Social Media Editors in The Newsroom:
A Survey of Roles and Functions

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Abstract

Social media editors are now common in large news organizations. Different from website editors, these journalists focus on creating conversations with the audience. Their place in the newsroom, however, is developing. This paper surveyed 13 social media editors at Canadian news organizations to determine their roles and functions. It concludes that social media editors were challenging the traditional gate-keeping function of news editors by representing audience interests in the newsroom.

Introduction

Social media use is booming in Canada, as elsewhere. In 2011, Canadians increased their time spent using social media services by 32% over the previous year (comScore, 2012). They are sharing information and using their social networks to determine the importance and relevance of news. They are interacting with reporters and editors on Twitter. The result is a weakening of news organizations' system of editorial control and, consequently, their traditional gatekeeping function (Hermida, 2012).

To meet their audience on these new platforms, news organizations have hired a small but influential band of editors in recent years to strengthen the relationship with their online audience. Dubbed social media editors or online community editors, these journalists aim to empower news consumers as participants. They strive to build online interaction by inviting comment and spreading the distribution of stories (Zak, 2012).

These editors describe themselves in media interviews as part listener, teacher, cheerleader and collaborator, helping bring "eyeballs and traffic" to news sites (Gleason, 2010). By answering questions, seeking verification and provoking debate, the social media editor has become the "multi-tasking genie of the newsroom" who puts the journalistic method on public display (Travers, 2011).

News organizations are still trying to determine the optimal role of these editors in the newsroom. Many media outlets have centralized their social media efforts in recent years. But in 2010 the New York Times moved to diversity responsibility for social media among its many reporters (Tenore, 2010). This may become a permanent initiative, negating the need for a dedicated social media editor altogether (Garber, 2011).

Consequently, the newness of the position and its changing role have some editors themselves lamenting their role as perceived "Twitter monkeys" who exist outside traditional newsroom structures (Jenkins, 2012; Sonderman, 2012).

Overall, there is a lack of data — including an absence of academic studies — regarding the nature of these positions in news organizations. The jobs themselves are new creations but are rapidly becoming mainstream (Zak, 2012).

This study involves interviews with 13 people tasked as social media editor or online community editor at Canadian news organizations. It aims to help news organizations better implement these duties in their own newsrooms.

RQ1: How do social media editors at Canadian news organizations describe their own role?

RQ2: What functions do they perform?

Literature

In 2008 and 2009, large media organizations such as the BBC, the New York Times, USA Today created social media editor positions (BBC, 2009; Luckie, 2010; Jennifer Preston, 2009; Silverman, 2009; USA Today, 2008). Executives identified a need to create two-way conversations with their online audience as a means of building loyalty as audience and readership declined (McLellan, 2009). The goal was to be more relevant to their audience and ultimately strengthen their journalism (BBC, 2009).

The job of social media editor is still relatively new. In a list compiled by Columbia University Columbia University journalism professor Sree Sreenivasan, there were 89 social media editors in North America in July 2011 (Sreenivasan, 2011). The proliferation of such

editors is due to a recognition among news organizations that they depend on social networks for a substantial portion of their audience (Pew, 2011). As a result, social media editors, while not everywhere, are now common in large news organizations (Vocus, 2011).

According to Newman (2009), social media activity in many newsrooms began informally with journalists dabbling in Twitter and Facebook while doing unrelated editorial jobs. Over time, employers defined these efforts in a formal job description for a social media editor. Newman (2009) states:

> Social media started in most organisations as a series of bottom–up experiments, but these are now being complemented with top–down initiatives and the allocation of specific roles to coordinate activity (for example the appointment of social media editors, Twitter correspondents, evangelists). (p. 23)

Many news organizations have consequently assigned social media editors a grab bag of responsibilities over time (Silverman, 2009). As a result, news organizations define the role differently and use different job titles to refer to similar responsibilities (Ellis, 2011). They might use the title social media editor or communities editor — but it's just as likely the actual words "social media" are absent from the title (Sreenivasan, 2010).

