

How Facebook Has Transformed Journalism

Sarah Rodriguez

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Chris Underation, Ph.D.
Thesis Chair

Amy Bonebright, M.A.
Committee Member

David Towles, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Tess Stockslager, Ph.D.
Assistant Honors Director

Date

Abstract

Journalists use Facebook as a tool to distribute information to the public. Over recent years, Facebook with its updated features has changed the way journalists interact with readers and sources. Facebook Live and Instant Articles have increased reader engagement. Journalists use crowdsourcing and conversationally-toned posts to gather information and connect with readers on a personal level. The journalistic process has accelerated since the addition of Facebook because news is disseminated almost instantaneously. Yet the rise in fake news challenges journalists to effectively use Facebook as a platform for news dissemination. Facebook is using fact checkers and increased awareness to fight fake news as well as better equip journalists and readers. Though Facebook denies it is a media company, Facebook has been transformative to the industry of journalism — fundamentally altering the way journalists gather stories and sources and then spread the news to the community. The relationship between journalists and readers and the nature of social media allow journalists to reach a wider audience, thus securing Facebook's place as a benefit to the news industry as a whole. This paper will examine how Facebook has changed the way journalists distribute information, the speed at which the information is distributed, and how readers can interact with journalists on a more frequent and personal level.

Keywords: Facebook, journalism, reader engagement, crowdsourcing, Facebook Live, Instant Articles

How Facebook Has Transformed Journalism

When Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard University, it began as a site for college students to connect with each other (Shedden, 2015). Over the years, the social networking platform has grown in size and scope to now reach a total of more than 1.86 billion monthly active users as of 2016 (Company Info, n.d.). Facebook users can connect with family members, friends, and people they have never physically met by sharing photos, posting on each other's profiles, or sending private messages. Currently, small and large businesses, celebrities, fundraisers, and news outlets can create accounts so the public can have around-the-clock access to stay informed about the latest happenings in the world.

According to a survey conducted in 2016 by the Pew Research Center, 76 percent of Facebook users use it daily (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Many see news articles as they scroll through on their timelines. An article by Barthel, Shearer, Gottfried, and Mitchell (2015) said 63 percent of Facebook users get news while on the site, while two years earlier in 2013, the percentage was 47 percent. The study found there is no single reason for the change, but the researchers attribute it to a combination of personal choices, increased activity by news organizations, and Facebook's changing algorithms (Barthel et al., 2015). In addition, there is not a single demographic leading the change; it is a widespread phenomenon, and journalists are continuing to distribute news on Facebook to anyone who wants to read it (Barthel et al., 2015).

Facebook benefits journalists of all types as they work as truth tellers and news distributors. Yet the rise of fake news on Facebook makes the job of distributing accurate news on the social media platform even more vital. Facebook updates constantly, and the

changes the platform has made over the 13 years of its existence make the work of a journalist more efficient and effective. Journalists can now interact with their readers in real time over Facebook, changing the journalist-reader relationship in ways never before seen.

Facebook Tools for Journalists

Instant Articles

The addition of Facebook as a tool for disseminating information has changed the ease with which journalists are able to give information to their readers and the general public because of the speed at which posts are published on Facebook. Instant Articles allows readers to quickly view news in the news feed of the Facebook app. Facebook first launched Instant Articles in October 2015, and the company has continued to work to improve the feature since that time (Owen, 2015). The feature is now available for all publishers, not just large news organizations, so local news reporters can also increase the speed with which their articles are read because Instant Articles loads 10 times faster than a standard webpage, and 20 percent more Instant Articles are read on average than normal articles (“Instant Articles,” n.d.). Readers of articles on Facebook are 70 percent less likely to abandon an Instant Article than a normal article (“Instant Articles,” n.d.).

Instant Articles also proves to be a useful tool for journalists to increase reader engagement, according to Michael Reckhow, a former product manager for Instant Articles (Owen, 2015). Articles in the Instant Articles format are more likely to be shared by readers than typical articles on the web because of the speed with which they load (Owen, 2015). Reckhow said Instant Articles supports readers liking and commenting on individual pieces of media within the article that can become stand-alone pieces in

Facebook news feeds (Owen, 2015). Mary Nahoriak, the deputing managing editor for digital for *USA Today*, said *USA Today* currently uses Instant Articles on its Facebook page and is constantly analyzing the benefits of this feature (Nahoriak, personal communication, January 25, 2017). Nahoriak said it has been confirmed that *USA Today* sees higher engagement with Instant Articles (personal communication, January 25, 2017). According to Bell (2016), publishers have reported that Instant Articles is greatly effective in increasing traffic — giving them three to four times more traffic than expected. Increased traffic and reader engagement produces a closer relationship between the journalist and the reader.

Noah Stubbs, a digital producer at the *Evansville Courier & Press*, said the *Courier & Press* does not currently use Instant Articles, but he said one of the main goals they have with digital news is to get people to the newspaper's website (personal communication, January 30, 2017). Stubbs said:

I think the drive is to get people on the website one way or another. Especially in mainstream journalism, there's always that push to get people to go to the website because that's where our advertising lies. (personal communication, January 30, 2017)

However, research says Instant Articles or even Facebook might not be the most effective way to keep people longer on the newspapers' websites. Matsa and Mitchell (2014) in a Pew Research study from 2013, found lower reader engagement levels from Facebook: "Facebook and search are critical for bringing added eyeballs to individual stories, but people who come to a site directly show far higher levels of engagement and loyalty" (Matsa & Mitchell, 2014, para. 19). The analysis found that readers who go to the

newspaper site from Facebook spend an average of 1 minute and 41 seconds per visit while those readers who arrive to the webpage directly spend 4 minutes and 36 seconds (2014).

