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## Social Media Adoption Among Small-Market Mississippi Newspapers

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# SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION AMONG SMALL-MARKET MISSISSIPPI NEWSPAPERS

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the MA in Journalism

Meek School of Journalism and New Media

University of Mississippi

William DeJournett

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to examine the attitudes, application and results of Mississippi newspapers' and others' use of social media. The goals are to determine the worth of social media to Mississippi newspapers, and to try to identify if there is any anecdotal or other information linking the use of social media to increased readership (print or electronic) and ad sales. Additional goals are to identify if there are any innovative or creative ways newspapers are utilizing social media so that these methods may be employed by other newspapers. The Diffusion of Innovations theory is an important aspect of this study, and is inherent in much of the survey questions and results collected. The final goal of the study is to determine a general sense of the worth of social media expressed in the attitudes of various Mississippi newspaper personnel. The study was conducted via a Qualtrics survey distributed directly to 33 Mississippi newspaper editors and reporters, and via invitation on various listservs and social media platforms. There were 68 responses. The study found that despite the perception that the adoption of social media platforms by newspapers had no tangible effect upon either advertising sales nor circulation, newspapers are generally satisfied with their use of social media and are applying these platforms in new and creative ways. This study is important because prior to this date, no such research has been conducted specifically pertaining to Mississippi Newspapers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty of the Meek School of Journalism and New Media for their tutelage and assistance. In particular, my advisor Joe Atkins, Curtis Wilkie, and mostly my thesis advisor, Dr. Kristie Swain, without whose help I could not have completed this study. I would also like to thank Susan Schornhorst, whose assistance with this project was invaluable.

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## CHAPTER ONE- BACKGROUND

With the adoption of new technologies over time, our reliance on the traditional daily newspaper has declined consistently. Chronologically, from the advents of radio, television, twenty-four hour cable news, the internet and now social media, newspapers have struggled to maintain advertising revenues and circulation levels. If mainstream print journalism is to survive, newspaper editors must explore innovative and creative avenues to increase revenues and readership. This study will explore how social media might be an important part of that equation.

Social media is increasingly changing the landscape of how print journalism operates. Numerous newspapers are increasingly bolstering their social media profiles and in many cases hiring dedicated social media employees. Newspapers are increasingly trying to stay relevant in a technology-driven information marketplace. Social media is just one more tool that newspapers are increasingly turning to.

From a historical viewpoint, print newspapers struggling to retain readers with the advent of a new media platform is nothing new. In 1963, when television networks expanded evening newscasts from fifteen to thirty minutes, it dramatically changed the landscape of the newspaper industry. Within twenty years, the number of afternoon daily newspapers within the U.S. had dropped below 400, from a high in 1963 of 1400.<sup>1</sup> A second television menace to newspapers surfaced in the early 1980's with the advent of twenty-four hour news networks. From 1980 to

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas E. Patterson, "The Decline of Newspapers: The Local Story". NiemanReports. Winter 2007.  
<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100118/The-Decline-of-Newspapers-The-Local-Story/.aspx>



2000, newspaper circulation dropped another ten percent.<sup>2</sup> This drop has only accelerated in recent years due to the increased popularity of online news outlets.<sup>3</sup> In a recent study titled “The News Consumption and Habits of Americans”, less than ten percent of adults and only five percent of teenagers relied heavily on print news media for their news consumption.<sup>4</sup>

In a March 19 2012 Poynter article, Rick Edmonds cited statistics from the Ninth Annual State of the News Media Report. Among his observations were that “through the first three quarters of 2011, print advertising losses outweighed digital ad gains by a ratio of 8 to 1.”<sup>5</sup> He reported that further declines were expected in 2012, and commented on newspapers reducing their editing and reporting staffs. He cited that the two Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, newspapers were about to eliminate forty-five newsroom positions at the time of the article’s publication, and that the Gannett Corporation was in the process of eliminating six hundred positions over their eighty community newspapers.<sup>6</sup> The article explored how due to these losses, newspapers were experimenting with other vehicles to create revenue streams. The introduction of paywalls, increased use of social media and the emphasis on the Sunday edition over the weekday paper were all discussed. According to Edmonds:

“Despite this litany of woes, it is worth repeating that the great majority of newspapers are profitable, just not as profitable as they used to be. Some operating at break-even or a small loss are doing so intentionally to support aggressive exploration of those replacement revenues.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas E. Patterson, “The Decline of Newspapers: The Local Story”. NiemanReports, Winter 2007. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100118/The-Decline-of-Newspapers-The-Local-Story.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup>Rick Edmonds, “6 trends for newspapers in 2012, from a Sunday boon to an executive bust” Poynter, March 19, 2012. <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/business-news/the-biz-blog/166575/6-trends-for-newspapers-in-2012-from-a-sunday-boom-to-an-executive-bust/>

<sup>6</sup>Ibid

<sup>7</sup>Rick Edmonds, “6 trends for newspapers in 2012, from a Sunday boon to an executive bust” Poynter, March 19, 2012. <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/business-news/the-biz-blog/166575/6-trends-for-newspapers-in-2012-from-a-sunday-boom-to-an-executive-bust/>

According to the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism State of the News Media 2013, newspaper advertising print revenues for this year continued to decline, while online revenues grew by 3.7 percent.<sup>8</sup> According to the Chicago Tribune, citing a report from the Alliance for Audited Media, daily newspaper circulation of U.S. newspapers declined .07 percent in the last year, while Sunday circulation declined 1.4 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the decrease in print circulation and revenues, many newspapers are seeking to integrate their print and online operations. According to Chicago Tribune spokeswoman Maggie Wartik,

“We are constantly reviewing the best way to report our ever-changing audience and believe at this point it is appropriate to report a portion of our digital audience... one we can confidently say does not result in a duplication with print.”<sup>10</sup>

One way in which newspapers are trying to achieve this goal is through extensive use of social media. Almost since the inceptions of Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006), newspapers have utilized these platforms as tools.<sup>11</sup> According to Lindsey Cook, since 2009 news sites have seen an increase in referrals from social media platforms of fifty-seven percent.<sup>12</sup> One of the main challenges to any online presence for newspapers is monetary. According to Cook,

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<sup>8</sup>Rick Edmonds, Emily Guskin, Amy Mitchell and Mark Jurkowitz. “The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism The State of the News Media 2013 An Annual Report on American Journalism. State of the Media.org May 7 2013. <http://stateofthemedial.org/2013/newspapers-stabilizing-but-still-threatened/newspapers-by-the-numbers/>

<sup>9</sup> Robert Channick. “Digital gains ease, but don’t erase, newspaper circulation declines”. Chicago Tribune, April 30, 2013. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-04-30/business/chi-newspaper-circulation-20130430\\_1\\_newspaper-circulation-neal-lulofs-chicago-tribune-media-group/](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-04-30/business/chi-newspaper-circulation-20130430_1_newspaper-circulation-neal-lulofs-chicago-tribune-media-group/)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Lindsey Cook. “Social Media and Newspapers”. July 3, 2012. Digitize Me, Captain. <http://www.digitize-me-captain.com/newspapers-use-of-social-media/>

<sup>12</sup>Ibid

“For the industry, finding the key to making money on the web and maintaining quality coverage is the goal. The New York Times instituted a pay wall this year and many are likely to follow behind including The Washington Post, USA Today and many metros. In the meantime, as platforms move online, news organization(s) continue to utilize Facebook and Twitter for news dispersion. Increasingly, news organizations also use more experimental media such as Foursquare, Pinterest, and the new kid on the block, Storify.”<sup>13</sup>

As of yet, little to no research has been conducted specifically with regards to Mississippi newspapers’ adoption and utilization of social media platforms. This study will attempt to remedy the dearth of information currently available on this topic. Information gleaned from this study could potentially be helpful to Mississippi newspapers as they explore new and different ways to explore social media.

The study will be in the form of in-depth interviews with either editors or social media editors of fourteen major to mid-market Mississippi newspapers. The interview questions will include information about general attitudes towards the use of social media by newspapers, the types of social media utilized, possible effects of social media use on overall circulation and ad sales (both print and online), perceived advantages and disadvantages of online media use, the various methods of how newspapers use their social media platforms, any legal ramifications encountered via the use of social media, unexpected, new or creative uses for social media, and their perceptions and opinions about the future of social media in the newspaper landscape. These interviews will be conducted in person, by phone, and in cases where those fail via email. Additionally, similar questions will be posed in an interview with Jim Prince, current President of the Mississippi News Association.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid

The interviews will be analyzed to identify any consistent trends or other pertinent observations, and the results will be disseminated. All participating newspapers will be supplied with the findings of the study, and other newspapers will have access to the results of the study upon request. It is hoped that this study will serve as a resource for Mississippi newspapers as they continue to grow and adapt in our contemporary digital society.