These editors may have some of the duties of an online or website editor responsible for posting editorial content to their organization's news site. But social media editors are usually more focused on building audience interaction through a news organization's online comments section, and its presence in social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. They might host live chats, monitor social networks for breaking news and emerging trends, and help reporters find sources (Luckie, 2010).

The editors frequently have the inward-focused role of integrating social media into editorial practices and convincing staff of its value in the newsroom (Ellis, 2011). Their outward-facing duties include building communities, and helping to start and manage conversations

(Bradshaw, 2008). In breaking news situations, they can be "debunking editors," aiming to stem the flow of misinformation in the form of hoaxes or rumour (Myers, 2011).

These editors may be faceless entities behind an organization's Twitter or Facebook feed. However, successful social media editors inject their personality into their online roles and use this personal connection to build a relationship with their audience (Ellis, 2011; Millington, 2011).

Social media advocates have called on news organizations to redesign their editorial workflow to place social media editors in a central position in the newsroom (Alejandro, 2010; Sreenivasan, 2010). LaMothe (2011) argues community managers need to be at the beginning of the editorial process, where they can select and develop content for specific communities. Such integration, however, represents a substantial overhaul of traditional newsroom culture (Cherubini, 2011).

This paper examines the role of social media editors in the context of gatekeeping theory, proposed in 1947 by psychologist Kurt Lewin.

Gatekeeping conceptualizes the role of editors as influencing the selection of news content through their personal preferences and assumptions. David Manning White (1950) adapted Lewin's theory to the news industry, analyzing the choices made by an editor he dubbed "Mr. Gates." This editor made "highly subjective value-judgments" — ones "based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations" (p. 386).

The Internet has presented a challenge to this function, however, with online journalists introducing audience data and audience comments to counter the subjectivity of editors' choices for news content.

Brill (2001) found online journalists were bringing website metrics into the newsroom and using those numbers to decide the types stories they spent time on. She found online journalists were concerned with "competition and appealing to a large audience" — traits she identified as a marketing function. These journalists, she said, listened to the audience and "have responded to what they have learned in audience tracking by setting their production schedules around those habits" (p. 37).

In a study of political campaign coverage in 2004, Singer (2006) found an "evolution in online journalists' thinking" that conceptualized the production of news as a shared experience with the audience. She found that online editors were adapting to the participatory nature of the Internet and "reconceptualizing their gatekeeping role ... toward a partnership between users and journalists" (p. 275).

Similarly, Cassidy (2005) noted a shift in the roles of online journalists whereby they saw themselves less as interpreters and investigators than their print counterparts. The audience, he suggested, has "an increased role in online news production, and online journalists may place greater importance on the goals and values of (this group) when assessing newsworthiness" (p. 273).

Methodology

In this study, telephone interviews were chosen over participant observation for data collection because the distance between subjects was expected to be great and the author was interested in how the subjects viewed their own role and function — an inquiry adequately served by a telephone interview.

There is no directory of social media editors in Canada so the first task in this project was to find them.

The news organizations chosen for this study were English-language newspapers, broadcast outlets and websites that produced news on a daily basis. The author's goal was to identify staff members at these organizations whose job was solely or substantially concerned with advancing the organization's editorial interests in social media. This type of emerging position was likely to exist at major news organizations or online-only outlets of any size. Consequently, the author started with the list of daily newspaper paid circulation levels recorded by the Canadian Newspaper Association (2010).

A natural divide in daily average circulation between large- and small-circulation papers appeared at 100,000 copies. Twelve newspapers had daily circulations above that mark. Another 80 had less than that, but few papers fell in the range of 50,000 to 99,000. The majority of papers in this bottom tier had a daily circulation between 1,000 and 20,000 copies.

Using the list of the upper 12 papers, the author then added the three major English-language broadcast chains in the country and one online-only outlet that produced original news reporting on a daily basis. The resulting sample was 16 news organizations.