Journalists who implement Instant Articles must enhance their social strategy with Facebook if they want more engagement and time spent on their website. Mitchell, Jurkowitz and Olmstead (2014) said Pew Research Center data suggests that translating social media readers to dedicated readers is a challenge: “For news outlets operating under the traditional model of building a loyal, perhaps paying audience, obtaining referrals so that users think of the outlet as the first place to turn is critical” (Mitchell et al., 2014, para. 7). News outlets must build a loyal base of followers who trust the news sites they see through Instant Articles on Facebook and then feel compelled to independently search the internet for the respective news site when they are in need of news.

As mentioned earlier, Instant Articles is available for any publisher, benefiting local news in addition to national-level journalists. Loyd and White (n.d.) said Instant Articles is simple to set up and publish, allowing smaller newsrooms to use this feature without making workflow adjustments. Smaller news distributors have found the benefit of Instant Articles because it brings traffic to the website (Loyd & White, n.d.). For example, one small Philadelphia news site, Billy Penn, has found Instant Articles gave the site its highest web traffic levels ever, since Instant Articles is the main means of referral to the website (Loyd & White, n.d.). Chris Krewson, editor of Billy Penn, said:

People with shared local connections talk to each other through Facebook. News Feed is the ultimate way for our content to get discovered and Instant Articles is

the best way for our stories to get shared. (as cited in Loyd & White, n.d., “Lifting Local News,” para. 2)

Instant Articles is more versatile and widely used by journalists. In fact, research indicates that some media outlets are using Instant Articles for multimedia purposes. Reckhow said he is seeing many publishers use Instant Articles to showcase a specific type of media including a photo or video because it is not required to be a long, written article (Owen, 2015). Instant Articles allows readers on Facebook to get news quickly while publishers continue work to convert Instant Articles readers into dedicated visitors of their webpages.

Facebook Live

Facebook’s feature that allows users to live broadcast events or live stream expands the repertoire of journalists. According to Mullin (2016) of Poynter, Facebook Live is a cost effective and quick way to reach a wide audience, since a journalist only needs a smart phone and no video editing is required after shooting. Mullin (2016) said wide audiences are reached through Facebook Live because Facebook’s news feed algorithm tends to highlight live streaming more than other types of posts. He also pointed out that Facebook Live is a helpful tool for traditional print journalists who want to incorporate multimedia but are unaccustomed to broadcast news (2016). Herrman and Isaac (2016) reported that Facebook Live appeals to media companies because it gives them “a sense of regaining control of Facebook’s news feed” (para. 22). The reporters said “the lack of control has made reaching users — even those that follow media brands intentionally — more competitive” (para. 22). But, as Mullin said, Facebook Live is prioritized so it displays higher in Facebook users’ news feeds (Herrman & Isaac, 2016).

Thus, reporters are taking advantage of reaching a large number of Facebook users fairly easily through live streaming.

However, it seems journalists do not see Facebook Live as a substitute for television broadcasting, but rather, as a separate entity, according to Chris Cox, Facebook's chief product officer (as cited in Wang, 2016). The reason, Cox said, is that because the video quality and small screen size are not comparable to traditional broadcast (2016). Yet, Fusion Media Network saw the potential in Facebook Live and in March 2016 produced a multi-camera live stream during the lunch hour to attract people who would be scrolling through Facebook (Wang, 2016). Still, Facebook Live differs from television, according to Jigar Mehta, Fusion's vice president of digital operations (2016). He said:

It's not TV. It's a very different medium. User behavior is much more engaged in Facebook Live than it is in television, and the content that we create has to break out of the studio mentality. (as cited in Wang, 2016, para. 18)

With the technology required for a broadcast on Facebook, Facebook Live is much easier than a television broadcast. The Daily Beast is training writers and editors about how to use their iPhones so they can go live when they are out in the field covering a story (Wang, 2016).

Michelle Maltais, deputy director of audience engagement at the *Los Angeles Times*, said Facebook Live is an essential part of the newspaper's digital strategy, and the *Los Angeles Times* has been able to take Facebook Live footage into more than a live stream.

We take that information, and we can create another produced video from that once it's completed, and then it feeds into the written text story well. So, it allows us to use it in multi-layered ways to enhance our journalism and not just our reach. (Maltais, personal communication, February 15, 2017)

Nahoriak said *USA Today* utilizes Facebook Live many times a day as another way to distribute news on Facebook (personal communication, January 25, 2017). Nahoriak said:

We use Facebook Live both at the individual reporter level and also at our big video programmatic level. We have maybe half a dozen Facebook Lives a day just from our main page. We're live streaming all the [presidential cabinet] confirmation hearings. We live streamed the inauguration. We live streamed the Women's March. We live streamed an interview yesterday that our bureau chief did with Chuck Schumer. We live streamed a panel about the Oscars with our life team. We're very aggressive about live streaming on all platforms and also on Facebook Live. (Personal communication, January 25, 2017)

Facebook Live is allowing journalists to increase interaction with readers by conducting nontraditional live streams. KXLY-TV, an ABC affiliate in Spokane, Washington, has begun using Facebook Live for behind the scenes looks and Q & A sessions (Mullin, 2016). Melissa Luck, an executive producer and director of social strategy at KXLY-TV, said Facebook Live proved especially helpful when it was used during a ride along with Washington State police officers for a story, and viewers were able to engage in real-time by asking the officer questions and seeing him respond (Mullin, 2016). Luck said live video is popular as "it has given viewers a chance to interact directly with our reporters and anchors, and it has been beneficial for both sides of that video stream to have that

interaction,” (Mullin, 2016, “KXLY4 News,” para. 5). At the *Courier & Press*, Stubbs produces content that occasionally is solely for social media, including a recent unique Facebook Live stream (personal communication, January 30, 2017). Stubbs said he wants to use Facebook Live to give readers a real-life experience, and he was able to do that by live streaming a recent Uber ride (personal communication, January 30, 2017). Uber recently opened for business in Evansville, Indiana, and Stubbs decided to take an Uber ride to the press conference held by the city, so he could distribute news to viewers while also adding an element of entertainment (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Stubbs said:

I gave people a real experience by showing them what Uber was like, how you could get on the app and use it, how you needed to pay through the app; you couldn't hand the driver cash. It was a real experience. (personal communication, January 30, 2017)

Stubbs said he knew Facebook Live is an engaging way to get the community involved because of an interaction with a delivery driver for the *Courier & Press* who asked him upon returning to work why his Uber driver took so long (personal communication, January 30, 2017).

