicating a priority in the effort. It is important to point out that there are significant differences in total tweets per daypart, content of those tweets, and even a lack of network cross promotion across *all* of the major networks' owned and operated stations in New York and San Francisco.

It would be naive to think stations operate with no input from any station's corporate ownership. Built-in efficiencies abound, from group purchasing of social media monitoring tools to monthly conference calls sharing best practices, so there is a built-in dialogue with the stations on how to best curate and promote content. Still, if a corporate group is recommending a common strategy among its stations, it has not been observed here. Rather, I believe it is the unique operational realities at the local level have more of an impact on how a station executes a social media plan. Could a weak manager be responsible for not communicating that day's digital plan? Could a station's internal network infrastructure be experiencing technical problems? Could employee turnover and training be wreaking havoc on the rest of the digital team? Many of these issues plague newsrooms and marketing departments at local stations, regardless of market size or network affiliation. Therefore, I am willing to conclude that in addition to any corporate direction, a successful station generally knows how to use social media successfully and then reaps the rewards. Weaker stations generally do not. This seems logical, as strong legacy stations in a given market have a large, established, skilled employees with a loyal audience base that's eager to engage. Weaker stations are not afforded the same luxury, and must build the audience first. The truly successful stations in my opinion are those like WVUE-TV (FOX) in New Orleans, who steadily built their social following with smart, relatable content (some of it decidedly non-news related), and as a result saw their TV ratings increase to a virtual tie in the 10:00 p.m. hour with the market's legacy station, WWL-TV (CBS).

Observation 4: Facebook Taking Over

One only has to casually observe the social media habits of local television stations to conclude that Facebook has emerged as the go-to content distribution and marketing tool for news departments and TV promoters. With almost 200 million users in the U.S. alone, Facebook has evolved from being a social media platform into one of the most accessible and widely distributed mass media communication companies in the world. Like its users, Facebook is hungry for content, especially video and local television stations are happy to provide a steady offering of local news. Compare that to Twitter, which became a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) just five years after the social network launched, but is showing signs that it may be losing its relevance. Twitter's no longer growing in active users, and newsrooms appear to favor the media-centric offerings that Facebook provides, not to mention relative newcomers Instagram and Snapchat. Harrington, Highfield, & Bruns noted that Twitter could enhance television viewing by reshaping the ways audiences watch and TV networks produce programming (2013), and this appears to have come to fruition, especially for national programmers (Accenture, 2015). At local stations, however, all observations point to Facebook receiving the bulk of creative and newsgathering resources.

Stations large and small have demonstrated a marked shift in standard operating procedures related to the development of content for Facebook, including hiring digital-only staffers. Some stations, like those owned by Tegna, Inc. and Tribune Media have begun hiring dedicated "social media marketing" staffers to promote and create original online marketing content to complement content coming from producers in the newsroom. This demonstrates that the time-honored practice of TV news stories simply being repurposed for the station website, Facebook or Twitter is no longer acceptable. Instead, stations are seen to be editing those stories

more than once. Not only for TV, but also in a manner to appeal to a Facebook consumer, especially those on mobile. Larger markets seem to be doing this most frequently, but it is also seen in medium and small market. Sometimes, these are shorter "snackable" versions of news stories are being edited with bold graphics to attract consumers scrolling through their mobile newsfeeds, and other times these videos are stories with custom anchor introductions for online users. It is important to note that, more often than not, these videos aren't promotional in nature— a tease to migrate digital audiences to traditional TV. These videos are complete (albeit abbreviated) news stories.

One of the most significant points worth discussing relating to Facebook has been the introduction of their live streaming video technology, Facebook Live. Since its launch in January of 2016, Facebook Live has quadrupled in size (Seetharaman, 2016), and media companies have contributed to this with vigor. Not all local television stations participated immediately, especially in the larger markets, where it seemed stations were unsure of how Facebook Live's streaming service differed from local station websites which already provided live streaming of their newscasts and other programming. Other stations jumped into Facebook Live almost immediately in what appeared to be an effort to tap into the pop culture buzz. Early instances of Facebook Live feeds by stations were simply TV newscasts streamed "behind the scenes from a cell phone near the news set, and appeared to be a short-sighted, legacy-centric mindset at the station. Over a short period of time, however, stations recognized that Facebook Live offered much more than what the local station's website live feed could— a simultaneous two-way conversation during the live feed. This, combined with the convenience of use for the consumer made Facebook Live something local stations could not ignore. Some local stations, regardless of market size or corporate ownership, still appear to fail in taking full advantage of the

technology, opting to just use Facebook Live in breaking news situations or as a means to promote an upcoming newscast. Perhaps this is intentional. After all, while some stations have embraced Facebook and Facebook Live wholeheartedly, others are seemingly wary of a technology that seems to blur the fundamental lines that draw the boundaries around what we understand as television.

In many ways, "live broadcasting" is what defines television as we know it. It has facilitated large audiences to its programming which for years has allowed for the sale of lucrative advertising space. Even through the emergence of digital, live television has been the chief differentiator from online video like that seen on YouTube and other digital platforms, including Facebook. This is all changing, however. Facebook's emergence in live video streaming has been rapid, and some local broadcasters might say, alarming. While Facebook has made deals with nearly 140 media companies and celebrities, compensating them for creating custom video for Facebook and Facebook Live, local broadcasters have seen none of that.