The author then checked to see if these 16 news organizations displayed a level of activity suitable for a study that would inquire deeply into their use of social media. All of the news organizations were engaged in regular and recent posts to the two most popular social services — Twitter and Facebook.

The author identified the survey participants by phoning the 16 newsrooms and asking for the name of the person charged with the responsibilities of social media or online community editor in their newsroom. The author then contacted that person via email, described the study

and invited them to participate in a telephone interview. All were promised anonymity in order to ensure candid responses.

Participants were asked 11 questions about their roles, functions and goals regarding social media use. They were asked to talk about their own experiences at the news organization, not to represent the views of their employer.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then open-coded to reveal key themes, in a standard manner of qualitative analysis (Neuman, 2003, p. 442). The author also used biographical information from LinkedIn profiles — which all of the interview subjects possessed.

Findings

Fourteen of the 16 news organizations that were contacted responded to the study invitation.

Two candidates at newspapers didn't respond to the initial correspondence or a follow-up request. At a broadcast chain, one senior producer who did respond said his organization did not have a person charged with the duties of social media editor that would be suitable for this study. These three organizations were excluded from the study.

Both national broadcast organizations that participated in the study referred the author to a person in the organization's headquarters charged with overseeing online communities — and did not offer social media editors in regional outlets for an interview.

As a result, 13 people — all from different news organizations — agreed to participate. It is important to note, however, that seven of these 13 news outlets were members of the same chain. While this relationship posed the risk that half the participants would offer similar

responses, the participants offered evidence that they conducted their social media activity with considerable independence from their chain's head office.

The interviews were conducted between May 16, 2011 and June 22, 2011. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Eight of the participants were women (five were men).

Age and Experience

The editors fell into two distinct categories of preparation for the job. One would expect the relatively new field of social media to attract younger workers, and that was indeed the case.

A majority (eight) of the 13 participants could be termed junior editors. They were in their late 20s or early 30s, and had less than five years experience in a newsroom. Most members of this group possessed a journalism degree or diploma, and almost all possessed another degree as well. They typically worked as a reporter for two or three years before joining the digital unit of their news organization and taking on social media responsibilities.

The other five participants could be described as senior editors. They were over the age of 35 and assumed social media responsibilities following a career of at least eight years, usually as a reporter, editor or broadcast producer. Nearly all of the members of this group had a journalism degree as well.

Interestingly, almost all social media editors had arrived at their positions by proving their mettle at traditional reporting positions. Only two members, one from each group, did not — and both came from a background in project management at a news organization. The results of this study suggest that the social media editors produce little original reporting and spend much of their time on a computer. But the participants' experience gave little indication their journalistic chops were weak or that they were "computer nerds." To the contrary, the editors' experience suggested a high level of journalistic ability and skill dealing with people.

Roles

Interviews began by asking participants to describe the social media efforts of their organization — where they fit into the newsroom organizational structure, where their desks were and how many people worked with them in social media. The author used the answers to better understand their place in the newsroom.

Asked to describe their role in the newsroom, many respondents prefaced their remarks with a statement like this one made by Editor 10: "I'm kind of a point person. I do a lot of things." (Personal communication, May 30).

Some of the respondents likened their role that of an emissary or missionary bringing new ideas to the newsroom. Said one: "I guess I'm a bit of a liaison, a bit of an ambassador" (Editor 6, personal communication, May 20, 2011). Another said, "My role in terms of social media is to push the agenda, to evangelize. To provide best-use case studies, both internally with my digital team or with the local reporters" (Editor 11, personal communication, May 30, 2011).

A theme of their comments was that they saw themselves as working in a newsroom culture that was at odds — even hostile — to their social media practices. Further, some allied themselves with the audience's news values. One editor described her role in story meetings as representing the public's view of which stories are important.