Facebook Live's real-time broadcasting by journalists allows viewers to interact immediately. Bain and Loyd (n.d.) said people comment 10 times more frequently on Facebook Live videos than other videos on Facebook with breaking news stories showing strong engagement with viewers. Many times Facebook Live videos add an element of unpredictability because actions are unplanned and can sometimes cause suspense, making the video popular to share (Bain & Loyd, n.d.). Live videos prove to be useful to

journalists when discussing the latest weather news since journalists can post live updates or have a Q & A session with a meteorologist (Bain & Loyd, n.d.). For example, in South Bend, Indiana a meteorologist used Facebook Live to give behind the scenes information, but he continued distributing information in the comments afterward for readers to follow after the live stream (Bain & Loyd, n.d.). In addition, Facebook Live gives journalists the opportunity to connect on a personal level with viewers. They can comment and ask questions the journalist can answer on the air, and the journalist can give viewers a live view into how he or she gathers information about a story (Bain & Loyd, n.d.). The relationship between journalist and Facebook user is strengthened when a viewer tunes into a live stream, asks a question, and hears the journalist answer his or her question while live.

Journalists have faced some difficulties with Facebook Live because of the need for a consistent Internet signal (Wang, 2016). Wi-Fi is frequently available, but sometimes it is not as quick as 4G Internet, and certain locations do not have cellphone signals (2016). The Huffington Post tries to combat the issue by filling kits with multiple iPhones and portable routers to find a signal (2016). It is also difficult to keep track of comments coming in during the live stream while making sure viewers know their comments have been seen (2016). The Huffington Post uses a multi-person team for primary Facebook Live operations, with one person in New York specifically following comments and relaying those to the host in the field (2016). BBC News has a producer filter comments, pick the best of them and relay them to the reporter during the live stream (2016). Mark Frankel, social editor for BBC News said:

I think it's really important to involve the comments. That's the fundamental reason for doing it this way. We're not just trying to do broadcast TV on Facebook. We're trying to reach and involve our audience on Facebook. (as cited in Wang, 2016, para. 34)

Interaction is integral for Facebook Live to continue to be successful, and live video provides viewers with interesting content they can use to engage with and provide instantaneous feedback to reporters.

Networking

In contrast to the traditional methods of story gathering in which an editor orally delegated story ideas to reporters each day, the rise of Facebook has allowed reporters to discover story ideas through Facebook posts (Alejandro, 2010). However, when a reporter or editor is coming across story ideas on Facebook, the reporter needs to write his or her story from a different angle than what has been presented previously on Facebook (2010).

Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing, or the gathering of information by soliciting information on the Internet, has been taken to a new level with the rise of Facebook and journalists relying heavily on their personal social media presence. Reporters are now able to directly ask readers questions about sources or their likes and dislikes, or to confirm an event is happening. Lavrusik (2013) said people in the community want to interact with journalists on Facebook by being part of the conversation. He cited statistics that said Facebook posts with a prompt for conversation or a question receive 70 percent above-average engagement than posts without prompts (2013). Lavrusik (2011) said a reporter

can learn to leverage the community when attempting to find a specific source or verify the accuracy of a piece of information or request a photo. For example, the *Star Tribune* in Minnesota polls the Facebook community when searching for “sources they want to dive deeper with for stories” (Lavrusik, 2011, “Individual Sources,” para.1). Lavrusik said:

Your followers are a powerful network of sources that help you gather information and content for stories you’re reporting. When you’re trying to find individual sources, casting a wide net to your followers can be a good start to find people to interview. (Lavrusik, 2013, “Enable Participatory Journalism,” para. 1)

Lavrusik and Cameron (2011) suggest asking a question when searching for information because data showed that posts with questions received twice as many comments and 64 percent more feedback than a typical post. Requesting media from the community can prove useful to journalists especially when it comes to the weather. Lavrusik detailed how KMOV-TV crowdsourced photos and videos of tornado damage from Facebook readers in order to improve the station’s coverage of the storm (Lavrusik, 2011). When crowdsourcing information, journalists should make a straightforward request with an explanation of how the content may be used and follow up with the reader for clarification if necessary (Lavrusik, 2013).

Nahoriak said the degree of crowdsourcing depends on the individual reporter; there is not a company standard (personal communication, January 25, 2017):

Those who do use Facebook to connect with an audience and post publicly ... regularly say “Hey I’m wondering what are everyone’s thoughts on this topic?” or “Do you know anyone who could speak about this other topic?” But I would say

we use Facebook just as much as anyone else does for crowdsourcing, and I think there is an element, you could maybe call it passive crowdsourcing, where instead of asking for something directly, we are viewing the conversation. So we're looking at trending topics. We're looking at how people are responding in comments to our post. We're just trying to get a sense of what the conversation is out there and then make any adjustments we need to make based on that.