## CHAPTER TWO- REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In examining newspapers' use of social media, it is helpful to examine a sample of the existing literature concerning the subject.

As far back as 2006 there was discussion about the future of traditional print media. In his winter 2006 article, Michael Riley discussed the need for newspapers to transition to the internet and various ways this can be accomplished.<sup>14</sup> In the same year, Chris Cobler reflected on the hesitance of traditional newspapers in transitioning to internet-based platforms, and the imminent demise of the traditional newspaper business model. He stated:

“The days of our monopoly business practices are over. Gone, too, are the times when journalists can write a story for print only and reach a mass audience.”<sup>15</sup>

In his Winter 2008 article, student journalist Luke Morris discussed ways the emerging generation of journalists could succeed in the workplace by embracing online platforms including Facebook and twitter in his article “Accepting the Challenge: Using the Web to Help”.<sup>16</sup> In the same Nieman Reports issue, Bill Adey of the Chicago Tribune chronicled their

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Riley, “Newspapers and Their Quest for the Holy Grail”, *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2006. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100279/Newspapers-and-Their-Quest-for-the-Holy-Grail.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> Chris Cobler, “Risk-Adverse Newspapers Won’t Cross the Digital Divide”, *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2006. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100277/Risk-Adverse-Newspapers-Won’t-Cross-the-Digital-Divide.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Luke Morris, “Accepting the Challenge: Using the Web to Help”, *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2008. <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100677/Accepting-the-Challenge-Using-the-Web-to-Help.aspx>

initial foray into the Social Media landscape on platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, Fark and Digg with an avatar dubbed “Colonel Tribune”.<sup>17</sup>

In 2009, Michael Skoler reflected on the decline of the popularity of mainstream print media and offered suggestions such as Facebook and twitter as possible business models in his article “Why the News Media Became Irrelevant- And How Social Media Can Help”.<sup>18</sup> In the same year, Greenbow and Reifman studied Facebook and how young people utilize it. They found young people have multiple uses for the website:

“They are also “Faceworking”, a term that Neil Selwyn, a sociologist at the London Knowledge Lab, coined this year. The word describes what happens when people intentionally put their social networking site to work, for example, when they seek or promote information, problem-solving, peer-sharing, and creative inspiration.”<sup>19</sup>

They also chronicled their launch of two community-focused Facebook applications called “Hot Dish”, which is an environmentalist site, and MN Daily, which is a supplement to the University of Minnesota’s student newspaper. They found that “there might be efficiencies in locating niche media-sharing communities within existing social networks, such as Facebook”.<sup>20</sup>

In her article “What is Journalism’s Place in Social Media?”, Geneva Overholser grapples with the concept of maintaining basic journalistic integrity in the age of social media.<sup>21</sup> Julia Luscher Thompson wrote of her experience working for the Tallahassee Democrat newspaper in covering

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<sup>17</sup> Bill Adey, “Digging Into Social Media to Build a Newspaper Audience”, Nieman Reports, Winter 2008, <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100697>

<sup>18</sup> Michael Skoler, “Why the News Media Became Irrelevant- And How Social Media Can Help”, Nieman Reports, Fall 2009 <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101897>

<sup>19</sup>Greenbow, Christine, and Reifman, Jeff, “Engaging Youth in Social Media: Is Facebook the New Media Frontier?” Nieman Reports, Fall 2009 <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101906/Engaging-Youth-in-Social-Media-Is-Facebook-the-New-Media-Frontier.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Geneva Overholser, “What is Journalism’s Place in Social Media?”, Nieman Reports, Fall 2009 <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101882>

the death of 23-year-old undercover police informant Rachel Hoffman in her article “Using Social Media to Reach Young Readers”. In this case, the Tallahassee Democrat used social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to gather information from friends and family members in order to ascertain the circumstances of the young lady’s death. The investigation and reporting that followed resulted in one firing, several suspensions and one reprimand of Tallahassee Police Department officers.<sup>22</sup>

In an experiment reported by Janic Tremblay in 2010, he relayed how five French journalists sequestered themselves in a farmhouse using nothing but Twitter as their news source as follows:

“For five days they would stay informed by using only their social networks. Their ground rules forbid them to follow the feeds and tweets of any news media; to be informed, they had to rely solely on the tweets or Facebook offerings of individuals or organizations such as nonprofits, government agencies, or educational institutions.”<sup>23</sup>

He found that among other things, he was able to read most of the important news stories during that time via Twitter. He also made observations that twitter can act as a radar, as he read the tweets of a man in Russia who had just been taken prisoner and was tweeting the entire experience. He also concluded that “Twitter can steer off course”.<sup>24</sup> He related how he read numerous tweets about a loud boom being heard and various explanations of its origin (it was

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<sup>22</sup> Julia Luscher Thompson, “Using Social Media to Reach Young Readers”, *Nieman Reports*, Spring 2009 <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100940>

<sup>23</sup> Janic Tremblay, “Twitter: Can It Be a Reliable Source of News”, *Nieman Reports*, Summer 2010 <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102416/Twitter-Can-It-Be-a-Reliable-Source-of-News.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

later determined that the boom was in fact a sonic boom of an airliner in the area). He also found that most of the retweets he received were from individuals and not from news organizations.<sup>25</sup>

In a 2010 article by Mallery Jean Tenore entitled “Why the New York Times eliminated its social media editor position”, she explains that the Times was not abandoning social media, but rather shifting the editor’s responsibilities in an effort to fully integrate the print and electronic branches of its operation.<sup>26</sup> In his summer 2010 article “A Message for Journalists: It’s Time to Flex Old Muscles in New Ways”; Ken Doctor cited a Pew Research study’s findings that three-quarters of American news consumers got their content via forwarded email links or through social media sites.<sup>27</sup> According to Doctor:

“It comes down to this: Use old muscles, but flex them in new ways. Tweet, yes, and post on Facebook walls, but perhaps with different messages tailored to each social venue. Keep those old world skills in mind-and yes, hold on to your news judgment, while adapting to the digital demands of readers”<sup>28</sup>

Reporting on a 2010 study by the Bivings Group, Damon Kiesow wrote that the New York Times led all U.S. newspapers in Facebook “fans”, with 993,307. He also stated that of the “top 100” U.S. newspapers, the average number of Facebook “fans” was 21,000. According to Kiesow,

“Researchers analyzed the Facebook activity for each publication, Selected based on print circulation size. In a blog post announcing

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup>Mallery Jean Tenore, “Why the New York Times eliminated its social media editor position”, Poynter, December 9, 2011 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/110111>

<sup>27</sup> Ken Doctor, “A Message for Journalists: It’s Time to Flex Old Muscles in New Ways”, Nieman Reports, Summer 2010. <http://nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102415>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid



the study, Alla Goldman wrote that more than 1,000 wall posts were examined to determine the type and typical number of interactions per item. According to the results, each Facebook post by one of the top 100 U.S. newspapers receives 8.8 “likes” and 5.4 comments, on average.”<sup>29</sup>

In a 2011 article, Jeff Sonderman reported how The Monitor magazine of McAllen, Texas, began printing the Facebook and/or twitter contact information of the reporters for every story. He stated that while still adhering to the paper’s code of conduct, the editor gave permission to reporters to express emotions and/or opinions on stories in some cases; the point of which was to make the reporters for The Monitor seem like real individuals.<sup>30</sup>

In his March 18, 2011 article, Ben LaMothe discussed ways newspapers could utilize Facebook to better engage readers. He states that in order to effectively engage readers, it is helpful to assign one person as the “face” of the newspaper on the Facebook page instead of just having a “nameless brand”.<sup>31</sup> He also advocated having a somewhat casual and conversational tone on a Facebook page and warned against coming across as mechanical. He stated that a newspaper’s Facebook page should not primarily be simply a vehicle for advertising for the print edition, but more for sharing news and information. The article went on to state that a Facebook page ultimately is there to serve both the newspaper and the public. If a reader were to post a comment complaining about the newspaper, he states that is an opportunity to respond to the reader and fix the problem. He states that comments, good or bad; mean that people are reading

