

‘It’s Maine; People Like to Feel Connected’: Traditional Standards and Community Engagement in Local Television News

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New communication technology creates new ways for local television journalists to both engage with and learn about their communities. At the same time, there seems to be an overall push for these journalists to connect with their communities in multiple other ways. This study employs a thematic analysis of interviews with local television journalists in Maine to explore how they negotiate traditional journalism, while also adapting new technology and evolving what it means to serve the community. The analysis suggests journalists find it challenging to align traditional responsibilities with new media norms.

In a small-market television newsroom in Maine, journalists regularly post selfies, behind-the-scenes information, and comments directly to audience members on Facebook and Twitter. A scroll through Twitter reveals these types of tweets from Maine broadcast journalists: A selfie sitting at the desk in a winter coat captioned, “You know you work in Maine when”; a shot of a fellow reporter looking windswept after reporting a storm; a reporter’s vantage point of a city council meeting showing what the reporter sees. “It’s Maine,” a local journalist said when this practice was questioned. “People like to feel connected.”

Journalists are required to cultivate engaged personas both on social media and within the community they serve, while also maintaining authority as distributors of essential civic information. Journalists must simultaneously preserve the neutrality and independence that safeguards their credibility, while simultaneously participating in conversations with the community that did not occur in previous eras. This paper proposes that the tensions between these two roles are leading to new uncertainties journalists must learn to navigate. Through a thematic analysis of interviews with local television journalists in Maine, community involvement is explored, along with tensions and ambiguities that arise when involvement overlaps with changing technology and traditional journalistic standards.

The field of journalism continues to transform as technological and economic challenges alter what it means to be a journalist. Looking at television news in Maine, this paper suggests the impact of new technology on television journalists’ social and political roles can be further

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investigated through local journalists' perceptions of the dual purposes of local television news—credible information distribution and local connections. These journalists are not just doing local television news, but also community journalism.

Local television news is a consistently influential part of democracy in the United States. Despite the decline in audience, it continues to draw larger audiences than other television news sources, according to Pew Research Center (2018). While digital news media audience size has increased to 43 percent of adults often getting their news online (though 93 percent find some of their news online), 50 percent of American adults still consistently get their news from television. Of that percentage, local television news has the largest share (Gottfried & Shearer, 2017).

In Maine, it seems local television news remains viable precisely because journalists are proving adaptable as technologies alter traditional practices. In particular, journalists define their role as being both integrated with and responsive to their local communities. While this idea is not new when it comes to local news media, audiences are increasingly seen as collaborative partners in the creation and distribution of information. For instance, Batsell (2015) argues that it is imperative for today's journalists to interact with audience members to survive in this new environment. While established norms, such as objectivity and independence, remain integral to practice, the tension between traditional and contemporary responsibilities can be stark. Understanding this relationship can inform news production practices beyond local television news and guide journalism training and education.

While local journalism does not necessarily mean community journalism, journalists' roles in the community are an important part of how they think about what they do. Of note, since this research was conducted, one of the stations from which journalists were interviewed now has a section on their website for "Maine Moms" that brings together "a variety of news sources, community journalists, and comments and suggestions from Moms like you" ("Maine Moms", n.d.).

While the primary job of journalism is to inform, its democratic function must also include space for a diversity of voices that engage the viewer with issues of common interest in both the broadcast and the larger public sphere. Continually declining audience numbers, overall, point to the fact that, while news is available, the public can't be made to engage. Here, it is clear that local broadcast news sits in a unique position. That local news retains its significance among news audiences suggests its varying approaches and attitudes towards community engagement and traditional practices and standards may continue to impact the profession, and its differing connections to community are aspects worth examining.

Literature Review

The search for definition and standards of practice in professional journalism has seen numerous approaches, from overall deontology to situational decision-making of case studies (Bowen, 2013; Deuze, 2010). With that and the search for a global ethic focusing on transcendent principles, rather than applicable practices or concrete definitions (Herrscher, 2002; Ward, 2005), it seems best to think of standards, as Deuze (2005) argues, as part of a professional ideology. This study utilizes Deuze's (2005) classification of this ideology as a basis to examine attitudes towards established normative practices and standards in news production.