(Nahoriak, personal communication, January 25, 2017)

Crowdsourcing can prove beneficial in the gathering of new information or confirming already known information, but the same fact-checking techniques utilized in traditional journalism must also be implemented with information gathered from Facebook

(Lavrusik, 2011). Lavrusik said:

With tools like Facebook, it's easier to do participated reporting at scale. That said, you still have to verify the accuracy of the information you're receiving. The platforms for information may change, but the skills needed to synthesize the information and ethical standards should not change. (2011, para. 2)

Crowdsourcing, when used appropriately, can prove to be effective as a tool for reporters to gather information they would otherwise not have access to. Journalists can take advantage of eager community members who want to help pass information on to reporters: "Facebook enables you to do the same quality reporting but on a larger scale with the help of your community" (Lavrusik, 2011, para. 2).

Speed of Journalistic Process

Facebook has increased the speed at which the journalistic process operates. Because Facebook provides its users with breaking news information, journalists must

find the line between speed and accuracy. If a journalist is not fast enough publishing a news story, the journalist runs the risk of being beaten out by a competitor who can post real-time information (Alejandro, 2010). Journalists from traditional media outlets are not the only people who can publish news to a wide audience now that Facebook allows all users to publish information to their followers. Journalists must be attentive to the breaking news story ideas on Facebook and ready to quickly perform the journalistic process (Alejandro, 2010).

Due to the ability of any Facebook user to make a post about a newsworthy event, the professional journalist must make sure he or she is timely in distributing the story he or she is attempting to break. A few minutes can be the difference between breaking the story and being the hundredth person to post about an event. In order to stay on top of breaking new stories, Roland Wilkerson, morning digital editor at *The Charlotte Observer*, said the paper's staff will post a few sentences about a story as soon as they get the information and then later expand the sentences to a full story once more details are gathered (personal communication, February 14, 2017).

Tayla Minsberg, social strategy editor at *The New York Times*, said the staff at *The New York Times* works quickly in breaking news situations to make sure the newspaper's homepage and Facebook page are updated, thus reflecting what breaking news has occurred almost instantaneously (personal communication, February 14, 2017). Minsberg said the goal is to allow readers to find the same information about breaking news on *The New York Times*' Facebook page as a reader could find on the homepage (personal communication, February 14, 2017).

Matsa and Mitchell (2014) said the rise in the percentage of people with cellphones allows more people who are Facebook users to share news stories and contribute to the coverage of stories by taking pictures or video, with the statistics showing that 50 percent of social networking site users shared or reposted news stories. Fourteen percent of social networking site users posted photos they took of a news event and 12 percent posted videos they took of a news event (2014). Because of anyone's ease with being able to post content about a newsworthy story, journalists must adjust the way and schedule of distributing stories on Facebook in order to remain the leaders in breaking news.

Beyond altering the turnover time for stories, Facebook has changed the news cycle, causing big name journalists and media providers to continually release content throughout the entire day. At the *Courier & Press*, stories are constantly posted to the Facebook page, with the frequency depending the amount of content they expect to generate throughout the day and what time of day it is (Stubbs, personal communication, January 30, 2017). Stubbs said:

We use analytics tools to sort of know when people are engaging more frequently with our articles and our page, whether it's on their timeline or they go to access our page. But on average, I would say we post probably every 30 minutes to an hour. That's all throughout the day. (personal communication, January 30, 2017)

The *USA Today's* main Facebook page is updated more frequently than once or twice an hour (Nahoriak, personal communication, January 25, 2017). Nahoriak said:

We do try to post a lot. We actually post a lot more than our national competitors.

We usually post about two to three times an hour around the clock. And then as

news happens and changes, we often time just post more. It's not a set thing where we have to post three an hour and we only post three an hour. There are times like during the inauguration that we may be posting 10 an hour because we have that many important stories that we need to get out there. We do make adjustments for news, absolutely. (personal communication, January 25, 2017)

Changing the Way Journalists Write

A journalist specializing in distributing content on Facebook knows that more people today are reading their news on their cellphones, so they must format their stories appropriately for the mobile phone.

Matsa and Lu (2016) report that on average cellphone users spend more time on long-form news articles than short-form stories. Pew Research found that long-form articles have more than two times the engaged time of short-form articles (Matsa & Lu, 2016). The average time of engagement for articles of 1,000 words or more is 123 seconds, while shorter-form stories average 57 seconds (2016). Statistics show that journalists do not need to necessarily shorten their stories to increase reader engagement on articles read on cellphones.

Hershkowitz and Lavrusik (2013) emphasized the fact that Facebook is a people-driven site, so readers want to know there is someone behind the screen making the posts. Facebook has allowed journalists to use a more conversational tone instead of the typical formal style. Posts with a conversational tone or clever language have been found to have significantly more engagement by readers than posts without that type of language (Hershkowitz & Lavrusik, 2013). In addition, because of the medium of Facebook it is effective to occasionally make posts with sneak peeks of content in order to bring readers

back to Facebook or to the news site, thus increasing engagement (2013). Stubbs said he has seen the benefit of infusing entertainment in news reporting because Facebook gives journalists the platform to write stories other than straight news (personal communication, January 30, 2017):

It's one thing to report a story, but on Facebook, I've often found, and we've found at the Courier, that if you find ... a level of entertainment [and] then infuse those facts and infuse that straight news ... [and] show the community off or the event that you're doing a story about off, you have to find a way to hook readers in but still stick to your job — to your goal in providing the information. (personal communication, January 30, 2017)

Social Media Headlines

Wilkerson said one of the most notable changes in how the reporters at *The Observer* write for Facebook is the difference in a social media headline and a print headline (personal communication, February 14, 2017). Wilkerson spends the majority of his time focused on the digital element to news (personal communication, February 14, 2017):