> My role in that meeting — which is kind of a new role — is like a reader champion. I'm talking about what is tracking well with our readers. What readers are interested in. What readers are talking about. To give our print editors a sense of what's going to play well on the front page. That's a departure from traditional A1 meetings where a web person might not do that much talking. (Editor 1, personal communication, May 16, 2011)

Another saw her role as partner with the public in the news creation process: "We're trying to build camaraderie with the audience so we're not just seen as a news outlet trying to make money" (Editor 8, personal communication, May 26, 2011).

Four editors referred to the role of strategist — planning long-term targets for audience numbers and coverage of news features. Three cited the role of trainer in the newsroom, helping colleagues get started with social media and answering questions.

To get a fuller sense of their role, the author asked participants to reflect on their conversations with audience members and to comment on what they believed the audience wanted from them. While this question asked participants to comment on a collective mindset outside of their own experience, the intent was to prompt participants to consider the role they played for the audience, given their extensive contact with them (see Tasks).

Two respondents said their audience wanted them to be a listener. "They want to be paid attention to," said one (Editor 9, personal communication, May 27, 2011). Editor 4 concurred, saying, "The audience wants to have their voice heard" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011).

This latter comment contained the suggestion that listening be accompanied by action. When audience members see their suggestions realized in a story update, a second editor said, the benefits in reader loyalty are substantial.

Two other participants said audience members wanted them to be a window into the organization, available to answer questions about editorial content. Said Editor 10:

> Transparency. A lot of them like the 'behind the scenes.' … A lot of times readers wonder what you're leaving out. If they have questions to ask [it matters that] we're easily reachable. (Personal communication, May 30, 2011)

Editor 11 cited transparency as well, but in terms of the organization's interest in the audience: "They want to know that [our social media use] isn't a gimmick" (Personal communication, May 30, 2011).

Two other editors said the audience wanted them simply to be real. They phrased it in different ways, but the editors said audience members wanted them to have a sense of humor and to be spontaneous.

"I think trusting the person behind the account matters. And also just fun — I think a lot of people want to engage playfully and not terribly seriously" (Editor 12, personal communication, June 15, 2011).

Editor 13 said audience members are often initially startled by his occasionally "goofy" comments but many take the opportunity to pursue a conversation.

> You get a mixed reaction from people -- they are surprised by it, even though we've been doing it for a while. But also a lot of other people appreciate the attempt of making it more personal … In our daily offerings we tend to be an organization that takes itself more seriously than it should at times. (Personal communication, June 22, 2011)

Tasks

The author asked participants to categorize the percentage of time they spent on tasks focused inward on the organization (for example, training) versus tasks focused outward (such as replying to audience questions). The aim of the question was to gauge how the editors balanced organizational needs and audience demands.

Ten of the 13 editors answered the question. Three editors said the breakdown was an even split. Four indicated they were turned mostly inward in their tasks. Three said they spent most of their time on outward-focused tasks relating to audience engagement. Many of the

participants, however, indicated they wanted to spend more of their efforts on building and interacting with the audience (see Challenges).

Participants were then asked to describe the tasks they undertake in a typical day. A list of the ones cited by more than one editor appears in Table 1.

Table 1: Tasks

Task	Done By (# of 13 respondents)
Training/supporting colleagues	12
Putting editorial content on Twitter/FB	11
Replying/engaging with audience	11
Strategizing long-term	8
Attending story meetings	7
Conducting online chats	7
Managing online comments	6
Monitoring social media	3
Working with community bloggers	2

Editor 9 broke her day down broadly as: "a bucket of editorial, a bucket of training and a bucket of product development and strategy" (Personal communication, May 27, 2011). The majority of respondents referred to these three categories in their answers, while weighting them differently.

Twelve participants said a component of their job was supporting colleagues in their use of social media. This took the form of tasks such as training, conducting lunch-and-learns, writing how-to guides and answering questions (Table 1).

Eleven respondents said they were responsible for posting content to social media services such as Twitter and Facebook on a regular basis. One might expect that all social media editors would do this. But two participants said another staff member performed this function.