Deuze (2005) argues that professional journalism consists of an overarching ideology that practitioners adhere to in order to provide legitimacy for their work. Based on a review of previous scholarship, Deuze breaks this ideology into five primary components: public service,

autonomy, immediacy, ethics, and objectivity. These ideals, as Pihl-Thingvad (2014) finds, are an important part of a journalist's identity, and can impact commitment to news production. Other scholars have found that traditional ideals are decreasing in priority because in their daily practices, journalists face pressures of producing more in less time with fewer resources, although they still believe they are committed to journalistic ideals in their work (Henderson & Cremedas, 2015).

A commitment to traditional standards and ideals has come up in a number of studies as a possible impediment to fully adapting the potential of online platforms such as social media (Reinardy & Bacon, 2014; Spyridou, Matsiola, Veglis, Kalliris, & Dimoulas, 2013). This impediment is not from a want of adapting to technology, but rather, as Lysak, Cremedas and Wolf's (2012) survey results show, not fully understanding the journalistic value and how to judge its reliability as a source. Moon and Hadley (2014) found television journalists relied more heavily on Twitter than other traditional journalists. It was sometimes used as a primary source, creating concerns about credibility. Additionally, a growing workload from the adoption of multiple platforms disrupted routines and lead to concerns about quality and accuracy (Adornato, 2014; Lysak et al., 2012; Smith, Tanner, & Duhe, 2007).

The development of new technology, specifically social media, has changed how journalists choose and produce content. Lewis and Molyneux (2018) define social media broadly as media that enhance interpersonal communication but more specifically social networking platforms, such as apps. The social nature of these platforms has broadened the expectations of traditional journalists to include two-way communication and engagement with audience members, bringing them into the conversation about not just content, but journalistic practice as well (Feighery, 2011; Malone, 2010; Skoler, 2009).

Revers' (2014) study of Twitter use among journalists in upstate New York found a divide between journalists who were wary of the breakdown of professional norms and those who embraced the platform as a space of transparency:

Traditionalists and light tweeters conceived of journalism as subjected to one set of norms, irrespective of the outlet it occurred on. Deviation from these norms on one level (or platform) meant undermining journalism as a whole. Intense tweeters assumed flexible boundaries and diversified their performance in different venues (Revers, 2014).

Although tensions still exist, relationships between the technology-adopting and the technology-ambivalent journalists were able to facilitate Twitter as a viable news alternative and push for adjusted professional norms that fit the nature of the medium. Revers (2014) further concludes the concept of transparency, as applied to journalistic use of Twitter and other social media, already fits within traditional notions of journalism, such as public service and autonomy.

While looking specifically at social media use at small circulation community newspapers, Wright (2018) found that journalists continue to hold onto traditional values and take on traditional roles in their posts. This seems to point to a continuing struggle to reconcile the engagement capabilities of new technology and journalistic ideals.

A focus on local television news provides another layer to this understanding of professional ideology. Local television news is, as argued by scholars such as Rose (1979), "its own unique, scrambled genre, with its own rules, forms and attitudes" (p. 168). Further, as Kaniss (1991) says, "local news has always played an important role in the way a city and region understands its problems, its opportunities, and its sense of local identity" (p. 2). It is biased towards a local audience. Television journalists feel the need to present newsworthy information while producing content that engages their community (Henderson & Cremedas, 2017).

Community journalism is often associated with small-circulation newspapers (Lauterer, 2006), but Reader (2012) asks, “who can really argue that a journalist who has lived and worked his whole life in a single large metropolis cannot practice community journalism because he works for the most popular TV news station in that city?” (p. 15). Community journalism also does not necessarily mean a geographic location, but can encompass journalism for a given community as it exists in many forms, especially as technology changes the boundaries of what community means (Robinson, 2014; Hatcher & Reader, 2012).

What makes a community journalist is both reporting focused on and a connection to a community. As Hatcher and Reader (2012) write, “The modern community journalist is not an autonomous outsider, objectively recording all that transpires, but a community connector who has both a professional and a personal stake in that community” (p. 8). The community journalist should be involved in community meaning-making through an active role in “listening and leading” (Lowery & Daniels, 2017).