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<sup>29</sup>Damon Kiesow, “Study: Newspapers get 8 likes and 5 comments per Facebook post”. Poynter, December 17 2010. <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/media-lab/social-media/111489/study-newspapers-get-8-likes-and-5-comments-per-facebook-post/>

<sup>30</sup> Jeff Sonderman, “Texas newspaper begins printing Twitter, Facebook contacts with each story”, Poynter, November 11, 2011 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/media-lab/social-media/152843/texas-newspaper-begins-printing-twitter-facebook-contacts-with-each-story/>

<sup>31</sup> Ben LaMothe, “4 Ways Newspapers Can Better Use Facebook To Engage Readers”. Mediabistro.com March 18, 2011. <http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/4-ways-newspapers-can-better-use-facebook-to-engage-readers>

both the paper and the Facebook page. He recommends having a staff member regularly monitor the page in order to respond to any feedback.<sup>32</sup>

In her article “How ABC News built a top social media presence with a small dedicated team”, Mallary Jean Tenore reported ABC’s success in aggressively utilizing various social media platforms. She reported that in the time period from April 2010 to January 2012, the ABC News Facebook page increased in fans from 32,000 to 383,000. She also reported that in the same time period, the Good Morning America Facebook page increased by almost 500,000 fans. The article also discusses ABC’s efforts to encourage individual reporters to promote their own Facebook and Twitter accounts, such as Diane Sawyer.<sup>33</sup>

The use of social media raises ethical and liability concerns with the possibility of each reporter having their own individual social media accounts. In his article “E.W. Scripps Co. issues Social Media Policy”, Jim Romenesko quotes the policy directly:

“If your personal account contains material that could reflect badly on Scripps, its business operations or your colleagues, or is contrary to Scripps policies, you may be asked to remove your affiliation with Scripps from the personal account or be otherwise disciplined, including termination. The possibility of disciplinary action is not intended to limit your use of social media, but clarify the company’s position regarding egregious behavior.”<sup>34</sup>

The policy went on to differentiate between personal and professional accounts and delineated general guidelines and best practices for each.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ben LaMothe, “4 Ways Newspapers Can Better Use Facebook To Engage Readers”. Mediabistro.com March 18, 2011. <http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/4-ways-newspapers-can-better-use-facebook-to-engage-readers>

<sup>33</sup> Mallary Jean Tenore, “How ABC News built a top social media presence with a small dedicated team”, Poynter, January 24 2012 <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/digital-strategies/158998/how-abc-news-built-a-top-social-media-presence-with-a-small-dedicated-team/>

<sup>34</sup> Jim Romenesko, “E.W. Scripps Co. issues Social Media Policy”, Poynter, June 30, 2011 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/137564/e-w-scripps-announces-social-media-policy/>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

In a 2012 study, Sounman Houg found a positive correlation between newspapers' adoption of social media platforms and their overall online readership. The study did not address the effects of social media on newspapers' print readership.<sup>36</sup>

Patti Schwartz commented on print journalism's use of social media in her May 8, 2012 article, "Print Journalism's Survival In the Social Media Age". She stated that above all else, content was the most important factor in a newspaper's business model. She lamented that in the age of social media, some of the journalistic quality may be giving way to expediency in an age where "the subject is being discussed on the social media sites before the newsprint is dry".<sup>37</sup> She commented on the need for newspaper editorial boards to focus on what was important to the community they serve, from both a business and political standpoint. According to Schwartz:

"Social media has created competition between all news sources and, in its quest for survival, print journalism has had to join in the fracas. It needs to rethink its management style and the way it presents itself to the community it serves. If it doesn't adjust to the changing times, it will only alienate it(s) current readership and lose out on the potential of many more."<sup>38</sup>

In her June 2012 Poynter article, Mallory Jean Tenore discussed the New York Times' latest social media hire- Daniel Victor, formerly the social media editor at ProPublica. Among other things, the article discussed how newspapers are hiring social media directors who may not necessarily have prior newsroom experience, and treating social media in new and creative ways.

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<sup>36</sup>SounmanHoug, "Online news on twitter: Newspapers' social media adoption and their online readership", Information Economics and Policy, March 2012, pp. 69-74.

<sup>37</sup>Patti Schwartz, "Print Journalism's Survival In the Social Media Age", Business2Community, May 8, 2012. <http://www.business2community.com/social-media/print-journalisms-survival-social-media-age-0600519>

<sup>38</sup>Patti Schwartz, "Print Journalism's Survival In the Social Media Age", Business2Community, May 8, 2012. <http://www.business2community.com/social-media/print-journalisms-survival-social-media-age-0600519>

The article cited the Times' ongoing desire to synthesize their print and media operations.

According to New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger,

“There is a reason why we are so committed to social media at The Times and that reason rests with our audience. We have an incredibly enlightened, intelligent and sophisticated group of users who are highly engaged with our products. Our efforts in social media are meant to tap in to the knowledge from that readership. We value what they can share with us and with other users.”<sup>39</sup>

In a July 2012 article, Lindsey Cook asserted a positive correlation between newspapers' adoption of social media and online readership. She cited a fifty-seven percent increase of traffic on news sites via referrals from social media since 2009. Furthermore, she asserts that mobile platforms are also a prime vehicle for newspapers to exploit, stating that one half of smartphone users use these devices to access news.<sup>40</sup>

In his Spring 2013 article “Curation is the Key to Bringing Social Media and Journalism Together”, he tackles the sticky problem of balancing traditional journalistic techniques and integrity with the rapidity of reporting breaking news in the age of instantaneous social media. He offers a novel solution to this conundrum:

“One solution could be an all-in-one app for peer-to-peer journalism that displays confirmed and reliable facts as well as the most credible unconfirmed reports. This app, specifically designed for breaking news, would be controlled and curated by professional journalists.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mallory Jean Tenore, “New York Times' latest hire part of evolving social media team”, *Poynter*, June 5, 2012 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/176192/new-york-times-latest-hire-part-of-evolving-social-media-team/>

<sup>40</sup> Lindsey Cook. “Social Media and Newspapers”. July 3, 2012. *Digitize Me, Captain*. <http://www.digitize-me-captain.com/newspapers-use-of-social-media/>

<sup>41</sup> Ludovic Bleher, “Curation is the Key to Bringing Social Media and Journalism Together”, *Nieman Reports*, Spring 2013 <http://nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=102887>

Technology can sometimes be a hindrance to newspapers' use of social media. In a November 4 2013 Poynter article, Andrew Beaujon reported how a spam-fighting glitch by Twitter engineers prevented the Philadelphia City Paper's URL's to be accessed via tweets. This occurred just prior to an important area election, when the newspaper was about to run a story regarding a retention vote for a judge who had previously made controversial comments regarding sexual assaults. Philadelphia City Paper reporter Daniel Denvir began sending out what were referred to as "protest tweets".<sup>42</sup> On October 30 2013, Denvir posted this:

"Dear @twitter: it is absurd you can bar newspaper's site for entire day. You are damaging our work and offer no recourse. cc: @twittermedia"<sup>43</sup>

The problem was resolved the next day, although Twitter issued no response to the paper addressing the issue. The article then quoted Denvir, who addressed the larger issue of newspapers' dependence upon social media platforms working correctly:

"I think that the news industry as a whole needs to think carefully about its dependence on third-party social media platforms as key nodes for distributing content published online. Someone should figure out a solution. It probably won't be us, However, since we are a very small paper."<sup>44</sup>

In addition to technological glitches hindering social media platforms, there are sometimes political and societal obstacles newspapers must overcome in order to utilize these tools. In her November 11 2013 Poynter article, Kristen Hare covered the attempts of officials at the upcoming Sochi Olympic Games to dramatically curtail the use of social media. According to the article, journalists will be allowed to utilize platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, but

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<sup>42</sup>Andrew Beaujon, "Twitter apologizes for blocking newspaper's URLs", Poynter, November 4 2013 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/228372/twitter-apologizes-for-blocking-newspaper's-urls/>

<sup>43</sup>Ibid

<sup>44</sup>Ibid

will be prohibited from posting video content. The article also discussed similar efforts during the 2012 London Olympic Games. Citing anti-terrorism legislation, journalists were banned from posting video content filmed across the street from an Olympic venue.<sup>45</sup>