We write headlines that will do well on social media, and then the copy desk behind us writes a headline for print. A print headline and a social media headline are two very different things. So, in my job I spend about five minutes a day worrying about the print newspaper, and everything else is online. (personal communication, February 14, 2017)

Wilkerson said *The Observer* is not interested in deceiving the reader with a story that does not live up to enticing headlines, but the staff wants to attract interest and compel the reader to read the entire story (personal communication, February 14, 2017):

We work really hard to write headlines that do well on social media. That is not clickbait because readers get clickbait and they'll punish you by not reading your stories. From a journalistic standpoint, deceiving readers with a headline that doesn't deliver — the only thing worse you could do is completely make things up. But, we work hard to make the headlines and the top of the stories especially engaging. So, in a headline you want to be direct but also encourage them to read the story. (personal communication, February 14, 2017)

Wilkerson said *The Observer* staff has seen stories change in popularity due to compelling headlines that help focus the story and allow it to stand out against the wide range of content on the Internet: "Once you put on a better headline, we've literally seen the stories start climbing by the minute. It makes an incredible difference. We've seen scientifically that better headlines really make a huge difference" (personal communication, February 14, 2017).

Interaction with Readers

News is no longer a one-way street in which the journalist reports the news to the reader and there is no dialogue between the two unless a letter to the editor is written. Facebook has changed this by providing the ability for journalists to pose questions to readers and see immediate responses. In an article about how Americans access and share local news, authors Olmstead and Barthel (2015) said, "In theory, Facebook opens up a space for news and information providers to experiment with new ways to get their

message out, interact with the audience and enable the audience to participate” (“What we learned,” para. 1). For example, the study analyzed 100 of the most commented-on Facebook posts by local news providers in the Denver area (Olmstead & Barthel, 2015). Half of the posts included a form of audience outreach in which the news organization either asked questions, made requests for photos or videos, or invited readers to take online polls (2015).

Minsberg said the relationship between reader and journalist has shifted because reporters now have countless ways to reach out and respond to readers, which equates to increased responsibility for a reporter (personal communication, February 14, 2017):

I think there is incredible opportunity for more interaction with readers and reporters than there has ever been. That’s a really powerful thing. That’s a big responsibility and a big undertaking. I think that is something that a lot of our reporters take very seriously. (Minsberg, personal communication, February 14, 2017)

Maltais said that though readers have always found a way to contact journalists in the past, Facebook makes the contact more immediate and sometimes rawer in nature (personal communication, February 15, 2017). She said people always have their cellphones with them and occasionally they spend more time on their screens than with their spouse or other important people in their lives, thus changing the relationship people had with Facebook (personal communication, February 15, 2017). People are engaging with news content on Facebook, and they are making their voices heard (personal communication, February 15, 2017). A click of a few buttons is all a reader needs to respond by comment to a post by a journalist thus giving the journalist immediate

feedback into the success of the story and what could have been changed to better engage the audience.

Maintaining a well-run page on Facebook is a 24/7 project, with reporters posting articles to their Facebook profiles throughout the day. It is suggested that journalists on Facebook post a status or photo to inform readers of breaking news because “people want to be informed about news as it happens” (Lavrusik, 2013, “Share Breaking News,” para. 1). People especially want to be informed of breaking news because, as the article points out, an analysis of posts by journalists and news organizations on Facebook indicates that posts with “breaking” or “breaking news” included received 57 percent more engagement (Lavrusik, 2013). He also reminded journalists in his compilation of best practices on Facebook that images can frequently be stronger than words, with photos receiving more than 50 percent more engagement than non-photo posts (2013). Because of the real-time element of Facebook, journalists should update readers as a news story progresses (2013). The article states that “when news organizations posted multiple updates in quick succession during a news event, they saw a 10 percent increase in engagement on their Page posts” (Lavrusik, 2013, “Keep Followers Updated,” para. 1). Readers who are following a specific news story want to know details as they happen, and consecutive Facebook updates provide that. During breaking news events, journalists and readers can exchange information over Facebook, giving the reporter more knowledge to write a story and giving the reader a better awareness about the situation.

Lavrusik (2013) also said people are interested in the behind-the-scenes journalistic process, and now readers are able to see a glimpse into the reporter’s life through Facebook posts. “People are fascinated by the journalistic process. Sharing

photos from the scene of your reporting gives them a glimpse into the newsgathering process and shows your audience that you're on the ground" (Lavrusik, 2013, "Share Behind-the-Scenes Photos," para. 1). A Facebook Live stream that shows the journalist arriving at the breaking news scene or before an important interview allows viewers to see the reporter as more than a name. People also want more than merely the straight facts posted on Facebook; they want to interact with the journalist by reading their interpretation of the news (Lavrusik, 2013). The article cited research that said Facebook links that contained analysis received 20 percent more referral clicks (2013). Readers can now see a reporter as an approachable figure and then interact with them through Facebook.

Lavrusik and Cameron (2011) found which lengths of Facebook posts are most frequently commented on by readers. In order to accumulate more comments, it is effective for a journalist to make either a one-line post or a five-line post (2011). Data has shown that a 4-line posting receives a 30 percent increase in feedback compared to typical posts, and posts of five lines receives a 60 percent increase in feedback compared to the average (2011). Interestingly, the data showed that posts of one line received the highest maximum feedback observed (2011). If a journalist is interested in receiving more comments, taking into account the post length is important. In addition, a simple way for readers to interact with journalists is to like the journalists' posts. Data showed that readers tend to respond well to photos posted by journalists — photos receive 50 percent more likes than other types of posts (Lavrusik & Cameron 2011).