This study aims to understand how local television journalists both view traditional standards and practices in the face of a changing news environment while engaging with their community in new ways.

Research questions

These questions seek to understand how the journalists in this study perceive aspects of their job discussed in the literature review:

RQ1: In the face of a changing news environment, what are local television journalists’ attitudes toward traditional journalistic standards?

RQ2: How do local television journalists perceive technology and social media-shaping journalistic standards and practices?

RQ3: How do local television journalists view their role in the community?

Method

This research is an analysis of data from a previous ethnographic study, which included participant observation and qualitative interviews. Only the interviews are analyzed here. The previous ethnographic research questioned attitudes toward newsroom norms and journalistic standards. The questions for the interviews were developed from observations, which revealed strong affinity to traditional standards, although not necessarily in practice, as well as interest in engaging with and participating in community through multiple means, including social media.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for the interviewer to tailor questions and interactions to the interviewee. Silverman (2011) described the interview as requiring flexibility, rapport, and active listening. The use of follow-up questions can engage the interviewee in more comprehensive replies, while building rapport creates the possibility of more open answers to questions. Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013) relied primarily on these types of interviews, in conjunction with descriptive data, for their study on the impact of ownership structures and technological re-organization on local television journalists, specifically regarding labor conditions. They identified several consistent trends in news production including the impact of different environments on the use of journalistic values through their interviews. How the participants constitute meaning in their discourse provides insight into how they construct themselves as good journalists.

Data Collection

Data was collected in 2015 in the state of Maine. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for data collection. To ensure confidentiality, participant names and specific identifying information have been removed or altered.

Participants

All participants interviewed for this study worked for a local television station in Maine at the time the interviews were conducted. There were 11 participants interviewed for this study: three female and eight male journalists, ranging in age from their early 20s to late 50s, all of whom worked in four different newsrooms in Maine. These newsrooms are in markets 80, 156 and 205 (Nielsen, 2015). There was a varying degree of training, from journalism degrees to on-the-job learning. Experience ranged from approximately 30 years to less than one, with four of the participants having more than 19 years and seven having less than five years.

Interview Protocol

One-time semi-structured interviews were conducted primarily in the workplace, and one interview was conducted via telephone. The interviews used in this research were designed to promote open-ended responses and delve further into preliminary responses. Questions included “What is your job as a local news broadcaster?”, “What role does social media play in your work?”, “What are important considerations for putting together news that is up to your standards?” and “What are your thoughts on traditional journalistic standards?” Based on answers, follow-up questions included asking what it means to be part of their local community, and what kinds of activities were part of that role. Audio recordings and transcripts were made with the permission of the participants.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), which is an analytical process looking for patterns of meaning, ideas, or concepts. Within this analysis, thematic categories with sub-themes are developed from a textual analysis of recorded data. Transcripts of interviews were broken into chunks of text thought to contain a unit of meaning, and these were grouped according to similarities. The groups were then consolidated into larger thematic categories.

While there are no specific guidelines for the number of interviews for qualitative interviews, 11 interviews were found sufficient for this analysis based on participant homogeneity and thematic saturation, where new interviews did not add additional thematic content (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In their research on saturation, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that saturation had occurred by the time they had analyzed 12 interviews. Additionally, based on the make-up of the journalists from the original ethnographic study, this was found to be a representative group.

Interpretation

The thematic analysis led to two primary thematic categories: Community engagement and building a relationship with community members for audience retention and story development. The first key finding is technology influences how and why stories are produced and distributed.

Within these thematic categories are notable overlaps, which highlight areas of ambiguity and tension in the journalists’ perceptions about how community engagement, technology, and traditional standards work in concert. To provide the foundation for these areas, first, I will discuss the first two themes individually, then discuss the tension between them as a third theme.

