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Journalism in the Digital Age: The Adaptation of Facebook Live in News Organizations

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Abstract

Given the prevalence of technology and the ability to go live on mobile phones, journalists and news organizations alike are learning why Facebook Live is such an important tool. As part of my research, I found online articles explaining the impact Facebook Live has had on the journalism industry and interviewed three different experts on the subject. In doing so, I was able to demonstrate the perspectives of someone from network news, a print and online publication, as well as a well-versed academic. My short documentary covers the rise of “fake news” and citizen journalism on the social media platform. Furthermore, I expose how live-streaming has been used as an outlet to promote social change and display acts of violence. Ultimately, while the emergence of Facebook Live has not entirely changed the nature of reporting, it is certainly an additional element that journalists today should know how to approach.

Link to website with video: <https://bstephanis.wixsite.com/fblivejournalism>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deHWfzJ3GXI>

Executive Summary

Through a news package, I am documenting the rise of Facebook Live and its effect on the broadcasting industry. While the core principles of journalism stay the same, the technology that accompanies it is ever-changing. By combining research and interviews with experts on the subject, I uncover how Facebook Live is being used in news organizations today and why it is such an important tool. I focus on the rise of citizen journalism and the issue of fake news on the social media platform. Furthermore, I expose how Facebook Live been used as an outlet to promote social change and to display acts of violence.

In the interest of getting sources with different perspectives, I chose to reach out to Rebecca Jarvis, an ABC News Correspondent, Madison Mills, a Facebook Live Producer with The New York Times, and Jennifer Grygiel, a social media expert and professor at Newhouse. This way, I would demonstrate the viewpoints of someone from network news, a print and online publication, as well as a well-versed academic. My first scheduled interview was with Jennifer Grygiel, whose office is conveniently on campus. However, I interviewed both Rebecca Jarvis and Madison Mills at their offices in New York City. In order to get in touch with Rebecca, I networked with another ABC News Correspondent, Linzie Janis, when she spoke at Newhouse in the fall. Linzie was kind enough to coordinate an interview with Rebecca for me, since she felt Rebecca would be a better fit for my project. As for Madison, I reached out to the email address for the Live Interactive Journalism Team at The New York Times that I found online. To my pleasant surprise, I received a response from Madison within a few hours saying she was willing to meet with me.

Since Facebook Live is such a new entity, my sources consist of all online articles. I found they supported my argument that the live-streaming outlet is transforming the news

industry. One New York Times article described Facebook Live videos as “a potentially transformational form of journalism because they let stories unfold organically, live, and with the audience able to change the experience” (Spayd, 2016). This live, interactive content creates a two-way conversation between the reporter and the viewers in real time. While not all news organizations may be adopting the trend, they should not expect the live-streaming tool to disappear anytime soon.

In the beginning of my research, the most notable social media platforms to explore live-streaming besides Facebook were Periscope, Meerkat, and YouTube. Over the course of my capstone, it was interesting to see new developments transpire. Since then, Twitter has jumped on the bandwagon. In May, the media outlet announced 16 live-streaming deals with partners such as LiveNation, BuzzFeed, and Viacom. In addition, it is joining forces with Bloomberg to produce a 24-hour breaking news channel on Twitter launching in the fall (Kuchler, 2017). As this form of live media continues to grow its presence across platforms, journalists need to stay updated as to how this will impact the industry, since those changes will affect their reporting as well.

According to a Forbes article, “Facebook is making a concerted push to build bridges with the news industry and promote higher quality journalism” (Chaykowski, 2017). The new program, entitled the “Facebook Journalism Project,” debuted earlier this year in an effort to minimize fake news stories shared on the site. Fake news can be defined as articles that contain false or exaggerated information intended to attract viewers for monetary gain. Within the year, Facebook’s partnership with journalists has evolved into “a training and support pilot program for local legacy and online newsrooms” (Hare, 2017). This is part of the media company’s latest attempt to solve the issue of fake news and the significant decline of publisher outreach on

Facebook. After meeting with several local newsrooms around the country, Facebook gathered input to help make the arrangement a success. While some news markets are concerned with direct audience engagement, others are focused on monetization. Eventually, the social networking site hopes journalists will take advantage of its services to build a following and discover innovative ways to tell stories. In return, Facebook intends to learn new product development strategies from newsrooms.

