Best Practices in Social Media:
How Newspapers Can Utilize Social Media Networks

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ABSTRACT

The following study investigates the best social media practices available for newspapers, with the goal of increasing social media followers and interaction, and gaining increased traffic and readers on a newspapers website. By taking the conclusions about best practices made in the study, the study also works to specifically form best practices recommendations for Mustang Daily, the student-run daily newspaper at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California. This study focuses on the best practices available in current social media by consulting existing literature on the subject and interviewing experts in the fields of media and social media. The study specifically focuses on Twitter by gathering activity data from six newspapers’ Twitter profiles for a one-month period, and analyzing that data.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

This study discusses various social media networks and how print media can best utilize them. The social media world constantly changes and new networks are developed every year. By defining the best practices for existing social networks, newspapers will be able to utilize social media more effectively. “Newspapers turned to social media as a relatively inexpensive way of connecting with current readers and reaching new audiences, especially the lucrative ‘tweens, teens and young adult market’” (“Newspapers Connect” 85).

“Previous studies have found that for both weeklies and dailies online, circulation size is related to differences in interactivity, updating patterns and digital content” (“Newspapers Connect” 86). Newspapers must be able to successfully navigate multiple social media platforms in order to be competitive and gain readership.

Background of the Problem

Because of the relatively recent development of social media, current literature about best social media practices for newspapers is limited. Although there is adequate data and information about the most-used social media networks and newspapers’ utilization of them, new social media sites are developed every few months and little to no literature exists about best practices regarding the newest networks.
Updated social media policies for newspapers will need to be crafted for new social media sites in the future, but general social media policies would be beneficial for newspapers to effectively use the resources available to them for reporting and outreach. As social media sites increase in popularity and more users continue to use the sites to consume and interact with news, it is crucial for print publications to use the networks effectively.

**Purpose of the Study**

The recent development of social media networks has left some print publications struggling to keep up with changing news dissemination and news consumption habits. By studying the best social media practices for print publications, particularly publications at a university, this study will aid future professional and college media in establishing the best social media practices for their publications. By outlining the best practices for various social networks, print publications can more smoothly make the transition to include social media in reporting and news dissemination plans. Utilizing best practices for social media networks will allow print publications to engage readers in more effective ways and to keep up with quickly changing preferences for news consumption.

**Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed as part of the data collection for a senior project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Interviews will be conducted with two experts in the social media and newspaper industries: Jennifer
Evans Cairo, the founder of SugarSpun Marketing, a company that helps businesses develop sustainable social media plans, and Erica Anderson, the manager of the News and Media division of Twitter at the headquarters in San Francisco, California. The experts will be asked questions catered to their specific knowledge and experience. The interview questions will be written with the goal of acquiring insight and knowledge that will answer the corresponding research question.

Data collection from the social media network Twitter will also be included in the study. By recording the frequency of tweets, content of tweets, number of followers and relative interactivity of Twitter accounts from three professional newspapers’ Twitter accounts and three daily university newspapers’ Twitter accounts from universities of comparable or larger size than Cal Poly, the study will be able to examine and compare the newspapers’ Twitter habits.

**Research Question**

This study was structured around the following research question. The research question was applied to six different social media networks and has multiple facets and possible conclusions that can be drawn from it.

1. What are the best social media practices for a daily university newspaper?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to clarify common topics within the study and to further the reader’s knowledge of social media.
**app**: “Short for *application*. A program that runs inside another service. Many cellphones allow *applications* to be downloaded to expand on their functions” (AP 313).

**follow**: an action on Twitter; by following another user, you can see their tweets in your newsfeed and view their profile. (AP 314)

**geotagging**: “The act of adding geographical metadata to pieces of media or social media updates. A *geotagged* photo would include the latitude and longitude of the location the photo was taken. A *geotagged* tweet would also indicate latitude and longitude, or a more general location, for example, Carolina Beach, N.C.” (AP 314).

**handle**: “A self-selected, public-facing username on a social media network, particularly Twitter. May be used interchangeably with *username*” (AP 314).

**hashtag**: Twitter speak for a group of tweets about the same subject or event, indicated by a # sign and topic word (such as “swineflu”) (Fahri n. pag.).

**link shortener**: “Tools that allow users to shorten a longer URL to make it easier to share. Bit.Ly and TinyURL are two link shorteners” (AP 314).

**mention**: “On Twitter, an @mention tags an account in a tweet someone else is publishing. It often appears in place of the actual name. Example: *I refer to the @APStylebook as I edit stories*” (AP 315).

**newsfeed**: the home page of many social media sites where users can view activity by users they follow on that social network.