Theme 1: Community Engagement

Engaging the local community fell into three primary subcategories: Understanding and reflecting the interests of the community; Being a member of the community; and Building ethical relationships with community members. Each of these subcategories has a slightly different approach to the focus on community. In the first subcategory, Being a member of the community, the community is seen as primarily an audience that has specific needs and interests that need to be met by local media, which demonstrates the local bias discussed by Kaniss (1991). One interview participant referred to this as Mainer pride:

If we can find something that resonates with Mainers about somebody who's working hard or, you know, a local business that a lot of people take pride in. I mean, there is such a sense of pride, especially in the part of Maine that we cover, about being from Maine. And we, I mean, it's in our TV promos as you might have seen. I mean, that is something that we take pride in and then also try to look aggressively for stories that reflect that. I don't know if you would call it a mission, but that trait of the place that we serve.

This sentiment was repeated by most participants, with the implication that only local news could do this job successfully, based on the connection local reporters have to the community. Phrases like “pulse on the community” and “in the know” were used to demonstrate the journalist’s ability to understand and provide for the particular needs of the local area. This includes a focus on topics of significance:

There's certain stories that this community seems to really enjoy, like veterans pieces, for example. I think those are... that's really something that this community connects with so, you know, you really try to focus on those kind of things.

Being in tune with the community’s needs and interests is how these journalists chose stories they believe will encourage the communities to engage with their content.

Part of being in tune is making sure to include content from all communities in the viewing area in an even manner. Audience members, they explained, need to feel like the news connects directly to their community, not just neighboring communities or the “big” city where the station is based. Without this localized attention, the audience might disengage. As one participant pointed out, specialized local content is what audiences tune in for:

You know, just try to give them as much as I can, keeping it as local as I can, 'cause you can get any of that Red Sox... all that stuff anywhere else. So try to get stuff here that's new to them...

Local sports, this participant said, is a key area of interest for all the communities served. Community members have children and friends on these teams and are excited to see them.

Another aspect of community engagement was that journalists themselves are members of the community. The following interview excerpt regards the number of journalists, who, unlike many younger reporters, decided to stay at their stations long-term:

We're still local people with, with vested interest in our local community, you know. You've got a foundation here at this particular station where you have a lot of people who have been here a long time. They make this home. They happen to do this for a living, you know...

While not expressed by all participants, this sentiment was seen from both long-time journalists who have lived in the market for many years, as well as young journalists who still plan to move into larger markets in several years. The following excerpt came from a younger journalist, in his early 20s, who was newer to the area:

It is more of a community-based feel, and a lot of the times you'll know, if you're at a scene in Bangor, like I know, I often know the officers on scene just from like work, having worked here for a year and a half and just like being part of the community.

Being part of the community is not just an individual matter, but an aspect of news stations as whole entities. The participants' stations make a point to be part of local events from holding food drives to covering and engaging in walks for cancer treatment.

I think one of my favorite parts about working in Bangor, and living in Bangor, is the community interaction, and you get to meet so many people in the community because you're doing community events that really matter to people, and maybe one walk doesn't matter to you, but another one might, and we're usually at all of them.

This statement overlaps with the idea of covering stories that matter to the community, but also emphasizes the importance of being in the community as well.

Community was also discussed in terms of relationships. These relationships are integral to working effectively and living harmoniously in the stations' coverage areas. Several participants mentioned approaching officials and other interview subjects politely, asking permission to film, even if they know they have the right to. In the following excerpt, the participant discusses finding a balance between being in a community and reporting on it:

We are small communities. We have to live with these people, and, yeah, a door can shut and you're really in trouble trying to get information, you know. Uh, you can't let that make you shy away from the story. At the same time, don't go burning a bridge unnecessarily, you know. So yeah, yeah, your network, you can't drop in, do the story and they'll never see you again, you know.

This participant is also demonstrating the difference between local news and network or national news, highlighting the specific relationship demands of community news work, of which trust is a major element.