On a positive note, in a November 14 2013 Poynter article, Andrew Beaujon cited a Pew report stating that twenty one percent of Facebook and eighteen percent of Twitter users frequently get news from print newspapers. The study also noted that Youtube (23%), LinkedIn (30%), and Google Plus users (24%) frequently get their news from print newspapers. This is against a baseline of twenty-seven percent of all adults who stated they get news “often” from print newspapers.<sup>46</sup>

Recently, several master’s theses and doctoral dissertations have studied similar problems. In her December 2010 University of Southern Mississippi dissertation, “The Experiences of Mississippi Weekly Newspaper Editors as They Explore and Consider Producing Internet Editions,” Cassandra Denise Johnson found that editors struggled to find a balance between online and print editions of their publications.<sup>47</sup> David H. Hopper studied seven Mississippi newspapers and their attempts to charge for online content in his 2010 University of Mississippi Master’s Thesis, “An Analysis of Daily Newspapers in Mississippi that Charge for Online Content.”<sup>48</sup> More recently, Jace Ponder studied the Pass Christian Gazebo Gazette and its attempts to stay relevant in today’s technological climate in his December 2016 University of

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<sup>45</sup> Kristen Hare, “Print journalists who use social media at Sochi Olympics could lose accreditation”, Poynter, November 11 2013 <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/229246/print-journalists-who-use-social-media-at-Sochi-Olympics- could-lose-accreditation/>

<sup>46</sup>Andrew Beaujon, “About a fifth of Facebook and Twitter users often get news from newspapers, too.” Poynter, November 14 2013. <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/mediawire/229802/about-a-fift-of-facebook-and-twitter-users-often-get-news-from-newspapers-too/>

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, C. D. 2010. “The Experiences of Mississippi Weekly Newspaper Editors as They Consider Producing Internet Editions.” PhD dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 2010. <http://aquila.usm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1545&context=dissertations>

<sup>48</sup>Hooper, D.H. 2010. “An Analysis of Daily Newspapers in Mississippi that Charge for Online Content.” MA thesis, University of Mississippi. 2010. <http://umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/record=b4460921~S0>

Mississippi thesis, “Community Newspapers in the Digital Age: A Case Study: The Pass Christian, Mississippi Gazebo Gazette.”<sup>49</sup>

From this review of the existing literature, one can observe how over the past ten years journalists have been reporting their findings and observations regarding Newspapers adoption and use of social media. These articles have focused on the growth of social media by newspapers, creative and unusual uses of social media, legal and political ramifications of social media use, the effects of social media on newspapers overall readership (both print and online), and how traditional journalistic methods may be employed within the context of social media.

## DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS THEORY

“Diffusion research examines how ideas are spread among groups of people. Diffusion goes beyond the two-step flow theory, centering on the conditions that increase or decrease the likelihood that an innovation, a new idea, product, or practice, will be adopted by members of a given culture.”<sup>50</sup> Much of this study relates to this theory, specifically in how the application of social media has been adopted by newspapers.

In her October 2016 paper, *A Little Birdie Told Me: Factors that Influence the Diffusion of Twitter in Newsrooms*, Alecia Swasy explored how the Diffusion of Innovation theory explains the adoption of Twitter in newsrooms.<sup>51</sup> In the abstract of her 2006 article, *Strange bedfellows? The diffusion of convergence in four news organizations*, Jane B. Singer states,

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<sup>49</sup> Ponder, J. “Community Newspapers in the Digital Age, A Case Study: The Pass Christian, Mississippi Gazebo Gazette.” MA thesis, University of Mississippi, 2016. <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2012115620/>

<sup>50</sup> Dominic Infante, Andrew Rancer, and Deanna Womack. *Building Communication Theory*. (Long Grove, Illinois, Waveland Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Alecia Swasy, “A little birdie told me: Factors that influence the diffusion of twitter in newsrooms.” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, October 2016. Pp. 643-656.

“This study examines newsroom convergence- a combination of technologies, products, staffs and geography among previously distinct provinces of print, television and online media- through the framework of diffusion of innovations theory... Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data drawn from case studies of four U.S. newsrooms, it is suggested that, despite culture clashes and other issues of compatibility, journalists see clear advantages in the new policy of convergence.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jane B. Singer. “Strange bedfellows? The diffusion of convergence in four news organizations.” Journalism Studies. Volume 5, Issue 4, June 4, 2006. Pp. 3-18.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will attempt to answer several questions relating to newspapers' use of social media:

- Since the adoption of social media platforms, has there been a change in newspapers' print circulation, plus or minus?
- Since adopting social media, has there been an effect to overall ad sales of newspapers, both print and online?
- Are there any unusual or creative uses for social media?
- What are newspapers' overall impressions of their use of social media?

### CHAPTER THREE- METHODOLOGY

In approaching the problem of small-market newspapers' adoption of social media platforms within the state of Mississippi, a review of the existing literature pertaining to print media's adoption of social media in general was conducted. Online articles pertaining to this subject were the primary focus of the review, since due to the novelty of the media, few if any books on the subject exist at present.

In order to conduct the study, a sample of Mississippi newspapers appropriate for the study were identified. 33 papers with circulations under twenty thousand were designated. A questionnaire was constructed via the program Qualtrix and was distributed directly to editors and reporters from these newspapers. The newspapers contacted were the Aberdeen Monroe Journal, the Batesville Panolian, the Bay Saint Louis Sea Coast Echo, the Biloxi/Gulfport Sun Herald, the Brandon Rankin County News, the Brookhaven Daily Dealer, the Bruce Calhoun County Journal, the Bolivar Commercial, the Canton Madison County Herald, Carthage Carthaginian, the Columbus Commercial Dispatch, the Daily Corinthian, the Desoto Times-Tribune, the Forest Scott County Times, the Fulton Itawamba County Times, the Grenada Star, the Greenville Delta Democrat-Times, the Greenwood Commonwealth, the Hattiesburg American, the Hazelhurst Copiah County Courier, the Holly Springs South Reporter, the Indianola Enterprise, the Lucedale George County Times, the Meridian Star, the Natchez Democrat, the Oxford Eagle, the Philadelphia Neshoba Democrat, the Picayune Item, the

Pontotoc Progress, the Senatobia Tate Record, the Starkville Daily News, the Tunica Times, and the Vicksburg Post.

The survey was distributed using the Qualtrics instrument, distributed via various journalism listservs, such as those provided by NICAR and Investigative Reporters and Editors. The full survey can be found in Appendix A.

Paul Keane, President of the Mississippi Press Association, was interviewed and was asked similarly-worded questions intended to be relevant to the entire Mississippi newspaper population, with questions as follows, but not limited to:

1. Give us your general impressions of Mississippi newspapers' adoption of social media platforms over the past ten years. What trends have you observed?
2. What, in your opinion, are editors' attitudes towards the adoption of social media?
3. What, in your opinion, are the advantages and disadvantages to the utilization of various social media platforms?
4. What have been the long-term effects, if any, that you have observed with the advent of social media towards newspapers?
5. What recommendations would you have for editors utilizing social media sites? How should they use these?
6. Are there any legal considerations in the use of social media? What should editors be aware of in regards to any potential legal situation which might arise from the use of social media?
7. What do you see as the future of social media as part of a newspaper's complete operation?
8. What is your overall impression of newspapers' use of social media?

Upon completion of the interviews, responses were compiled to see if there are any consistent trends or discrepancies, and results presented with any further recommendations. Results will be shared with all participating newspapers.

## CHAPTER FOUR- RESULTS

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

In response to question ten, “Can you describe any unusual or unexpected negative effect or event that occurred due to your paper’s use of social media,” there was a general trend towards complaints about people “trolling” in the comment sections. Below are some samples:

“We have had sensitive stories like a case of a child that was killed and babysitter acquitted at our Vacaville, CA, paper. That particular story I was careful in what I posted on Facebook, but people still took to the comments like crazy. They thought she was guilty, but suddenly family members on both sides were drawn into the Facebook comments and it got ugly fast. That was a hard one for us because we didn't want to incite violence or anger, but wanted to report on the issue. So, sensitive issues that people don't necessarily enjoy seeing. I have since been more careful about what I do and don't share on our Facebook pages.”

“The only negative is an occasional troll that stirs an issue from an extreme, unrealistic viewpoint.”