The story type and timing of posting also has an effect on the engagement of readers. Data showed that stories focused on education, politics, behind-the-scenes

insights, and analysis by journalists had more feedback from readers than the average post (Lavrusik & Cameron, 2011). Stories about education received double the likes of an average post, while political stories had 1.7 times more likes and 1.6 more comments (2011). Timing was also crucial in the amount of feedback given by readers as journalists saw the maximum amount of feedback later in the week with Thursday through Sunday receiving the highest total (2011). The data said Sunday was the day on which the highest amount of feedback was given by readers; likes increased by 25 percent and comments increased eight percent compared to the average (2011). Even throughout a single day, the feedback from readers varied (2011). Data showed that there were spikes in increases of feedback at the beginning of the day at 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., as well as 10 a.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m., 12 a.m., and 2 a.m. (2011). When breaking news does not require immediate posting of the story a journalist can strategically post his or her story to Facebook at specific times in order to receive increased feedback.

Keeping Journalists Accountable

Because of the ability for readers to interact in real time with journalists, readers are able to keep them accountable for telling the truth while also publishing news that they want to read. Readers can make sure that no story falls through the cracks.

The audience now has a say as to what news is important to them and as to what level of engagement they wish to pursue it whether watch or listen to it on TV or radio or go online or reply via mobile text or tweet about it or post it on Facebook ... on whatever device when they want it and where they want it. (Alejandro, 2010, p. 12)

Maltais said people consistently engage with content in intimate ways and readers are keeping journalists accountable (personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Journalists are responsible for seeking out the truth and distributing it to the public, but they must also be aware of the news topics the public wants to know about. Through Facebook, readers are able to let journalists know what kind of stories they want to read.

Taking in News on Facebook

More and more people are getting their news on Facebook than ever before. However, not everyone who goes on Facebook is seeking out news — the traditional reasons for getting on the social media platform to connect with people are still in play. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center as reported by Mitchell, Kiley, Gottfried, and Guskin (2013), 78 percent of Facebook news consumers take in news when they are initially on Facebook for other reasons. In the survey one respondent said Facebook news is the reason why he or she knows what is going on in the world because otherwise he or she would not be knowledgeable about daily news (Mitchell et al., 2013). Journalists on Facebook are reaching a wider platform of readers without trying very hard. The article also said 67 percent of those Facebook users who spend more than at least an hour on the site get news from Facebook, while 41 percent of users who use Facebook for less than an hour a day get their news on the social media platform (2013). The platform to distribute news to a large number of people is available through Facebook to readers who are not purposefully trying to absorb news.

Wilkerson said people are moving away from typical newspaper websites to find news and now are skipping right to the newspaper's social media sites: "Social media [is] changing people's reading habits. People today are less likely to come to the website, and

they're more likely to find their news on social media, especially Facebook" (Wilkerson, personal communication, February 14, 2017).

Minsberg emphasized the importance of news sites reaching people where they are spending a lot of their time:

In sum, we want to reach people where they already are because so many people get news in so many ways, we want to make sure that one way people are gathering information is on Facebook. We want to be there. We want to be where people already are. Many people consider it their new homepage. Instead of having a newspaper the first thing they see when they open their browser, they see Facebook, and we want to be on that homepage. We want to give people the information and news they're looking for. (personal communication, February 14, 2017)

Maltais shared the same sentiment as Minsberg regarding the fact that if journalists are not effectively using Facebook to distribute news, they are missing out on a vital part of journalism (personal communication, February 15, 2017):

The goal primarily is to meet people where they are. This is where people are learning about news, getting news from their friends, from publications, sharing it, engaging with it, and if you're not there, you're not part of the conversation. (Maltais, personal communication, February 15, 2017)

Journalists need to be on Facebook and using it effectively because a large percentage of the world is connected to the site. They have a responsibility to distribute news to the public, and the billions of people on Facebook need to be informed about the world's happenings in order to be contributing citizens in society.

The reason why readers click on certain news articles on Facebook is something journalists are continuing to research to make their work as profitable as possible. According to the Pew Research Center, only 20 percent of people reported clicking on a news story link because the news organization is one they prefer, while 50 percent said they click on links because they are surprising and 37 percent said it was because of a friend's recommendation (Mitchell et al., 2013). Pew Research also found that as of 2016, 66 percent of Facebook users get news while on the site which is 44 percent of the general population (Matsa & Lu, 2016). The audience that takes in news on Facebook is large and growing, thus placing responsibility on journalists to leverage the platform's reach to keep users informed about the news.

The Rise of Fake News

Facebook has altered the job of a journalist and the role of journalism in society, but not every change has been positive. The rise of fake news or posts with inaccurate information or headlines used to cause deception has recently plagued Facebook and begun tarnishing the site as a news provider. For example, according to a Poynter article by Alexios Mantzarlis (2016), Facebook placed a false story in its trending section that was headlined "Fox News Exposes Traitor Megyn Kelly, Kicks Her Out for Backing Hillary," and Facebook later apologized for the error. The story was pulled from Facebook, but not before the damage was done (2016). Other sites picked up similar stories with reactions and shares totaling more than 40,000 (2016). A large number of people saw the fake article and then had to make a decision whether they wanted to trust the article or write it off as fake. This is the dilemma of many news consumers on Facebook.

Because of the way Facebook news spreads rapidly, fake information can be circulated quickly and with little resistance. Emily Bell, director at the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, said Facebook is “designed to encourage repetitive consumption and interaction (and it is not) necessarily designed promote what is good information over what is bad information” (Mantzaris, 2016, “Blaming Facebook for human nature?” para. 6). Mantzaris said, “Facebook insists that it doesn't make editorial decisions with News Feed: It places the user first. If users say fakery is a problem, the company will act” (2016, “Fighting fakery more forcefully” para. 4).