The term "fairness" was used frequently in the context of relationships. This is not the same fairness of equal time or providing response time to criticism, but fairness as it relates to sensitivity and building ethical relationships with the communities served. One of the participants described how a young girl and her younger brother were in an accident while using a recreational vehicle on their own. The younger brother was killed, and the police released the names of both children. The girl was not charged with anything for the accident, but, in reporting the story, questions were raised about whether it was ethical to use the girl's name. To be fair

and sensitive, it was decided the name would not be used. The argument was that even though the story raised a number of questions about what happened, nothing in particular was gained by naming her, and it might make her life more difficult. This conception of fairness as a type of sensitivity to community members was found in the transcripts of interviews with most of the participants, ranging from dealing with reputations to deaths to illness or disability. The following excerpt encapsulates this sentiment:

You want to give the viewers the information, but you don't also want to ruin someone's life whose life didn't need to be ruined in the first place.

Theme 2: Impact of Technology

Technological developments have long influenced the evolution of television news and broadcast journalism practices. With more recent changes in technology, however, participants with longer careers noted enthusiastically that the way they work has changed in multiple ways, becoming paradoxically easier and more difficult. With more mobile and networking capabilities, these participants noted both cell phones and networked, digital video created a more responsive system to breaking news or changes in story development. The expanded use of email and social media provided local journalists with more ways to reach out and connect with sources and engage with their audiences.

On the other hand, these same technologies create a heavier workload for everyone in the newsroom with more platforms to populate, the possibility of last-minute changes, and more spaces to engage with and search for information and stories. As discussed in the literature review, this concern has been found in numerous other studies. In particular, social media stood out in the interviews as an important factor in the daily workings of the newsroom, with one participant noting they are no longer a television station, but a multimedia station.

Overlapping with the concepts of community relationships, technology, specifically the use of internet and social media, have opened up avenues for building new types of relationships through accessibility to on-air talent and candid behind-the-scenes knowledge. Reporters and anchors are encouraged to post pictures and information about their work process, in addition to posting updates to and teases for the day's big stories.

1) I want them on their personal pages because people know who they are and they're becoming friends with them and that's great because it's also helpful for our brand.

2) I mean all of us are so accessible to viewers these days. We all have our own Facebook pages. We have our own Twitter pages.

These digital relationships with audience members create new avenues for connecting with what is happening in the community and what is important to audience members. Particularly, the use of social media is about new ways to engage and get input from viewers. As the following excerpt demonstrates, this includes ways for audience members to draw attention to potential news stories:

They're more likely to weigh in their support on social media through someone who might initially start a campaign or effort, and then maybe we will look at it and say OK, well there might... maybe there's more validity to this.

The excerpt suggests just how much impact audience members can have in getting a story covered in a space where they can engage with the newsroom as a group, creating noticeable trends, rather than individuals emailing or calling. Participants described social media as a tool to specifically ask for audience member contributions and story ideas:

Earlier in the week we posted on Facebook, like, do you have a cool, like, Easter tradition we might be interested in covering. That's definitely a feature story should nothing else be happening that... like nothing breaking... and people responded, oh yeah, we have like egg fights or things like that. So things like... things that sound cool. That's a good way to, um, kind of... and then send them a message after and be like, hey, we saw you posted here. Are you interested in doing a story?

This use of social media for story development through both explicitly engaging with viewers and more passively watching and responding to viewers' online activity was mentioned by most participants as a regular activity in the news development process.

Social media, specifically Facebook, also provides space to engage with users through posting content that is not deemed quite newsworthy enough for broadcast or worth sending a reporter to cover. It allows the newsroom to foster community without the “bridge burning” and loss of trust mentioned in the previous section in a different way.

People will write to us like a lot of fundraisers. Like, we don't often cover fundraisers. Like if they're like oh I want to... Like I'm trying to like start a business, here's my Gofundme page. Can I get some coverage? Like, we'll tell them to post it on our Facebook page where other people can see it and that way we're not really promoting it ourselves, but it's like they post it to us for other people to see and then people are still getting that... Not as much exposure as they would had we covered a story like that, but they're still getting exposure and at the same time we're not really burning any bridges by telling a person no.

Social media also provided a place to distribute content in both a more immediate and expanded way. Specifically, Twitter was mentioned as the place reporters posted information while in the middle of reporting and where breaking news is first distributed. This is part of how technology is changing audience expectations of how and when they get information, as demonstrated here:

The public's expectation has definitely changed because you know our sense of like we have to get this out... we have to, you know, the second it happens, you know ... I think court is probably for me the biggest example of that because you know every kind of major twist and turn in some sort of court proceeding is expected to be tweeted...

