Evolving Journalistic Guidelines

A Survey of Social Media Policies in U.S. Television Newsrooms

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AEJMC 2015 | San Francisco



Introduction

- Use of social media by journalists raises new ethical and professional dilemmas
 - √ "The ongoing social media hype puts pressure on journalists to be active in social media 24/7. In this process professional values and journalistic norms are put to the test..." (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013).
- News outlets implementing policies that address what is and what is not permitted on social media
- SPJ revised Code of Ethics to address contemporary issues



Introduction



Juliana @producerjulz · 10h

Sometimes you just gotta be thankful that some drunk dude drivers into a house..no one was hurt, but I needed news #producerproblems

Collapse

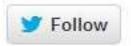
♠ Reply ♠ Retweet ★ Favorite ••• More

2:03 AM - 4 Feb 2014 · Details



Joyce Evans

@JoyceEvansFox29



Thought "Breaking Bad" was hot last Sunday? @FOX29philly See who's breakin' bad in SW Philly leavin' 6 people SHOT -Tonite at Ten!



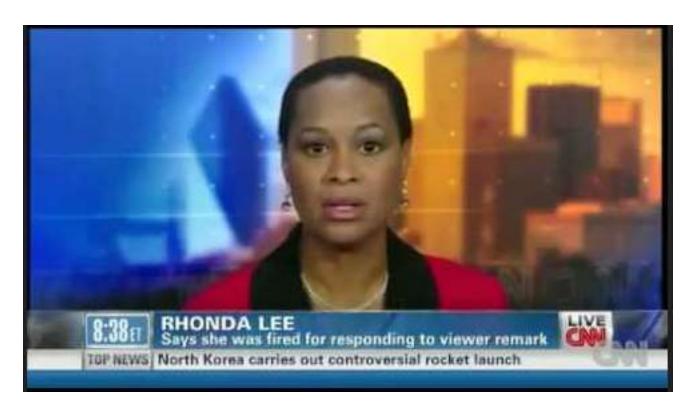








Introduction



Fired after responding to viewer comments on station's Facebook page. News director said she repeatedly violated procedures for responding to SM comments.



Purpose

- Investigate whether local TV newsrooms have social media policies, where such policies come from, and how they address emerging issues related to five areas:
 - ✓ Personal vs. Professional SM Activity
 - ✓ SM Sourcing and Content
 - ✓ Audience Complaints on SM
 - ✓ Use of SM While Reporting in the Field
 - ✓ Ownership of SM Accounts



Literature Review

- The Newsroom: Infrastructure, Identity, and Process
- Policies convey to staff and the public that standards and accountability are important to a news organization
- Policies only effective if there is a culture of open and frank discussion about the guidelines
- Some newsroom SM policies are loaded with internal contradictions and ambiguity ("use common sense")
- Policy has not caught up with practice



Research Questions

- RQ1: What is the prevalence of social media policies in local television newsrooms?
- RQ2: How are social media policies applied in local television newsrooms?

 RQ3: What components/guidelines are included in the social media policies of local television newsrooms?

Methodology

- Nationwide web-based survey of news directors at local affiliates (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX)
- August and September 2014
- 526 news directors
- 24.9% response rate (N=131)



RQ1: Prevalence of SM Policies

95% have a SM policy

Written	78%
Unwritten	17%
No Policy	5%

A third implemented prior to 2012



RQ2: Development & Application of Policy

Policy developed with recommendations from:

Station owner/corporate	73%
Newsroom management	72%
Professional organizations	32%
Newsroom staff	30%
Other (*consultants)	10%



RQ2: Development & Application of Policy

How is newsroom staff made aware of policy?

Periodic emails	77%
Informed when hired	72%
Periodic meetings	44%
Other	8%

- Three-fourths have consulted policy to resolve an issue
- A fourth have suspended or dismissed a staff member for policy violation



- Professional & Personal Activity
- 90% include guidelines for appropriate use of professional accounts

Personal opinions	95%
Advocating on behalf of issue	83%
Sharing details of personal life	71%
Sharing political affiliation	70%
Sharing religious beliefs	51%
"Friending"/following sources	51%



- Professional & Personal Activity
- ✓ Separate professional and personal accounts:

28% require separate accounts

50% recommend, but do not require separate accounts

"If you wouldn't put it on-air, on a fullscreen, don't put it on social media."



- Sources & Contents
- ✓ Facebook: A third have no guidelines for "friending" sources.
 41% said it is allowed
- Twitter: About a quarter have no guidelines for following sources.
 77% said it is allowed.
- Content: A third of policies have no guidelines for verifying usergenerated content, and policies are split on asking for permission.



Responding to Audience Complaints on Station's SM Pages

Depends on type of complaint	44%
Staff other than reporters	33%
Reporters allowed to respond	19%
No policy	4%



Reporting

Majority of policies (63%) advise reporters to break news on SM first vs. website first (19%).

Ownership

Majority of stations (66%) own the professional SM accounts of on-air talent.



Conclusions

- Digital natives & SM for journalistic purposes: "We have found our young employees have the biggest problem and occasionally will make inappropriate comments on social media."
- Unwritten policies leave newsrooms vulnerable
- Lack of face-to-face communication and staff input
- Majority of policies distinguish what is appropriate to share
- Policy has not caught up with practice: sourcing and content



Future Research

- Reporters' perceptions of SM policies
- Content analysis of policies
- Case studies of how guidelines are applied



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