“We had a story go viral a few years ago after we ran a photo with a story that was ill-advised but hardly a major error. Posters and commenters online were angry and sharply critical of the reporter whose byline appeared on the story but who had no role in choosing the photo. She was a young reporter just starting her career, and was badly shaken by the experience. She left our newsroom shortly thereafter, and while she didn't say the incident was the reason, it clearly was a factor. It showed how even a minor slip can become a major issue and cautioned us to choose carefully what we post to social media.”

“People commenting on a post and downgrading another individual.”

“Random posters using profanity or slandering others in community (police, city leaders, school, etc.)”

“Facebook comments on controversial posts (our typical policy is to link to the story on our website) sometimes veer into profane, racist and rude remarks. We edit remarks to try and keep the conversation civil.”

“Several times when people post story ideas to the paper on social media others use that as an opportunity to deride the newspaper.”

“Sometimes comments get out of control or spiral because of trolls or politics, leading to negative feelings about the news organization, but that's expected.”

“The biggest thing we experience is that we gain criticism from individuals who clearly don't read our content but just comment to express their general displeasure and, in response, other readers see those comments and choose not to read our work. However, this is pretty minor and we have a mostly positive relationship with our readers.”

In response to question eleven, “Can you describe a positive event that happened due to your paper’s use of social media,” a general trend was the use of social media for information gathering and/or crowdsourcing, which led to a positive outcome. Examples:

“Commenters can sometimes give us new leads on a story or source.”

“Yes! Most recently, parents were left out of the loop when a local school shut off their water because of a certain bacteria found in the drinking fountains. We got a hold of the information and published our story on social. Parents were rightfully outraged and the school was held accountable for the communication problem. Also, our paper in Ukiah, CA, used Facebook and Messenger as a hub for emergency information during the Mendocino Complex Fires in the fall of 2017. The editor took over the page and shared updates, stories, evacuation orders, and responded to private messages. It was a primary source for the community.”

“We have posted several unidentified old photographs that have been successfully identified through social media.”

“Posting information on criminals being sought by police (a breaking news story).”

“Our missing man article in Webster County that was posted to social media helped get a ton more volunteers out looking for him.”

“We've been able to cover stories that we otherwise wouldn't have known about. In one instance, a reader sent us a Facebook message to ask if she could write a letter about an experience she had. Instead, we turned it into a story that ended up gaining national attention.”

In response to question thirteen, “Is there anything else you wish to add, concerning your paper’s use of social media,” there seemed to be a trend towards an attitude of social media as a “necessary evil,” but something that is no longer an option. Some responses:

“While we do use social media as a means of engagement, we do not find that it necessarily helps us in any tangible, monetary way. For instance, when we post the lede

of a major story on Facebook, with a link to our newspaper's website, the traffic to our website is increased and the number of "reads" on a particular page increases dramatically. However, people are just reading what is in front of the paywall. The vast majority of social media users are used to getting something for nothing online and they are not willing to pay even a few bucks to read 'the rest of the story' on our website."

"Social media, for all of its trapdoors, provides an important way to connect with readers and gauge their reaction to stories. It has become a vital tool for news outlets, when used correctly, and I don't see that changing in the future."

"Newspapers need to spend more time promoting their websites rather than promoting Facebook's website. Social media is a cesspool of hatred and bigotry, and we need to position ourselves as participating in a more civil public debate on substantive issues rather than rancorous fighting on the web."

"Personally cannot stand social media. We use it simply because we have no other choice."

"We need to be much, much, much, much more active with our social media presence. The problem we have is we only have three staff members, and our youngest is 52 years old. With that said, finding the time and developing the skills needed to really increase our social media presence is a real challenge on this end."

"We have to be where our readers are and engage with them where they are engaging with news and having conversations. We can no longer assume people will come to us. We have to go to them. Social media is vital to our success and ability to build a loyal and engaged audience."

"It's a necessary evil. We mostly use Twitter to drive traffic to our print edition and somewhat to our website. We use it as a breaking-news platform-rather than our clunky website admin- if something is happening that could affect the greater public. Rarely do we post on Facebook because I hate how it has almost single-handedly destroyed print advertising."



In response to question 29- “Why does your organization use (or not use) social media?”, there appeared to be a trend towards using social media out of necessity. Examples-

“You have to be there or someone else will”

“When we first started using Facebook about 2010, we did not have a website. Facebook was our de facto website at that time. We have had a website for several years now but we continue to use Facebook and Twitter, to the limited extent that we do, for engagement, dissemination and to have that freely visible public presence.”

“We use it simply because we have no other choice.”

“We use it because it is typically the third largest traffic source for our articles. We also use it because it's a strong way to get in direct touch with our readers, especially as our newsrooms shrink.”

“We believe it is necessary to reach an audience that we may otherwise not be able to reach. There are a lot of things we do not like about social media, especially how much of a competitor it has become when it comes to advertising, but we believe we have to take advantage of the opportunities that it provides to promote our business.”

“To remain in the game, so to speak.”

“That's where many people are, and it's a way to reach them with our products, even if we hate social media, which I do.”

“It is simply a way to connect with readers/visitors/others. In addition to promoting our content, it has also been hugely successful at building our brand and visibility, as well as trust. And those qualities are reaching not just readers, but sources, legislators and thought-leaders as well.”

## INTERVIEW WITH PAUL KEANE

### PRESIDENT, MISSISSIPPI PRESS ASSOCIATION

How do you think social media has affected the press in Mississippi?

Keane- “Good and bad. It’s good that you can use it for information, tips on stories, story ideas. It’s bad that social media is not held to the same standards that a newspaper, television or radio station is. Sometimes they don’t let the facts get in the way of a good story. It’s bad because it’s hard to stay on top of stuff, especially for a community newspaper. It’s good that it keeps us on our toes, and makes us want to be out there ahead of Facebook.”

“I had a mentor in the business. He said that every week, you want your paper to be what he called a ‘talker.’ Whatever they were talking about on the streets, you wanted to have that in your paper every week. With Facebook, that has sped that line of thought up exponentially. They used to talk in the coffee shops and things of that nature, and now they’re doing that on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, and you’ve got to be aware of what’s being done out there, because you want to be sure that A. it’s in your paper that week, but more importantly, it’s got all the facts and features, and it’s more in depth than a Facebook post or a 140 word tweet. So it’s really changed the dynamics of making sure you have a ‘talker’ in your paper that week, or that day, if you’re a daily.”

Does social media present more of a challenge for papers with small staffs?

Keane- “Logistically, yes, most definitely. I’ve got three people on my staff, total. One is a sales rep who does a little social media, will cover an event or shoot a picture for me, the other handles office manager, circulation, public notices, classifieds, so she’s out of the picture. So that leaves me to handle the bulk of the editorial, plus my publisher duties, plus edit and design and all of that. So finding the time to do it- we know we’re supposed to be doing it- it’s just a matter of finding the time to do it. With a short staff, finding the time to do that stuff.”

Any specific anecdotes, good or bad? Any legal ramifications?

Keane- “Eventually an attorney is going to figure out how to sue some people for libel on social media. That’s the big thing. As a newspaper, we’re held to a higher standard. I have people coming in all the time saying, ‘I saw it on Facebook. Why didn’t you put it in the paper?’ Because I’ve got this little thing called a lawsuit that would happen if I did that. Where you really see it is with message boards- people taking shots at coaches and elected officials. I tell them, ‘Look, if I go up to a coach or an elected official and ask for a quote, they know their name is going to be in the paper, or on my website. With these anonymous quotes, these anonymous posts, these people hiding behind an avatar, if they want to come out and put their name in the paper, I’ll be more than happy to print it. I haven’t had anybody take me up on that offer. Eventually, the lawyers are going to figure it out, and they will start going after some people. I think that’s when you are going to see it come more in line with that there will be some accountability and responsibility that’s not out there right now. That’s the biggest thing we have to battle- as a media outlet, we have to deal in facts. We can’t deal in posts and tweets and

snapchats and all that. We have to be able to verify it, we have to be able to back it up, and at times we have to be able to defend it in a court of law.”