Not only traditional journalists are leveraging the social media platform. On July 6, Facebook became the world's live news network when Diamond Reynolds filmed her boyfriend, Philando Castile, get fatally shot by a police officer after a routine traffic stop. Justifiably so, the tragic incident brought a lot of attention to the platform. Although broadcasting video in real time was nothing new, what made this incident special was streaming it on a website like Facebook, which has extensive social outreach. In addition, it did not come from a traditional news organization; instead, a regular citizen posted it. Within a day, Reynolds' video had 5 million views on Facebook. It not only sparked a national discussion about police brutality and injustice against African Americans, but also one about how a social media outlet allowed a tragedy to be broadcasted worldwide with such immediacy. Consequently, it created a new ethical dilemma, involving the prevalence of technology and the ability for anyone to go live with ease.

Aside from social commentary, I think it is important to include how successful journalists today are using Facebook Live and why they feel it is a beneficial skill to incorporate into their work. Especially in this day and age, it is crucial for broadcasters to know how to handle interactive outlets like these. Journalists need to possess the responsibility and skills necessary to report live with accuracy and build people's trust. According to a recent Pew

Research Center study, over 40 percent of the U.S. population consumes its news on Facebook (Gottfried and Shearer, 2016). This raises new questions regarding how media sites should regulate their content. Rebecca Jarvis, Madison Mills, Jennifer Grygiel, and I provide insight on some of these ramifications of Facebook Live that could be a result of it being a new platform. In essence, my capstone explores Facebook Live's impact on the industry thus far and its significance for the future of journalism.

In order for my capstone project to get more exposure, I decided to create a website on wix.com. I found the site was a clear and concise way to organize my project. Furthermore, I thought it would be helpful to have all of my work accessible in one place. It was also useful to have the freedom to design each page differently, depending on the content. In total, the site has five tabs: *Home*, *Interviewees*, *Video*, *Blog*, and *About Me*. On the homepage, I provide an overview of the project with a link to my blog post underneath. In addition, I thought it would be helpful to include a separate page with a slideshow of the interviewees and their titles, so viewers would be more familiar with them before watching my YouTube link on the video page. For the *About Me* section, I describe my educational background as well as a brief summary of the project.

As a supplement to my short documentary, I felt it would be beneficial to write a blog post encompassing the most useful tips for Facebook Live. Since I received so much valuable information from my interviewees, I wanted to be able to share it with current and future journalists. After looking over my transcriptions from each interview, I compiled the best pieces of advice for better understanding the platform. Tips from Rebecca Jarvis were: (1) Do your research and be prepared. (2) Talk to all parties before jumping to conclusions. (3) Have a two-way conversation with your viewers. (4) Know your audience. (5) Host a Q&A during breaking

news. (6) Interview guests in a less structured setting. (7) Cover big events or conferences. (8) Advertise at least an hour in advance if possible. (9) Don't feel obligated to go live with expensive equipment. (10) Don't respond to a question you don't know the answer to. Madison Mills recommended the following: (1) Bring your audience into the storytelling process. (2) Go behind the scenes with your interviewee. (3) Ask the news consumer what he or she thinks. (4) Don't be intimidated by the accessibility and immediacy of live-streaming. (5) Remember your reputation is at stake. Lastly, Jennifer Grygiel suggested to: (1) Consider the lack of content moderation when recording potentially graphic content. (2) Maintain a certain level of responsibility and skill. (3) Have a purpose for going live. (4) Show what television doesn't. (5) Make sure you're properly trained. The details for each item of advice live on the site.

Ultimately, the implementation of Facebook Live in reporting is a timely issue in my field of study. Whether you are a seasoned reporter or one who is just starting out in the field, staying on top of social media trends is necessary for being successful in modern journalism. Therefore, journalists should care about the emergence of live video on Facebook, as it becomes increasingly popular for news outlets to use. However, just because Facebook Live is the latest trend, does not mean it is appropriate for every situation. Media professionals must recognize how to effectively use the live-streaming platform. Above all, journalists must remember to value accuracy with the utmost importance. After a number of people have been first and wrong, the real pressure today is to be early and right.

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