Final Thoughts and Future Consideration

The modern local television landscape looks nothing like it did even a few years ago. Looking back at the earliest days of TV, previous generations of viewers happily embraced "scheduled" programming. During this period of time, known as what Amanda Lotz defines as the *network era,* producers of TV content were just as effective as TV marketers, having a much easier job in making a connection with consumers due to the sheer reach of the medium. Today, now having evolved into a *post-network era*, audiences are becoming increasingly fragmented, dividing their media consumption across a multitude of choices, channels and platforms. Over the past twenty-five years, consumers have migrated to more specialized, niche content via cable and multichannel offerings. Now, with the growing availability of on demand, self-programming

and search features, some consumers are moving beyond niche to practically an *individualized* television viewing experience. The pressure to innovate is particularly felt in local broadcast television markets seeking to hold on to a share of a traditional TV viewing audience that is getting smaller (and older) by the year.

Local television has changed dramatically in the past ten years. Aside from well documented proof of a steady increase in digital consumption by the consumer, we are also seeing huge leaps in technical capabilities provided to stations. The most important of these new innovations has been social media, including two top platforms, Facebook and Twitter. News providers have been quick to harness the newly found power to reach mass audiences, and in return, social platforms have benefitted by receiving free content from local news providers that they can redistribute. Social media is no longer considered a lightweight addition to the serious business of the newsroom, but the primary function of newsgathering and dissemination. However, local television news stations continue to operate at a disadvantage, relinquishing control over which consumers see which content, as well as the all-important matter of advertising revenue. The relationship between local news stations and Facebook is one that seems symbiotic on one hand, but the world's largest social media platform is firmly committed to build on its "video first" content delivery strategy. It doesn't take much to see that Facebook's ultimate game is to tap into advertising's pot of god: television budgets.

Digital disruption has triggered a seismic shift in all aspects of the television industry, from media consumption to content creation. For local television promotion and marketing managers, an even more fundamental transition is taking place: the evolution of station-level promotion and branding. Local television marketing managers continually seek effective social media practices, but the process in this post-network era often feels counterintuitive.

Traditionally, television promotion was based on a model that in many ways sought instant gratification— using off-channel media to drive consumers to tune in to a local television broadcast. ROI was measured primarily by looking at last night's ratings. With the emergence of social media, local television stations used this new "mass media" tool in the same way, but they did so with limited success, other than increasing social media followers. As evidenced in the observations above, we now see that the use of social media by television marketers is more nuanced, striking a blend of content, engagement, and interaction. Station marketers are now banking on a long-term investment in increased brand awareness that hopefully will translate into TV ratings which can then be monetized.

Television, like other legacy media including radio and the newspaper, is at a crossroads, but this kind of industry disruption is not new. What *is* new is the speed at which this transformative change is occurring. This constant change makes it difficult for researchers to not only stay abreast of an industry in flux, but to bring much needed context to the discussion. While difficult, future studies involving how social media is used in local television promotion should include emerging applications and technologies. In the period of time of putting together this publication, Instagram and Snapchat have been increasingly adopted by a number of television stations, for example. Additionally, future research will need to address what could be considered a cross-pollination of promotion and news in the social media efforts of the station. Will these two departments continue to be separate, as is typical of current staff structure, or will the marketing and "social journalism" skillsets need to be cross-trained among employees in a more blended newsroom?

The fight for relevance is not new for local television marketers, and it is a battle that has been fought among stations for decades. The war, however, seems to loom much larger: the

survival of the television industry as a whole. It involves the fight for attention, for brand

visibility, for control of content and for access to the data that helps one understand the audience

and unlocks the kind of revenue opportunities that will ensure its survival. The emergence of

social media and the platforms that support it has changed the rules and now play a dominant

role in today's media landscape. The few studies that have been conducted related to social

media and its effect (and effectiveness) on media, particularly television, have been focused on

network-level efforts. While this is important, I feel it is also valuable to explore the efforts

across more than 1,300 *local* commercial television stations serving more than 200 U.S.

television markets. I hope that these observations shall serve as a call for more exploration into

the crossroads of these media, and potentially a new direction into media studies as a whole.

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[i] Reverse compensation is the practice of a local television station paying a network in exchange for affiliation with that network. This contrasts with the long held practice of networks paying stations, which was met with much protest by station ownership groups (Kunz, 2007).

[ii] For decades, companies were prohibited from owning more than one television station in a single market. In 1999, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) relaxed this limit and allowed duopoly ownership, i.e., a company owning two stations in a local television market (FCC, 1999). In June 2003, the FCC further relaxed the local TV multiple ownership rule. For example, in markets with 18 or more TV stations, a company can own three stations provided that only one of these stations is among the top four in ratings (FCC, 2003).

[iii] Social media "engagement" is a somewhat ambiguous catch-all word that describes a consumer's online interaction with a person or brand. Engagement often includes a consumer expressing interest in a brand by "liking" or "sharing" online content provided by the brand with others. Engagement can also include a brand's two-way communication with an audience, including direct responses to consumer inquiries plus customer reviews and referrals. These interactions are quantifiable, and become valuable information to consumer marketers in their effort to build brand awareness and product loyalty.