“I’m an old school newspaper guy. I started throwing newspapers at age eight. At age fourteen, I started covering sports for my local newspaper. If you count the paper boy years, I’ve been in it for 45 years. I was at a state basketball tournament semi-final game. The guy from the other newspaper who we were playing was sitting next to me. He was what I call a “young buck.” He was sitting there the whole ballgame tweeting. Not stuff about the game. He was following Twitter accounts and was on Facebook. He was barely watching the game. I get up afterwards, I get my interviews, come back, write the story, I put my video highlights into Imovie, I do the video highlights packets, the voiceover, I post that to the website, I post my story, and I shut my computer down. He turned to me and said, ‘Hey- do you have any quotes from either of the coaches?’ I was like, ‘Dude, do your job!’ Be a sports writer. I laughed for two and a half hours on the way home from Jackson. I was blown away.

“During a football game, I know that there are tons of people in the stands on Mississippi Sports Talk, giving updates and their opinions, they’re on Facebook. There is no way possible I can do that from the field, because I can’t juggle another device. I know that right after that game, I need to get back to my office and get busy, and give people a good highlights package, an in-depth story, and a full stats package. With social media, nobody does box scores anymore. They don’t do stats. One of the things that is interesting, is that the kids in the high schools and middle schools, they pick up our paper and the first page they go to is our stats sheet to see how they did. They’ll come and argue with me, telling me ‘I had more tackles than you had me down for.’

That's where we can combat it. They will start quoting my stats on Mississippi Sports Talk."

Our challenge with small community papers is to provide them with more than a Facebook post or a tweet. I say all this saying that my newspaper needs a better social media presence. There's no doubt. Even with that, in our paper, we've got to provide them with more. 'I know what's out there on Facebook, but I've got to give them more. I have to make sure it's more accurate, more detailed than what they are getting on social media."

Any issues unique to Mississippi in regards to this?

Keane- "I don't think so. I think everybody is struggling with this. It seems like the big newspapers are struggling with how to monetize their social media. The little newspapers are struggling with how to do better with social media. I think that's pretty universal. One of the challenges I see community papers facing is Facebook live. We were out at a dogfighting ring they were breaking up earlier this week, and here comes the television reporter, who started doing a Facebook live report right there. It's something that me and my staff have to figure out how to do that. You are juggling a still camera, a video camera and a notepad. How do you juggle your cell phone to do the Facebook live? I'm not gonna lie to you- it was a lot easier before social media. It was. But it's not going away. We've got to adapt, embrace and utilize it."

## INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINE RUSHTON

### DIGITAL FIRST MEDIA

How has social media changed the game?

Rushton- “Significantly, in the sense that when it was first launched, we very much thought it was an opportunity to push out our content. It was another place that as we were losing print readers for us to get our information and stories out there, breaking news, etc. A little later we found that we could use it as a crowdsourcing tool and better understand what our audience was talking about, then what we might be able to focus on. I think we’re entering another new stage here, especially with the algorithm changes to things like Facebook. It’s almost shifting from ‘push out your content’ to highlighting the two-way interaction. We want to use social (media) not only to share our information with you, but from a local news standpoint, we want to know what our readers want to hear from us. We want to know what conversations they are having and we want to be in those conversations with them. So instead of being the business that really doesn’t have a face, we’re now shifting to use social media to put a face on our operation, in hopes of building up trust, credibility, and being able to focus our editorial side and our articles on what people want and need to hear about in their communities.”

What challenges has social media presented?

Rushton- “Oh, there are lots! One of the major challenges, something I always have to make sure I have a good argument for when talking to my bosses, is ‘what is the point of social media? It’s

not paying us to put stuff on there. What's the deal? What's the return on our investment there?' That's been a major challenge, being able to explain that social media is a way we directly engage with our readership, and build that personal relationship. Also figuring out ways to get it to help us, when our newsrooms are as tiny as they get. The argument is always 'we don't have time for social (media)'. Which is part of the reason my job exists, to be able to do that for all of them. But also the challenge is making sure we're using social but we're not overwhelmed by all the different platforms- being very strategic about which ones we use and how to use it most effectively with the limited time we have."

"Our papers have been lucky enough where the publishers decided that my position should exist. That was created to help with that. That's just one of the larger challenges- how do we find time with it with everything else we are doing?"

Any specific anecdotes?

Rusthon- "I try really hard to focus on the positive, because it's very easy to find the negative. One example of the negative is that we like to report crime because people want to know about crime in their local area. Sometimes crime can be a little bit gory or unsettling. I'm very careful about what we do and do not post on social media. Sometimes I'll choose not to post crime updates just because I feel like audiences would not appreciate it. The good things about it are how it sparks conversation and how it can bring the community together. For example, this last fall, in October, we heard all about the fires in Ventura County and the Bay area, but in Northern California, we had a huge, complex fire in Mendocino County. Quite a few people lost their



lives, and it was a very big issue. Mendocino is tucked in the mountainous area up there. We only had one or two papers up there. Other than that, they don't really have very much competition with regards to other news sources, so they were pretty much it. So when those fires happened, the editor of the Ukiah Daily Journal, which is our newspaper, I called her up and said, 'what do you need me to do?' and she said 'I need you to let me take over the Facebook page over for the next week.' I said "Sure. It's all yours, take it." She used that Facebook, as well as their twitter, as a hub for information. They were posting updates from the fire department, police, local representatives explaining what evacuations were needed, where the fires were, and what was going on. People just latched onto our Facebook and social media as a source of information, because there really wasn't much else in that area. That was very, very good, and really connected us with the community in a time of really desperate need."

"Any legal issues that have popped up?"

Rusthon- "Not that I have had in Northern California. I know that our company is watching our social media policy. That will help with things like we've had some internal issues- staff members both on the editorial and advertising and circulation side- having some inappropriate behavior on our Facebook pages, so we've really clamped down on that. We've been very specific as to what you can and cannot do when you are representing the newspaper to the community that you live in. So that's been a bit of an issue, but with regards to outside legal issues, no."

## RESULTS/ANALYSIS

The study was launched in late January 2018 and was concluded on February 25, 2018. It yielded 68 responses, via direct email invitation to Mississippi newspapers and various journalism and communications listservs, such as NICAR-L. Respondents came from eight states, the most coming from Mississippi, the least from Minnesota, Illinois, Alabama, Colorado and Ohio.

In question three, the most commonly used social media platforms are Facebook and Twitter. This finding was echoed in the responses to question seven, where fifty-three point four percent and thirty-five point six percent of respondents identified Facebook and Twitter, respectively, as having increased traffic to their websites.

In question four, adoption of social media platforms by newspapers is still a relatively new concept, with the average use of social media dating back six point eight eight years. Respondents indicated multiple uses for their social media platforms. In question eight, “somewhat disagree” and “disagree” responses were in single digits for each of the statements, including “We use social media as a means to gather information for news stories,” “We use social media as a means to quickly disseminate news and stories,” “We use social media to engage with readers,” “We use social media posts to encourage people to share community opinions,” and “We use social media to increase readership.” As one respondent stated, “It is simply a way to connect with readers/visitors/others. In addition to promoting our content, it has also been hugely successful at building our brand and visibility, as well as trust. And those qualities are reaching not just readers, but sources, legislators and thought-leaders as well.”

The responses to question fourteen indicate a sense of ambivalence as to the overall effectiveness of their uses of social media. Thirty-three point three percent of respondents, the highest percentage, indicated that they “neither agree nor disagree” with the statement, “The use of social media has increased our publication’s circulation.” Similar high responses were recorded in the statements of “The use of social media has not increased our publication’s website traffic,” and “The use of social media has not increased our publication’s advertising revenue.” Despite this, sixty-six point seven percent of respondents recorded positive responses to the statement, “My publication is satisfied with its current use of social media.” As one respondent stated, “While we do use social media as a means of engagement, we do not find that it necessarily helps us in any tangible, monetary way.”

The responses to question thirty indicate an overall enthusiasm and willingness to adopt new innovations in social media. Sixty-six point six percent of respondents indicated positive responses to the statement “I am quick to adopt social media innovations.” One respondent said, “While our publication as a whole isn’t very proactive with social media, I am, and have used it in the past to craft and entire story based on reader opinions that were collected via my Twitter direct messages. I’ve also found that my being proactive on social media has brought a different audience to our online product that we may not have had in the past, given it’s a new market being tapped by our publication likely for the first time.” These sentiments were echoed in the responses to question thirty-two. Sixty percent of respondents recorded positive responses to the statement “I am venturesome and eager to be the first to try new innovations.” Similarly, in response to a statement in question thirty-five, “Social media apps are difficult and complex to learn,” sixty-six point seven percent of respondents recorded a response of varying degrees of disagreement.