However, in December 2016, Facebook decided to take even more robust steps to combat fake news and increase the credibility of journalists who are distributing correct information. Mullin and Mantzaris (2016) of Poynter reported that Facebook has a plan to fight the fake news that has plagued the social media site by allowing verified third-party fact-checkers to review stories by using a specific code of principles developed by the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). If enough fact-checkers determine the story is false, the story will be designated as fake (Mullin & Mantzaris, 2016). In addition, disputed news stories on Facebook will now be lower in the feed, due to an adjusted algorithm, and fake news sites have been banned from using Facebook’s advertising service (Owen, 2016).

Facebook is still working through what is considered fake news and how to find the line between fake news and truthful news stories. As reported by CNBC, Zuckerberg said at a town hall-style event in North Carolina, that it is not always clear what is fake and what is not (Taylor, 2017). Zuckerberg said:

We need to make sure that we don't get to a place where we're not showing

content or banning things from the service just because it hurts someone's feelings or because someone doesn't agree with it – I think that would actually hurt a lot of progress. (Taylor, 2016, para. 8)

Facebook is making sure it stands in the center on news, allowing its readers to see both sides of a story while working to ensure that incorrect information does not fill news feeds. On February 16, 2017, Zuckerberg posted a lengthy personal post on Facebook about the company in which he addressed the topic of fake news. He discussed the company's attention to ensuring accuracy and truth on Facebook because there is not a strict line between satire, opinion and fake news (Zuckerberg, 2017). Zuckerberg said:

In a free society, it's important that people have the power to share their opinion, even if others think they're wrong. Our approach will focus less on banning misinformation and more on surfacing additional perspectives and information, including that fact checkers dispute an item's accuracy. (2017, "Informed Community," para. 6)

Facebook has taken the approach of using fact checkers to remove inaccurate information from its site, but also focusing on allowing different perspectives that may be divisive but not necessarily inaccurate. Facebook wants an informed society without sensationalist tendencies, and Zuckerberg said a step to achieving this is to support the news industry: "Giving people a voice is not enough without having people dedicated to uncovering new information and analyzing it" (Zuckerberg, 2017, "Informed Community," para. 13).

Though fake news has recently plagued Facebook, Nahoriak said the *USA Today* organization has not been significantly impacted, but the challenge of fake news has resulted in important in-house conversations (personal communication, January 25,

2017). Nahoriak said:

I don't know necessarily that we've been directly affected because we're continuing to do the work that we do and share it out in general. I think we are certainly having conversations about how we can make sure that people understand that we are real news, like any legitimate news organization. So I think that's an ongoing conversation – something that we'll need to adapt and develop. We're also, I think, individually sharing things like “Here's how you can report a fake news story on Facebook.” I think we have actually written that as an article. So it's something that we are aware of; we've written about. We try to share it with our audience, but it hasn't necessarily changed what we do. (personal communication, January 25, 2017)

Maltais said fake news on Facebook has not affected the *Los Angeles Times* in the way its journalists report the news (personal communication, February 15, 2017).

Ultimately, we are just additionally committed to what it is we have done for ... years, and that is find and report the truth and make it as clear as possible. It hasn't affected what we do on a day-to-day basis. We're as rigorous, if not more in making sure what we're reporting is fact. (personal communication, February 15, 2017)

Facebook may be in the process of cleaning up news feeds, but the consequences of such false information circulating quickly still causes damage. Survey data published in a Pew Research Center article by Barthel, Mitchell, and Holcomb (2016) said 23 percent of U.S. adults have shared a fake news story. Sixty-four percent of U.S. adults said fake news stories “cause a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events”

(para. 2). Though professional journalists may not be directly creating fake news, the skepticism it causes in readers is important to note:

While it is difficult to measure the precise extent to which people actually see news that has been completely fabricated – given that news consumers could see but not recognize made-up news stories as well as mistake factual stories for false ones — these figures provide a high-level sense of the public’s perception of this kind of content. (Barthel et al., para. 3)

Though not everyone falls victim to believing fake news on Facebook, the credibility of professional and truthful reporters can be called into question if a reader becomes more skeptical of news on Facebook in general. Pew Research Center found that “only 4 percent of web-using adults have a lot of trust in the information they find on social media, and just 34 percent say they trust it at least some” (Matsa & Lu, 2016, para. 8). If these statistics are accurate, the public’s trust of social media news is extremely low already and the addition of fake news will not make the public more trusting of Facebook. Journalists and Facebook must take this into account and be proactive in combating these issues by reminding readers what news sites and journalists are credible and committed to distributing only truthful articles and removing false news stories from Facebook as quickly as possible.

Is Facebook a Media Company?

Zuckerberg and his employees maintain their stand that Facebook is a technology company and not a media company. Jessica Guynn (2016) wrote that Facebook’s product chief Chris Cox said Facebook defines itself as a technology company because it focuses on the tools it builds rather than the stories told on the platform. Guynn (2016) also cited

remarks by Zuckerberg in September 2016 who is adamant that Facebook is not a media company:

We're a technology company; we're not a media company. When you think about a media company, you have people who are producing content, who are editing content, that's not us. We're a technology company. We build tools. We do not produce any of the content. (para. 5)

Despite the amount of news shared on his site and the number of journalists taking advantage of Facebook's platform, Zuckerberg claims Facebook is not primarily a place for people to discover information:

Remember that Facebook is mostly about helping people stay connected with friends and family. News and media are not the primary things people do on Facebook, so I find it odd when people insist we call ourselves a news or media company in order to acknowledge its importance. (as cited in Roberts, 2016, para. 5)

Fortune.com writer Jeff John Roberts said Zuckerberg refuses to embrace adopt the idea that it is a media platform because if it were to and claim to be unbiased and non-partisan, many users would fail to believe it (2016). From a business standpoint, Zuckerberg will focus on the technology aspect of Facebook in order to sustain his business model (Roberts, 2016).

