



Using Short-Form Video in the Multimedia Journalism Classroom

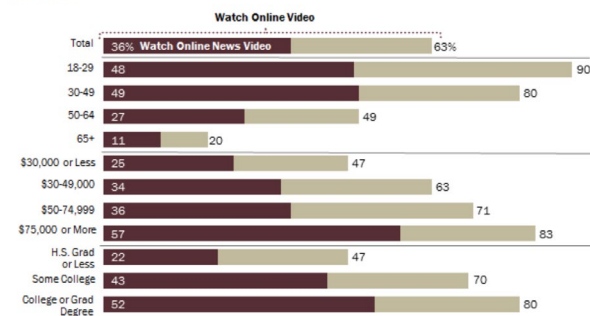
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More adults are watching news video, and at the same time online attention spans are shrinking. It's no wonder several major news outlets have started experimenting with Instagram, Vine and Tout videos. The video social networks have tight time limits—15 seconds for Instagram and Tout, and six seconds for Vine. The demand for short videos creates a challenge for journalists to be efficient with images, words and their audience's time.

That direct and punchy storytelling is now a requirement of journalism graduates. That's why I've started having my students dissect, evaluate and emulate good video blurbs from these social media platforms.

Young, Educated, Affluent Most Likely to Watch Online News Video

Young, Educated, Affluent Most Likely to Watch Online News Video
% U.S. Adults



Source: Pew Research Center 2013 Digital Video Survey
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The Video Trend

Today 36 percent of U.S. adults watch news videos—up from 26 percent in 2007, according to [2014 figures from the Pew Research Journalism Project](#). When you look at just smartphone owners, or just younger re-

spondents, the numbers were higher.

More than half—53 percent—of smartphone owners reported watching online news videos in the survey. Forty-eight percent of respondents ages 18-29 and 49 percent of respondents ages 30-49 said they watched online news video.

Much of the research on audience attention spans comes from online marketing companies, which help companies determine if their advertisements will get watched in online videos. Studies from TubeMogul, ComScore and Visible Measures have all pointed to shorter video attention spans. The overall message: the longer a video runs, the fewer people are watching.

The Industry

With those facts in mind, students in my Multimedia Journalism course experimented last semester with short-form mobile video using Instagram. The first step was to evaluate what others were doing. Together we found and followed several news outlets on Instagram.

Dozens of news outlets use Instagram, but not all have ventured into video content.

Some of the players in the video arena include traditional broadcast outlets, such as CBS News and CNN. Others are established print or online media outlets, such as *Forbes* and the *Washington Post*. And there are newcomers, such as [NowThisNews](#), a video aggregation news site that targets young viewers.

As the 15-second video format is still evolving, we found several variations on how outlets use video.

- **Raw footage:** Some news outlets are using raw video footage alone to augment a story. An example is a short cell-phone video of soccer fans

cheering after a goal.

- **Video segments:** Outlets like CBS This Morning and CBS Evening News often run 15-second segments of their on-air broadcasts, highlighting an important quote from an interview subject or teasing an item to be aired later that day.
- **Text narration:** BBC's [Instafax](#) and NowThisNews have mastered the art of quick videos that use short text narration and music to move the viewer through the B-roll clips.
- **Voice-over narration:** Other edited videos include B-roll clips with an interview voice over, similar to the text narration but without any text.

The Take-Aways

While the different approaches work well for different media and different situations, we discussed some common factors that journalists should keep in mind when using short mobile videos.

Quality matters.

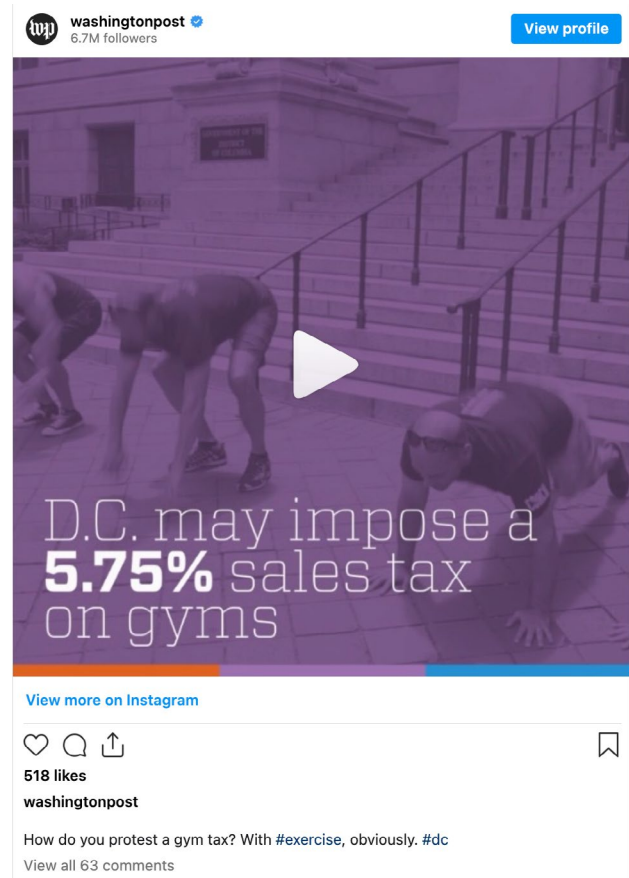
To consistently use short-form video through a network like Instagram, you have to have quality video. The videos stand alone, except for short captions, and need to speak for themselves in order to be effective. To do that well, you need clean and professional video editing. That editing can include raw footage, like this [June 10 video](#) about a state of emergency in Iraq. The way the BBC team edits the footage with subtle music and text help give the video clips context and credibility. Quality extends to the accuracy of the news reports. Online video blurbs don't include much attribution, so the journalist needs to have credibility and a longer story to back up the facts stated in the video.

Keep it simple.

There is a lot to process in a 15-second video, and so you should make it as easy for the viewer as possible. Try to keep one consistent throughout. It could be one shot of B-roll with rotating captions. Or it could be a single caption that is displayed through a series of clips. If you are using a voice-over, skip the text captions.

Keep it simple.

It's so important it's listed here twice. In addition to using unobtrusive editing techniques, make sure the message itself is simple. Think news hook and a couple supporting facts. It may feel like not enough, but the point is not to give an in-depth look at an issue—it's to give a [quick summary](#).



Video can mean photos too.

Don't limit yourself to just moving images. A photo slideshow with a voiceover is just as effective as a video. If you have a series of photos from an event, consider putting them together as a short Instagram video.

The Classroom

The first part was easy. Students found and evaluated Instagram news stories and we had a great time going over examples in class.

The follow up was harder. The second part of the assignment required students to create their own news stories to publish on an Instagram account we created. After the in-class discussions about what worked well for other news outlets, I thought the students would have solid work right away. Not so.

But with the lower quality submissions came lessons on using multimedia in reporting. We had great conversations about how much work actually goes into short video news blurbs.

In order to stand apart from citizen journalists, the students needed to have polished video editing skills. In order to tell a story fully in 15 seconds, the students had to do hours of reporting. In order to communicate the story well, they had to be judicious writers.

Through a process of trial and error, students learned how important the fundamentals of journalism were in producing short news bits.

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