Respondents indicated a high rate of personal use of social media. Eighty-four percent of respondents indicated using Facebook “several times per day” or “once per day.”

Overall, the study seems to indicate a general sense of satisfaction with social media use, with a few reservations. As one respondent wrote, “Social media, for all its trapdoors, provides an important way to connect with readers and gauge their reaction to stories. It has become a vital tool for news outlets, when used correctly, and I don’t see that changing in the future.”

## CONCLUSIONS

In conducting this study, the following research questions were posed:

- Since their adoption of social media platforms, has there been a change in newspapers' print circulation, plus or minus?
- Since adopting social media, has there been an effect to newspapers' overall ad sales, both print and online?
- Are there any creative or unusual uses for social media?
- What are newspapers' overall impressions of their use of social media?

In response to the question, "The use of social media has increased our publication's circulation," results seem to indicate that adoption of social media has no perceived effect upon circulation.

In response to the question, "The use of social media has not increased our publication's advertising revenue," results also seem to indicate a general negative trend.

Additionally, in response to the open-ended question, "Is there anything else you wish to add, concerning your paper's use of social media," one respondent stated, "While we do use social media as a means of engagement, we do not find it helps us in any tangible, monetary way." In response to question ten, one respondent wrote, "Our readers prefer to get content for free rather than a paid subscription." Paul Keane, President of the Mississippi Press Association, said, "It seems like the big newspapers are struggling with how to monetize their social media."

In response to the question, "Are there any creative or unusual uses for social media," most of the responses came from the open-ended questions. One respondent wrote, "Most

recently, parents were left out of the loop when a local school shut off their water because of a certain bacteria found in the drinking fountains. We got a hold of the information and published our story on social. Parents were rightfully outraged and the school was held accountable for the communication problem. Also, our paper in Ukiah, CA, used Facebook and Messenger as a hub for emergency information during the Mendocino Complex Fires in the fall of 2017. The editor took over the page and shared updates, stories, evacuation orders, and responded to private messages. It was a primary source for the community.” Another respondent wrote, “We have posted several old photographs that have been successfully identified through social media.” Another added, “When we first started using Facebook about 2010, we did not have a website. Facebook was our de facto website at that time. We have had a website for several years now but we continue to use Facebook and twitter, to the limited extent that we do, for engagement, dissemination and to have that freely visible public presence.” One Mississippi respondent wrote, “Our missing man article in Webster County that was posted to social media helped get a ton more volunteers out looking for him.” Another contributed, “Lots of times we’ve posted content from our schools- football games and other athletic contests, photos of students on a project, videos of school bands performing, etc. Always have gotten great feedback.”

What are newspapers’ overall impressions of their use of social media? In response to question 14, subset 4, “My publication is satisfied with its current use of social media,” the majority of respondent’s indicated that they agreed with the statement.

In response to question 32, subset 1, “I am venturesome and eager to be the first to try new innovations,” a majority of respondents indicated they agreed with the statement. This seems to indicate an overall enthusiasm amongst print journalists for the use of social media.

Overall, the study indicates a general satisfaction with the use of social media by newspapers, although the study indicates that there does not seem to be a tangible correlation between social media use and its effect on either advertising revenue nor circulation. The anecdotal and open-ended questions indicate an enthusiasm for using social media in new and creative ways, and per the Diffusion of Innovations theory, it seems to indicate an eagerness to adopt and explore new technologies as they pertain to social media.

### LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to the editors and reporters of 33 Mississippi newspapers, and others who responded to the survey invitation on NICAR-L and other listservs. The survey was limited to 26 questions. It was feared that having more questions on the survey would cause respondents to become bored or frustrated with it and log out.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

As social media technology evolves, and public opinion on social media changes, further study of this topic is recommended. Of particular interest is how public opinion on social media has been affected by the recent revelations of security breaches and mining of personal information. Does this affect how newspapers view their social media use? Also of interest is the use of various social media platforms by age groups. Another recommendation is study of how dedicated social media specialists' attitudes would differ from other newspaper staffers.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

I am conducting a survey about newspapers' use of social media. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a brief anonymous survey, which should take ten minutes or less.

There is no compensation for participation, and risks associated with your participation are minimal. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalty.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any question, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu). If you have any questions regarding this research or its purposes, contact Dr. Bill DeJournett at [dejou@olemiss.edu](mailto:dejou@olemiss.edu). Completion of this survey signifies your voluntary consent to participate in this research and that you are at least 18 years of age.

By clicking below, I agree to participate in this survey and acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

- I agree

1. Do you work at a paper with a circulation of 50,000 or less?

A. Yes.

B. No

(If no, text box reading, “Thank you your willingness to participate. We are only interested in publications with a circulation of 50,000 or less.)

2. What is your role?

A. Editor

B. Reporter

C. Photographer

D. Columnist

E. Copy Desk

F. Graphic design or layout

G. Social media editor or manager

H. Advertising or marketing

E. Other- Blank text box to specify.

3. To what extent does your publication currently use the following?

A. Facebook

B. Twitter



C. Instagram

D. YouTube

E. WordPress or other blog

F. LinkedIn

D. Other (Specify with open-ended text box)

4. How many years has your organization utilized social media?

(Open-ended text box)

5. How many individuals post social media content in your organization?

(Open-ended text box)

6. Does your organization use social media to direct to or from your main webpage? Yes or no?

7. Which social media platform(s) may have increased traffic to your website?

A. Facebook

B. Twitter

C. Instagram

D. Other (Specify with open-ended text box)

8. Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: (Eight-box likert scale)

A. We use social media as a means to gather information for news stories.

B. We use social media as a means to quickly disseminate news and stories.

C. We use social media to engage with readers.

D. We use social media posts to encourage people to share community opinions.

E. We use social media to increase readership.

10. Can you describe any unusual or unexpected negative effect or event that has occurred due to your use of social media? Open-ended question with text box.

11. Can you describe any positive event that has happened due to your paper's use of social media? Open-ended question with text box.

11. Has your paper ever encountered a legal issue from your use of social media? If yes, please provide an example.

A. Yes

B. No

Corresponding open-ended text box.

12. Is there anything you would like to add concerning your use of social media? Open-ended question with text box.

AGREE/DISAGREE QUESTIONS- Using an eight-point likert scale, the following statements will be evaluated on a scale from strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, no opinion, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree.

1. The use of social media has increased our publication's circulation.
2. The use of social media has not increased our publication's website traffic.
3. The use of social media has not increased our publication's advertising revenue.
4. My publication is satisfied with its current use of social media.

Question 29- Why does your organization use (or not use) social media?

Question 30- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: (Eight-point likert scale)

1. I am quick to adopt social media innovations.

2. I find social media cumbersome.
3. I am resistant to changes and innovations in social media.
4. I only adopt social media in my job when absolutely necessary.

Question 32- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements: (Eight-point likert scale)

1. I am venturesome and eager to be the first to try new innovations.
2. I often adopt social media innovations and try to influence others to do so.
3. I am willing to follow the lead of others in adopting social media in my job.
4. I need to be convinced of the advantages of social media by colleagues.
5. I am suspicious of social media.
6. I am always on the lookout for new social media features and apps.
7. My opinions about social media are respected by my peers.
8. I use social media in my job but do not attempt to influence others to do so.

4. What is your gender?

- A. Female
- B. Male
- C. Prefer not to say

5. How many days a week is your paper published?

A. 1

B. 2

C. 3

D. 4

E. 5

F. 6

G. 7

5A. Does your publication publish an online edition?

A. Yes- online only.

B. Yes- online and print.

C. No.

6. Would you be willing to participate in an interview on this topic? If so, please contact me at [dejou@olemiss.edu](mailto:dejou@olemiss.edu); or phone at 662-816-0866. By contacting me, you agree to waive your anonymity for this study.

7. Is there anything else you would like to add that you think would be relevant to this topic?

(Open-ended text box)

## APPENDIX B: RESULTS/RAW DATA

Q2- What are your current roles at your paper? Check all that apply.