Eleven participants said a component of their workday included interacting with the audience. The described it using phrases such as "getting more discussion" (Editor 1), "responding to comments" (Editor 6), "attempting to build a conversation" (Editor 7), and "playing Devil's Advocate to facilitate debate and discussion" (Editor 3).

The eight editors who cited strategizing as a task referred to work such as "working on upgrades, finding a better way to offer community tools on our site. (Editor 6, personal communication, May 20, 2011)" and determining "where we want to go in the future and how we can tie social media to what we do in our print product." (Editor 3, personal communication, May 18, 2011).

Seven editors referred to attending story meetings or talking with fellow journalists about story selection and use of social media. Editor 8 mentioned "talking to story managers about ideas that are coming up through social media sites" (Personal communication, May 26, 2011). Editor 10 referred to "watching the news and identifying things we should go bigger on or not going bigger on" (Personal communication, May 30, 2011). Editor 3 stated: "I'd say 2-3 times a day we step back and say what else can we do with this stories – how can we incorporate social media into them" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011).

Six referred to using online chats and, among them, Editor 6 talked specifically about working with moderators.

Many of the participants referred indirectly in the interview to monitoring social media traffic for trends. However, only three mentioned this activity explicitly when asked about tasks. They cited "watching trend maps" (Editor 1) and "monitoring Twitter lists" (Editor 8).

The two who mentioned working with community bloggers said they recently started this as a chain-wide initiative.

Goals

All of the respondents referred generally to goals such as building community and fostering discussion. One editor said building trust was a specific goal. Editor 12 talked about the ideal news outlet "as something trusted and familiar, and also friendly and receptive to ideas and questions" (Editor 12, personal communication, June 15, 2011). Two other editors described the goal of a community built on trust: one where members share information with editors and add their own content. Editor 3 said she wanted to build a community where "people want to come to us [with information]" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011). Editor 11 said, "I'd like our organization to be a playground where the community can share stories and build on news stories themselves" (Personal communication, May 30, 2011). The three talked about the aim of humanizing the news organization and changing its image from an institution to collection of people.

Another two editors mentioned an aim of injecting more personality and playfulness into their efforts. "I want people to look at our stuff and say, hey, there's a real person behind there … because we're having fun with it," said Editor 8 (Personal communication, May 26, 2011). Similarly, Editor 13 said: "I really want our audience to remember that it's real people sending these things out" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011).

One editor's goal was to better represent the audience's wishes in editorial meetings. She wanted editors to pay special attention to the stories that resonate with readers. Editors might not necessarily reject story ideas that don't, she said, but audience interest evident in social media analytics should be a factor in every editorial decision.

> What we think is important or relevant isn't necessarily what the public thinks is important or relevant. So we do our darnedest to make sure we're the people at the table who saying 'actually this is what people are discussing.' (Editor 9, personal communication, May 27, 2011)

Tools

The participants were asked to list the specific tools or social media services they used in their job. These are itemized in Table 2.

Table 2: Tools

Tool/Service	Used By (# of respondents of 11)
Facebook	13
Twitter	13
Storify (Social media storytelling)	9
CoverItLive/ScribbleLive (Live blogging)	8
Flickr (Photo sharing)	5
Tumblr (Visual blog)	5
Foursquare (Geo-location)	4
Dipity (Timelines)	3
Linkedin (Business network)	2
Instagram (Photo sharing)	1

The list reflects a standard toolkit of online journalism services. It also shows adoption of some relatively new tools: the social media storytelling service Storify, the micro-blogging platform Tumblr and the location-based social network Foursquare.