Rather than waiting for air time, reporters are constantly distributing information to their audiences, even though how that information is packaged changes as it moves from platform to platform.

Theme 3: Positions of Ambiguity and Tension

There is significant overlap between statements put into the previous themes of community engagement and technology. These overlaps were useful in revealing challenges

facing journalism as these things further converge. It is not just changing technology that directly impacts newsroom perceptions about journalism, but it also changes ideas about community and steadfast attitudes about the importance of traditional standards. The particular intersection that spawned doubt changed from person to person, but there was an overall sense in the transcripts that there was some apprehension with the current state of local journalism.

The continued importance of traditional standards and ideals can be seen in the prevalent allusions that continued through the interviews. The focus of conversations around these topics often reflected the purpose of journalistic ideology discussed by Deuze (2005). Maintaining credibility and responsibility of the job were frequently used as explanations for the importance of these standards. The idea that following traditional journalistic standards is the responsibility of the journalist was clearly stated in several interviews, such as the following short example:

We have a responsibility to be accurate, to be, you know, to be balanced...

Others expressed a similar sentiment more implicitly. In the following excerpt, a participant discusses how being unbiased is integral to being a journalist.

I mean it's, it's like taking something without a bias. I mean it's just, you know, telling viewers what they need to know and I would hope that's what we're doing. If not, I don't want to work here anymore, you know what I mean? I think it's the right of the folks watching at home to have a newscast that isn't biased in any way or isn't leaning in one way.

If a journalist does not do this, they are not doing journalism, as suggested by the claim, “I don’t want to work here anymore.” The concept of being unbiased is seen as integral to the point that it doesn’t require much explanation, but there is also a sense of responsibility of choice. The journalist presents facts, but it is the responsibility of the journalist to choose which ones the audience needs. Here, the journalist uses standards as tools in acting as a public servant.

Several participants repeated the importance of this sense of responsibility. In another example, a participant talks about these standards and responsibility in terms of quality.

Nice to meet your deadlines. Nice to have that as a goal and to do everything you can to meet them. Nice to get it first. Nice to scoop the competition, this is a business. And, nice to- and for egotistical, uh, reputation purposes, you know, it feels good to do that. But none of that should be the driving factor ultimately. The driving factor should be: is this solid? Can we rely on this? Have we touched enough bases here to have a solid story? You know, have we filled as many gaps as we can to put this out there, this information out there responsibly?

To do your job responsibly as a journalist requires making sure you have the best product with “gaps filled” to distribute. Ultimately, these standards of journalistic production should outweigh other business and personal motivations. If, as this participant says, “scooping” or “ego” take precedence, the implication is that a journalist is failing in their responsibility.

The concept of responsibility was most frequently brought up in relation to journalistic standards, but credibility was also emphasized as a reason for preserving related practices. It is a prudent business practice as a distrustful audience may not remain an audience. In these three excerpts, there is a sense of not losing the trust of the audience with anything that might be considered inaccurate or biased:

- 1) *You have to serve an audience that wants to know that you're unbiased when it comes to these things...*
- 2) *Without image what's left for any kind of information sharing, whatever we call ourselves now, for journalists, you know. I mean you have to have credibility and you have to have um... and reputations are involved here. I mean obviously if you are very opinionated about a social issue and you share that freely then viewers and consumers have every right to question your objectivity when it comes to covering that issue...*
- 3) *You can't be wrong or else that just makes you look bad, station look bad, and people might be, not that it's that extreme here like if you get, like pronounce a name wrong, but people notice...*

Some of the concerns about where these standards fall apart will not sound new to many, such as whether or not a story is providing free advertising for a business:

I forget what time of year, but like there's a bakery and they have these strawberry tarts, and like every year we do a story about like, hey, the tarts are here, and I look at that and I go that's not newsworthy.