Even though Facebook is holding to its stance that it is a technology company, partially due to the business behind it, Facebook has acknowledged the role the platform has in society when it comes to news and fake news distributed to readers on Facebook.

Facebook does not need to identify as a media company for it to be a powerful platform journalists use to share news articles.

The Facebook Journalism Project

Despite the acknowledgement by Facebook corporate that the platform is not a media company, the company has recently announced a new program set to roll out in 2017 that will tie Facebook more closely to the news industry (Simo, 2017). Facebook has seen the importance of discussing news on Facebook and said it cares about ensuring journalism can thrive on the social media site (2017).

We will be collaborating with news organizations to develop products, learning from journalists about ways we can be a better partner, and working with publishers and educators on how we can equip people with the knowledge they need to be informed readers in the digital age. (Simo, 2017, para. 2)

According to the announcement, the project will have a multifaceted goal which includes creating new products, specific training for journalists and training for the public (2017). The collaboration will connect news partners and Facebook to evolve features such as Instant Articles in order to make them more effective for news providers (2017). In addition, the collaboration will include more meetings between Facebook and media partners (2017). The training for journalists will include e-learning courses on Facebook tools and services that can benefit a journalist who distributes news on Facebook (2017). Facebook has also acknowledged the Facebook Live upsurge and said it will work toward providing more tools for reporters who live stream (2017). In terms of training and tools for everyone, Facebook said it wants to promote news literacy and provide information to people so they informed decisions about what sources to trust (2017). Mike Isaac (2017)

in a *New York Times* article said Facebook's move toward creating closer ties with publishers is "something of a peace offering from Facebook to publishers who share news content on the network" (para. 8). Collaboration could bolster local news and help to promote smaller news media (2017). It will take time for Facebook and publishers to concretely implement the Facebook Journalism Project, but it is a first move for Facebook as it acknowledges the amount of news spread on the site and the power it holds in news distribution. The collaboration between Facebook and journalist will strengthen the relationship between the two, allowing journalists to more effectively use the site as a platform for news distribution.

Conclusion

Journalists' main focus to disseminate news in its truest form has not changed with the rise of technology and the Internet. However, the upsurge of the social networking site Facebook has fundamentally altered the way news is distributed online. Though Facebook may claim to not be a media company, Facebook has become one of the largest platforms for news circulation by national and local journalists.

The addition of Facebook Live and Instant Articles has taken traditional print and video and transformed them into live streaming and easy to access articles, both of which have increased reader engagement. Journalists' ability to live stream anything while out investigating a story has intrigued viewers and caused a desire in viewers to engage with the journalist. Journalists can now give readers to a chance to see behind the scenes look and create a relationship with viewers. Journalists who want to increase engagement have learned that a conversational and more relaxed style on Facebook posts connects with readers. Interaction with readers is available instantly with a Facebook post.

Journalists are using Facebook to make connections, verify information and gather sources due to the availability of the search feature. Crowdsourcing information has become a tool reporters use to collect information by asking readers for their opinions, what happened at an event they attended, or even submissions of multimedia elements.

Recently, fake news stories circulated on Facebook have increased the awareness of credible news sites. These news providers continue to share news like they have in the past, but now they have to combat the battle of ensuring to readers that their news is truthful and reliable. Facebook has recently taken measure for fact-checking as it has seen the dangers of false news spreading on the site. Facebook has separated the true journalist and those just wishing to make money or get people annoyed. Reputable journalists and their truth telling has stood out from the fake news found on Facebook. In addition, Facebook has recently taken a step to work with news publishers in a development called the Facebook Journalism Project as collaboration will take place between the social media platform and news publishers. Courses will also be available for journalists in how to effectively use Facebook, as it becomes more necessary for reporters to know how to use Facebook to their advantage.

The relationship between the journalist and the reader has become different than it has been traditionally. With the ability to give instant feedback on stories or engage in an informal conversation with the click of a button, journalists are now held accountable to more people more often than ever before. Journalists publish news on Facebook for readers, and with the rise in smartphone use, people are seeing this news shortly after it is posted. Readers have the chance to directly interact with journalists, creating more

personal relationships and aiding in creating effective accountability. Readers are also able to tell journalists what kind of news stories the public needs to be informed about.

Facebook has transformed the way journalists look at journalism and the way society looks at news in general. With the addition of Instant Articles and Facebook Live, readers are interacting personally with journalists thus making journalism a two-way street. This broadens the scope of journalism, transforming it into a profession that requires more skills of its reporters, but also allows the public to have more of a say. For every comment or Facebook interaction, valuable information is being exchanged over social media — information that may have never reached a certain demographic of readers otherwise. The ability to become mini-publishers, as Maltais stated it, gives readers more power than in the past to distribute news to their sphere of influence. With greater reach of news stories on Facebook, more responsibility is placed on the reader to discern the truthfulness of the news so the false stories begin to stop circulating on social media.

Facebook makes the job of a journalist different than the traditional role, but the influence and scope of a journalist's work has increased, thus making the addition of Facebook and the rise of news on Facebook, a necessary advancement in journalism. Challenges have arisen, but journalism has remained resilient. More challenges will arise, but the close relationship between reader and journalist will allow readers to stay connected with the news and continue to influence what is written and how it is distributed. Going forward, the field of journalism will continue its fluidity, changing with the way Facebook and technology improve. Journalism's core of distributing news and facts will still remain despite the unpredictability of Facebook and the Internet.

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