In fact, the interviews reflected tepid interest in Foursquare: none of the participants cited it in descriptions of their daily tasks or in anecdotes pertaining to their work. By contrast, nine respondents said they had used Storify and four mentioned it in anecdotes relating to successful initiatives. Two respondents said they wanted to try Tumblr, but hadn't yet. One editor who had tried Tumblr was enthusiastic:

> It has been successful, not in terms of getting followers, but in terms of introducing ourselves. What 15-year-old reads a newspaper? I think that number is quite small. They might not even go to a news website. They're getting that in their Facebook feed or word of mouth. So it's introducing ourselves to new people that might not come to us all the time. And it's letting them know, hey, we exist. We're not your grandpa's newspaper. (Editor 8, personal communication, May 26, 2011)

Two editors said they faced a significant problem in using too many social services at one time. Said Editor 9: "There are big opportunities for Facebook and Twitter. But you can get distracted and you can do too much. So it's about picking the tools that are working. Get really good at them and move on" (Personal communication, May 27, 2011).

Editor 11 suggested that using a service poorly was worse than not using it all:

> [We] try not to get people distracted by the bells and whistles … if you have a Foursquare account and if you don't use for six months and it wilts away, you're doing more harm to your brand then if you hadn't started it at all. (Personal communication, May 30, 2011)

Success

Participants were asked how they knew they were successful in their social media efforts. The answers were diverse. For two editors, the answer was simply when the analytics numbers were up — website visits, follower or friend counts, and time spent on the site.

"The more readers the better -- period," said Editor 6. "No one is going to tell you the key to success is not having a ton of readers" (Personal communication, May 20, 2011). Editor 7 concurred: "We look for the hard numbers" (Personal communication, May 25, 2011).

Editor 12 was more nuanced, but also more guarded about using less-tangible benchmarks:

> I personally rely on feedback from Twitter and Facebook. It doesn't sound that great on paper — but you can feel in people's reactions when something does or doesn't work. That's what I've been trying to rely on. But I'll admit that not much of a science yet. (Personal communication, June 15, 2011)

Two other editors cited less measureable factors of tone and quality of feedback as being an important measure. Said Editor 10:

> It's really great when something you do generates a debate. When it starts a conversation and it's intelligent and it continues — that's a success too, even if it doesn't get big readership. Seeing people feel passionately about it, whether it's something negative or positive is a sign of success. (Personal communication, May 30, 2011)

A victory for Editor 8 was when an audience member acknowledged her humanity: "When someone says, I can tell there is a person behind there. When people start to notice and they bring it up to you" (Editor 8, personal communication, May 26, 2011).

A final editor's measure was personal, however, and concerned the level of respect accorded by her newsroom colleagues. For this editor, success will have occurred when journalists in more traditional roles treat the members of her social media team as equal partners in the news gathering process: "When we no longer have to fight to be at the [editorial] table" (Editor 9, personal communication, May 27, 2011).

Engagement

The author asked participants to define a term used frequently in discussions of social media use: engagement. Used often alongside "conversation" and "discussion," the word appears in the literature to have different meanings to different people. Many of the study participants used the word themselves in the interviews and the author prompted them to explain what exactly they meant. He first asked them if engagement was, in fact, something they strived for — they all said it was.

For three editors, the meaning of engagement concerned hard numbers. For Editor 4 it was strictly the "amount of feedback and the percentage of people offering it" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011).

Editor 13 offered a similar view, saying: "I think all it means is you want people on your site longer than anybody else's site. In a cynical way, that's what it's about" (Personal communication, June 22, 2011). Editor 9 viewed engagement in much the same way: "At the very basics, it's time spent and pages consumed — that's a real hard measure" (Personal communication, May 27, 2011).

For Editor 11 and Editor 12, the definition included talking — and paying attention. For Editor 10, engagement occurred when an audience member took an action such as sharing a story in social media or commenting on the website.

Two other editors saw engagement occurring when a reader didn't just communicate with them, or with the institution generally, but when they began talking to each other. Editor 3 stated:

> It's when we can move past people talking to us and get them talking to each other — when people start planning action and forming groups and meeting up to talk about these things. (Personal communication, May 18, 2011)

Editor 8 concurred, saying, "It's also getting them to talk with each other … We might not even be involved with them directly" (Personal communication, May 26, 2011).