While this attention to local business fits into a broader conception of being a part of and supporting the community, which was described by most as an important aspect of the job, there was a sense from some participants that taking on a purely promotional role for the community isn't the right way to go about it. Making the story about a more newsworthy aspect that impacts more of the community, with the local business purely as an example, was suggested as an alternative. Here, a poorly defined characterization of community engagement comes into conflict with traditional journalistic standards of independence. Other participants expressed this particular apprehension about community as the possibility that community members might abuse personal relationships to get promotion for their local businesses.

Local business was not the only subject of this type of tension between community engagement and journalistic standards. Prominent community members and prominent community attitudes also came up as subjects of doubt when it came to reflecting community interests while maintaining journalistic integrity:

You want to present information that your viewers are going to appreciate, but you don't... you... I think you kind of get off the rails as far as objectivity goes when you start writing too much to what you think they want to hear, bec- You know, you obviously... You want to create content that they want to watch, but you also, you know... It's like, oh well, people in this part of Maine think this or think that, like, I'm going to write my story a little bit more, you know, geared towards that. I think that's dangerous.

Community engagement online seemed to lead to a similar concern about community members abusing or overly influencing news decisions based on the newsroom's need to encourage community input. The sense of ambiguity here was around how to, with the new access social media provides audience members, gauge what topics are worth giving time to.

There are contributors, but this is still not their job and, you know. So, we have to, we have to remember that too, that it's still our job to... to, you know, finally put out that product and things and not to say that the contribution isn't of value, but I think sometimes we have to question the contribution and, you know, and really wonder like are we doing this just because social media deems that we should be doing something about this? I don't know. I worry about that sometimes.

While community members are encouraged to contribute pictures, videos, anecdotes and story ideas, when do these contributions require a response? Is a specific issue trending on the station's social media and email because of manipulation, as this excerpt posits?

A lot of the most vocal people, the ones that are really against something or really for something, they might be a very loud minority. Then again they might be a legitimate majority. But the point is that they're going to tee off, but if they get some kind of organized response to you it can skew... it's not scientific. We've got 400 responses and 300 of them were negative. Well it's probably accurate, but you don't know that for a fact. It could have been a concerted effort.

There are no clear guidelines for knowing when it is appropriate to incorporate audience input online into the reporting process.

The same tension resides around posted critiques and what are often called "trolls," or people who purposely post disruptive content. Responding to legitimate critique and answering questions is not seen as a problem, but when does critique cross the line into trolling? When is it appropriate to delete comments or not respond? These two excerpts from different participants express the uncertainty around dealing with this aspect of engaging with people online:

1) Sometimes we monitor that sort of thing and we'll delete things and other times we won't. So that I feel like that's something that could be... I don't... I don't really know how to... I feel like that's something that like... I don't know how many people... I don't know if anyone knows really how to handle that because people are entitled to opinions, but, at the same time, like do you want vulgar stuff on your website, but, again, it's just reaction from a story you did.

2) I know that we've run into that a couple of times in the newsroom and I can't even pinpoint the specific examples, but it's kind of like... you know, because a child is tit-for-tat sort of thing, and you just wonder like are we getting involved in that too much. Is that what we need to be doing? But not that can't. You know, sometimes you do have to make an immediate response to people and reply to them.

The ambiguity around how to approach these situations comes across not only in what journalists are saying, but also in the almost hesitant way they try to explain the nature of these online interactions. While these types of commentary from audience members may have been present in the past through phone calls, letters, or visits to the station lobby, online interaction provides a whole new scope both through much greater accessibility and the public nature of such comments that raises questions about how to maintain community relationships and journalistic standards online.

The accessibility that social media provides also created a sense of ambiguity in the reverse situation, when audience members are exposed to the darker side of the medium. It opened new doors for gathering information and materials for reporting a story that, for some

participants, is rife with potential ethical dilemmas. One participant described a situation during a report on a local soldier. Members of the newsroom were able to find and send a message to the wife using Facebook, but the approach and wording was not sensitive to the situation, which this participant thought was due to the more impersonal nature of the contact.

Some things that were said were kind of... like I would have never said to a person, so I kind of think there are boundaries that are kind of overlapped (...) like you can definitely reach a broader network of people on Facebook and that sort of thing, but I feel like there's also things that, like, you shouldn't do as a reporter, like ethically, that goes against what you should be doing.