Editor- 18.9%

Reporter- 21.3% (High)

Photographer- 10.2%

Columnist- 6.3%

Copy desk- 4.7% (Low)

Graphic design or layout- 9.4%

Social media editor or manager- 13.4%

Advertising or marketing- 7.9%

Other- 7.9%

Total- 127

Other-

Associate Publisher

Digital producer

Editorial assistant

Publisher/Owner

Publisher (2)

Owner/Publisher/Editor

Owner and Publisher



Table i-Q3- To what extent does your publication currently use the following?

#	Question	Several times per day	Once per day	Several times per week	Once per week	Once per month	Never	Total
1	Facebook	70.6%	2.0%	19.6%	5.9%	0.0%	2.0%	51
2	Twitter	64.6%	4.2%	8.3%	2.1%	8.3%	12.5%	48
3	Instagram	9.1%	6.8%	27.3%	4.5%	6.8%	45.5%	44
4	YouTube	7.0%	0.0%	7.0%	7.0%	20.9%	58.1%	43
5	Wordpress or other blog	16.3%	4.7%	11.6%	4.7%	0.0%	62.8%	43
6	Linkedin	4.7%	7.0%	2.3%	4.7%	9.3%	72.1%	43
7	Other social media app	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	10.0%	85.0%	20

Other social media apps:

Snapchat (2)

Q4- How many years has your publication utilized social media?

40 responses. Low- 2. High- 15. Average- 6.88

Q5- How many individuals post social media content for your organization?

Low- 1. High- 20. Average- 3.83

Q6- Does your organization use social media to refer to or from your main page?

Yes- 83.3%

No- 16.7%

Total- 42

Q7- Which social media platform(s) may have increased traffic to your website? Check all that apply.

Facebook- 53.4%

Twitter- 35.6%

Instagram- 8.2%

Other platforms (specify) 2.7%

Total- 73

Other platforms-

Reddit (2)

Table ii-Q8- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	We use social media as a means to gather information for news stories	26.8%	24.4%	34.1%	0.0%	7.3%	7.3%	0.0%	2.6
2	We use social media as a means to quickly disseminate news and stories.	43.9%	31.7%	12.2%	4.9%	4.9%	2.4%	0.0%	2
3	We use social media to engage with readers	31.7%	36.6%	24.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	0.0%	2.1
4	We use social media posts to encourage people to share community opinions.	17.1%	29.3%	24.4%	19.5%	4.9%	4.9%	0.0%	2.8
5	We use social media to increase readership.	41.5%	24.4%	19.5%	4.9%	7.3%	2.4%	0.0%	2.2

Q12- Has your paper ever encountered a legal issue from use of social media? If yes, please provide an example.

No- 97.0%

Yes- 3.0%

Total- 33

Table iii-Q 14- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	The use of social media has increased our publication's circulation.	12.1%	9.1%	15.2%	33.3%	12.1%	12.1%	6.1%	3.8
2	The use of social media has not increased our publication's website traffic.	6.1%	18.2%	6.1%	24.2%	9.1%	15.2%	21.2%	4.4
3	The use of social media has not increased our publication's advertising revenue.	12.1%	30.3%	12.1%	21.2%	6.1%	9.1%	9.1%	3.4
4	My publication is satisfied with its current use of social media.	3.0%	27.3%	36.4%	12.1%	6.1%	6.1%	9.1%	3.5

Table iv-Q 30- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	I am quick to adopt social media innovations.	12.1%	33.3%	21.2%	6.1%	12.1%	12.1%	3.0%	3.2
2	I find social media cumbersome.	6.3%	3.1%	28.1%	15.6%	18.8%	21.9%	6.3%	4.3
3	I am resistant to changes and innovations in social media.	0.0%	12.5%	18.8%	9.4%	15.6%	34.4%	9.4%	4.7
4	I only adopt social media in my job when absolutely necessary.	3.1%	12.5%	12.5%	6.3%	15.6%	34.4%	15.6%	4.8

Table v-Q 32- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

#	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	I am venturesome and eager to be the first to try new innovations.	10.0%	20.0%	30.0%	16.7%	16.7%	6.7%	0.0%	3.3
2	I often adopt social media innovations and try to influence others to do so.	10.0%	16.7%	16.7%	13.3%	20.0%	23.3%	0.0%	3.9
3	I am willing to follow the lead of others in adopting social media in my job.	6.7%	26.7%	40.0%	13.3%	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3
4	I need to be convinced of the advantages of social media by my colleagues.	3.3%	6.7%	10.0%	23.3%	13.3%	26.7%	16.7%	4.8
5	I am suspicious of social media.	10.0%	6.7%	13.3%	20.0%	13.3%	23.3%	13.3%	4.4
6	I am always on the lookout for new social media features and apps.	12.9%	9.7%	6.5%	29.0%	16.1%	19.4%	6.5%	4.1
7	My opinions about social media are respected by my peers.	6.7%	33.3%	23.3%	26.7%	3.3%	6.7%	0.0%	3.1
8	I use social media in my job but do not attempt to influence others to do so.	0.0%	20.0%	26.7%	16.7%	20.0%	13.3%	3.3%	3.9

Table vi-Q 35- Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

#	Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
1	I will use social media innovations in my job, but only out of necessity.	6.7%	3.3%	20.0%	13.3%	16.7%	36.7%	3.3%	4.5
2	The social media apps I use in my job are consistent with my existing values and needs.	6.7%	40.0%	30.0%	13.3%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8
3	Social media apps are difficult and complex to learn.	0.0%	3.3%	10.0%	20.0%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	5.2
4	I often need more time to experiment with social media before I use it with my job.	0.0%	10.0%	23.3%	10.0%	13.3%	33.3%	10.0%	4.7
5	Using social media has enhanced my image or status at work.	10.0%	13.3%	10.0%	26.7%	6.7%	30.0%	3.3%	4.1

Q 20- How many years have you worked at your present publication?

30 responses. Low- Six months. High- 40. Average- 14.9

Q 33- How many years have you worked in the newspaper industry?

30 responses. Low- 3 years. High- 51 years. Average- 23.0

Q 21- What is your gender?

60% Male

40% Female

30 responses.

Q 34- What is your age?

29 responses. High- 63. Low- 24. Average- 45.3

Q 40- How many hours a week do you work for the paper, on average?

29 responses. Low- 20. High- 70-80. Average- 47.4

Q 37- In what state is your paper located?

Mississippi- 21



California- 2

Georgia- 2

Alabama- 1

Colorado- 1

Illinois- 1

Minnesota- 1

Ohio- 1

Table vii-Q 38- To what extent do you personally use the following apps?

#	Question	Several times per day	Once per day	Several times per week	Once per week	Once per month	Never	Total
1	Facebook	70.0%	14.0%	8.0%	0.0%	2.0%	6.0%	50
2	Twitter	45.8%	10.4%	8.3%	6.3%	6.3%	22.9%	48
3	Instagram	29.5%	15.9%	6.8%	11.4%	4.5%	31.8%	44
4	Linkedin	4.5%	13.6%	9.1%	15.9%	31.8%	25.0%	44
5	YouTube	21.3%	6.4%	21.3%	25.5%	17.0%	8.5%	47
6	WordPress or other blog	11.6%	9.3%	9.3%	7.0%	7.0%	55.8%	43
7	Snapchat	19.0%	9.5%	7.1%	9.5%	4.8%	50.0%	42
8	Pinterest	10.0%	5.0%	15.0%	5.0%	7.5%	57.5%	40
9	Other social media app	9.5%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%	9.5%	76.2%	21

Other social media app- Tweetdeck

Q 22- How many days a week is your paper published?

29 responses. High- 7. Low- 1. Average- 3.5

Q 24- How many days a week is your publication published online?

High- "24/7". Low- 1.

## VITA

William DeJournett is originally from Americus, Georgia, where he attended high school. He possesses degrees in music from Jacksonville State University, Northern Illinois University, and the University of Mississippi.

DeJournett served in the public schools of Alabama and Georgia before attending graduate school, and subsequently served as the band director at Colorado State University, Elon University, and since the fall of 2003 at the University of Mississippi. During his career, DeJournett has published numerous articles in music and band journals, and has had an active career as a clinician and adjudicator.

In the summer of 2011, DeJournett was selected by the Taiwanese government to cover an international band festival in Chiayi City, Taiwan, due to his extensive writing background.

In the fall of 2013, DeJournett began pursuing the Master of Arts degree from the Meek School of Journalism and New Media at the University of Mississippi. Since then, he has written for several publications, including the Oxford Citizen, HottyToddy.com, and most recently for Oxford Magazine.