Challenges

The author asked each participant to relate the challenges in their job. The goal was to prompt each participant to reflect on the tensions in matching roles and tasks. Two clear themes emerged in the answers: a lack of time and reluctance on the part of newsroom colleagues to embrace social media.

"Teaching old dogs new tricks," said Editor 3. "There's a lot of skepticism" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011).

Similar answers included "getting people on board" (Editor 11), "trying to change mindsets" (Editor 4) and "old people!" (Editor 2).

Other editors expressed frustration at being unable to effectively balance inquires from their audience with organizational demands for training and support, and the stream of news they needed to post to Twitter and Facebook.

"I'm only one person and there's room to do so much more," said Editor 6. "It's really one of those 'hours in the day kind of things'" (Personal communication, May 20, 2011).

"Resources for sure," said Editor 10. "We don't have a big staff. We have an older staff so training is a big thing" (Personal communication, May 30, 2011).

For Editor 9, the challenge was inserting the wishes of the audience into the newsroom agenda. Assignment editors generally pursue stories because they believe the stories are important. This editor said she has the analytical data each morning to determine if audience members are reading — or caring about — a story.

"It's being brave enough to say 'No, *these* are the most important stories of the day.'" (Editor 9, personal communication, May 27, 2011).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the 1990s-era stereotype of the Internet team operating independently in the corner of the newsroom is long gone. The study paints a picture of Canadian social media editors who are integrated into the editorial workflow of the newsroom: working closely with individual reporters and meeting regularly with assignment editors to shape their site's content.

While many indicated they feel hampered by the "Twitter monkey" label identified by Jenkins (2012), there is little evidence of isolation from traditional newsroom structures. They have desks at the centre of the newsroom and they are active participants in story meetings. Almost all have risen through established journalism ranks to obtain their current positions.

However, a majority still feels outside the newsroom culture. They fight an editorial agenda guided by intuitive judgment more than data. They deal with skepticism from colleagues about the relevance of social media. They fight to assert the value of conversing with the audience, not simply reporting on them.

They aim, in many ways, to challenge traditional norms of the newsroom. They want their colleagues to spend more time talking with the audience. And they want the audience to see them — and their colleagues — as lively and personable, not faceless and dispassionate.

Many see themselves as serving two masters: their newsroom superiors and also the audience — an evolution observed by Singer (2006). A significant number are finding the confidence to side with the audience on many issues and push their interests in story meetings — a further sign that the traditional gate-keeping function of news editors identified by Hermida

(2012) is eroding. How they resolve conflicts between these sometimes-opposing agendas will be a crucial topic for future research.

The editors place a high value on building conversation with their audience but they spend much of their day on tasks such as strategizing and supporting colleagues. In this way, there is a disconnect between how they envision their role and what they typically do.

They have their hands on multiple tools and they strive to integrate new ones into their workflow. However, a significant number of them worry about spreading their efforts too thinly among the diverse social services — creating a poor experience for the audience.

Similar to Brill (2001)'s early observation, some see their success in audience data — hard traffic figures they can use to justify their efforts to superiors. Others see victories in the less-tangible aspects of smart comments or lively conversation. These different standards suggest a tension of qualitative versus quantitative pursuits.

In short, this study reveals social media editors in transition, coping with a rapidly changing news environment and facing the pressures of colleagues' demands and audience inquiries. They are trying to remove themselves as the social media bottleneck in their organizations by training colleagues in new software and in new attitudes toward the audience. But they find it a difficult task.

The influence of social media editors is growing, and along with it the influence of the audience they represent. This greater audience role challenges the traditional gate-keeping function of news editors, as website traffic data and reader comments influence the types of stories journalists cover and the manner in which they cover them. Canadian social media editors envision a new partnership with the audience but, at present, struggle to identify how that partnership will work.

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