This same participant also described another situation of reporting on a death where Facebook was used to find out information and a picture of the deceased person. Again, there was an ethical dilemma about approaching people in ways one might not do when actually in the community. For instance, the family should perhaps have been asked for permission to use the photo. However, the photo, as well as the message in the previous example, were technically public, not made private by the Facebook users. The technology provided ways to access the community in ways that are not available off-line, but using this access to report stories seems to come into conflict with the idea of building an ethical and sensitive relationship with the community discussed earlier.

Discussion and Conclusion

Local television journalists in Maine appear to be doing community journalism by, as Hatcher and Reader (2012) say, being community connectors who have “both a professional and a personal stake in that community” (p. 8). At the same time, traditional journalism standards and ideals continue to guide their practice. However, those traditional standards are evolving to respond to demands for engaging with the community. Expanding capabilities for reporting and interaction with the audience create new demands and concerns for Maine’s local television journalists. While still primarily attentive to reporting on the community interests, journalists appear to be increasing their emphasis on engagement with the community.

The concern with local community and the impact of changing technology is not new to local television news, but the current manifestations of these aspects of the local news business are evolving. The significance of community engagement and the growing use of social media are redefining the type of relationships and conversations that are occurring. These relationships are more immediate, more frequent, more accessible, and more participatory. The questions facing journalists revolve around behavior and responsibility. When does community engagement threaten traditional journalistic ideals? When is sharing online too much? When do these activities impact journalistic integrity, as defined by traditional notions, by engaging in unprofessional or unethical behavior? These questions reflect concerns heard in the interviews regarding the possibility of giving community engagement and social media use too much emphasis over other professional concerns. This signals a need to figure out how credibility can be preserved as journalists push reporting into new arenas.

One limitation of this study is the particular nature of the location. Maine is tied as the state with the largest percentage of the population living rurally (U.S. Census, n.d.). The largest population center is in and around Portland, in the south of the state, which has a population of approximately 66,000 people. The Portland area has three local television news stations and is a

medium-size market. Three additional local television stations are in Bangor, a city of about 35,000 people. One more station is in the north of the state in Presque Isle, which serves a market of approximately 27,000 viewers. While this research is based on a specific geographic area, as well as a smaller television market size, and, as such, cannot be generalized, there are some take-aways that can be useful for understanding the current state of local television news as it continues to be an important source of information for American audiences.

Overall, local television journalists in Maine are generally positive toward embracing new technology and are working toward maintaining their work on multiple platforms. However, there is tension at the intersection between the use of new digital platforms and a changing concept of community engagement and building relationships. Discussions with journalists showed building community relationships was an important part of their overall journalistic practice, and the use of social media was an important part of facilitating those relationships through both sharing about themselves and engaging directly in conversations with the community.

This study also provides qualitative support for a number of studies that examined journalists' relationship to social media while bringing attention specifically to local television news. The findings here support previous research that showed journalists are trying to figure out how to combine traditional practices with new opportunities that challenge established norms. The thematic analysis also shows the tensions found with trying to fit the use of technology and traditional standards and ideals into new conceptions of community engagement and relationships.

The traditional ways of doing local news are tied up in a journalistic ideology and identity. Within local television news, this includes an embrace of technology and an understanding that viewers are connecting with on-screen personas. These aspects of the local television news journalist's professional identity, as shown in the analysis, are still very much a part of how those interviewed for this study view their daily practice. The nature of both the current technological developments and connections with viewers are transforming in ways that sometimes conflict with older perceptions of what it is to report the news.

Even with uncertainties about how to handle new conversations happening about news work, journalists in Maine are managing to negotiate individual situations. The fact that a mostly rural state continues to support a number of local stations suggests that these negotiations are on the right track. As Newman (2016) points out, "In many cases, broadcast television is the only reliable and accessible source of information for these communities, which are outside the scope of broadband networks" (p. 5), providing an alternative explanation for local television's continued prominence. However, as local television news seemingly maintains its position across the country, it is worth examining to see if these themes, tensions and negotiations are found in other markets.

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