

Old Event, New Media: Learning Social Media Use for News

The Washington Post runs its presence on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. New York Times and Vox are on a similar track, minus TikTok. All news organizations have made their presence felt on social media. However, simply highlighting a one-dimensional presence of social media in journalistic teaching is no longer enough. 76 percent of Americans consume at least some of their news via social media. (Willnat & Weaver, 2018) Tricia Ennis, Digital Content Manager at 13abc, Toledo, emphasizes the need to use diverse social media platforms to target different audiences. Today, social media plays a key role in the dissemination of information.

Students use social media frequently but transitioning to using it in the newsroom is tough. Bor (2014) points out that students “felt inadequate in their ability to use...technology...as a medium for producing news.” (p. 245) These skills of posting content include wording, presentation, frequency, and aesthetics. The student needs to understand the importance of both the organization personality and creating a personality of their own as journalists. The Washington Post has a serious tone for all of its social media, but on TikTok it focuses solely on creating content that would appeal to a younger demographic, following popular meme and prank formats. This social media engagement is not just important for news dissemination but is also necessary for increased engagement and therefore increased revenue. Additionally, news organizations are now looking for digital journalists who are adept at multimedia coverage. (Bor, 2014)

Keeping these requirements in mind, for this teaching assignment, students will revisit an old event in history and report the event on social media as if it were happening in real time. Their tasks include creating live tweets, Instagram posts/stories, Facebook posts/stories, and TikTok videos. They will choose the platforms and then work on reporting these stories with careful consideration to their words, posting frequency, post design and aesthetic, and relevance. With this assignment, students will be able to:

- Learn the importance of social media for journalism
- Learn to deliver news in short social media formats
- Learn how to diversify one piece of information for different platforms
- Learn how to differentiate personal social media needs from professional social media needs
- Learn how to maintain a voice and tone on social media
- Create a portfolio for future internship and job opportunities in journalism

This assignment can be helpful in courses focused on journalism, multimedia journalism, storytelling in journalism but also while teaching social media and new media courses independently. They will study and analyze the existing social media accounts for news organizations and will be taught, over the course of the semester, what are appropriate ways of disseminating news on these platforms. They will be aided by guest lectures, papers, and real-life examples to facilitate their understanding of the subject. In order to engage with that they have been taught, students will be workshopping in class and meeting outside. They will have submissions during the course of the semester in a step-by-step fashion.

Part I: First Steps

1. **We Are the News:** Students will be divided into groups and asked to choose an organization name for themselves, specifying what kind of media they are (print, broadcast, or online).

2. **Let's Go Back in History:** Students will choose an event that has happened between 1970 and 2006. They will be given a non-exhaustive list that they can choose from.
3. **We Are Online:** Students will create accounts on social media sites for their news organization.

Part II: Setting Up Shop

1. **So, this is what happened:** Students will explain what the event was about and compile all their research. This is to make sure that they have found enough data in order to continue with the event they have chosen.
2. **Target Audience:** They will choose who they are targeting for each platform.
3. **Calendar:** Students will plan a content calendar that indicates how often they will post content about the news event, once the breaking news phase is over.

Part III: Creating Content

Students will create content based on research that they have done. This content is old articles or old videos that are available. The idea is to present this information on a social media site. Whatever links students might provide can link to different existing news sites – the focus will be on creating content out of these to post on social media. They will create two hashtags for the event, to be used on all platforms. One hashtag should be the universal hashtag that everyone is using to report on the event, and the other should be specific to them. For example, #Coronavirus and #VoxCoversCorona. They will be posting this just like they would in real time, such that it indicates the frequency of posting.

Twitter and Facebook: The students will run posts/tweets that cover various aspects of the event. They can choose a specific part of the event to live tweet. The posts/tweets should include links to articles and videos, and polls for audiences.

Instagram: This is a very visual and interactive platform, and offers posts as well as stories. These elements should be key in creating a visual narrative. They will create a timeline that chronicles the event exclusively through pictures. Most importantly, they should have crowd sourced content, especially on stories.

TikTok: They will present the same content, in a video form that makes it relatable to the audience they are targeting here.

Since this is an assignment for a course and no real audience participation may be there, the students should ask groupmates and/or classmates to become dummy audiences and have them follow the page/account so that audience interaction can be taken care of.

In its first run, this assignment was used to emphasize the importance of social media and journalism in a class predominantly about social media. This idea would work well in a class solely focused on journalism so that other aspects such as ethics, language, reporting, crowdsourcing, etc. are also covered during the course of the semester, thus giving them a chance at better engagement with the project. This project would also greatly benefit from a short workshop on a video editing software, that has previously proven to be successful.

Students had a positive response for this assignment. Most of them were excited to choose their event and the possibilities it offered. They even created short videos of themselves reporting the event using archival footage. There was a lot of experiment in terms of content that they could put on social

media. They were able to understand the importance of quickness and conciseness of news on social media. While they had the option to delete these profiles, some chose to keep them for future journalistic opportunities.

Works Cited

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