**pin**: a verb and a noun on Pinterest. To pin an item means to ‘tack’ a picture onto a board Pinterest; it consists of a picture and a link to the original source.
post: a short statement made on Facebook or other networks to other users. Posts can be text, and tag other users, and include photos, videos and links.

retweet: “The practice, on Twitter, of forwarding a message or link from someone else to your followers. Spelled out in all references, though common usage on Twitter abbreviates to RT” (AP 315).

RSS: “An abbreviation for Really Simple Syndication. A protocol for subscribing to and distributing feeds that notify people of new entries on news sites, blogs, podcasts or other online information sources. Also RSS Feed” (AP 315).

status update: “A short string of words used on social networks to alert followers to a user’s recent activities or point them to something of interest” (AP 316).

stream: “A method of processing and delivering media in realtime over the Internet. Videos on YouTube are an example of streaming content, as are many on-demand services like Netflix and Hulu” (AP 316).

tag: “To identify someone or something in a post someone else is publishing. Photos are often tagged to identify people and objects in them” (AP 316).

traffic: the number of visitors that visit a website (Adee 52).

tweet: a pithy message capped at 140 characters that can be sent from computers, mobile phones and other mobile devices on the Twitter social media network (Fahri n. pag.).

Organization of Study
Chapter 1 includes the background of the problem, purpose of the study and a glossary of terms used in the study. Chapter 2 discusses six social media networks and how print publications can use those networks by reviewing existing literature on the subjects. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used to collect data for the study. Chapter 4 will summarize the responses from the interviewed sources on the subject of social media integration with print publications and will compare those responses to the data gathered from existing literature. This chapter will also include a summary and analysis of data collected from various newspapers’ Twitter accounts. Chapter 5 closes the study by providing a summary and recommendations for best social media practices for newspapers to further outreach and interaction with readers.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The review of literature defines the best social media practices for newspaper publications and seeks to define how they can be applied to a college newspaper publication. The literature review examines literature six social media network, defines each network and discusses its uniqueness, drawbacks, anecdotal successes and failures for print publications and how each respective network can be best utilized by newspapers.

Twitter

Twitter is essentially a micro-blog. “Twitter, a micro-blogging site released publicly in August 2006, allows individuals and organizations to blast 140-character posts” (“Newspapers Connect ” 85). Twitter users follow other users to see their tweets in their newsfeed; hashtags are used on Twitter to easily find all tweets and information about specific topics (Fahri n. pag.). The December 2012 Global Web Index (Global Web Index n. pag.) report indicated that Twitter is the fastest growing social network, particularly in the United States (Global Web Index n. pag.). “The fastest growing network in 2013 in terms of “Active Usage” was Twitter which grew 40% to 288 million across our 31 markets (approximately 90% of global Internet population). 21% of the global Internet population now uses Twitter actively on a monthly basis” (Global Web Index n. pag.).
There are unique features on Twitter that make it an advantageous social network for print publications to use. Journalists adopted use of Twitter as an ideal platform to quickly gather and disseminate news (Fahri n. pag.). Media publications can easily issue a request for information from eyewitnesses of an event and reach potential sources by using relevant hashtags (Fahri n. pag.). “Twitter works best in situations where the story is changing so fast that the mainstream media can't assemble all the facts at once” (Fahri n. pag).

“Newspapers adopted Twitter more quickly and widely than they did Facebook. Further, Twitter is updated more frequently. ... Twitter’s micro-blogging format and limit of 140 characters is perfect for breaking news and links into the site. Twitter also can function much like a free version of "Cover It Live," used by larger papers” (“Building Connections” 93).

A 2012 study of the 100 largest newspapers in the United States, based on their circulation numbers by the Audit Bureau of Circulations, found a positive correlation between newspapers that use Twitter and online traffic on their websites (Hong 73). That correlation became stronger as the size of the social media networked increased — i.e., the number of followers.

Twitter introduced Vine in January 2013. Vine can be used mobile devices, (iPhones and iPod touch as of February 2013) and allows users to create automatically looping videos (Twitter 2013). Each user can record a video in one six second stretch or record short bits of video that total six seconds. The videos are easily uploaded to via Vine to Twitter, Facebook or both.
Certain aspects of Twitter allow for abuse or misuse of the social network by print publications. The high frequency of tweets makes it necessary to sort through useless information. “Twitter proponents say they can improve their signal-to-noise ratio by thinning their lists of people they follow, keeping only the most consistently useful” (Fahri n. pag.). The 140-character limit on tweets forces users to use short descriptions, which can cause the tweets to be too vague or confusing if they are not carefully crafted within the character limit (Fahri n. pag.).

According to Messner (2011), Twitter is not properly utilized by news organizations.

While Twitter now is fully adopted by news organizations, its full potential as a community building and engagement tool has not been developed, yet. ... Instead, Twitter is being used like a streaming RSS service for news stories that promotes and re-distributes previously published news content. News organizations should address this lack of community engagement and develop guidelines that do allow for a better dialogue with their audiences to make use of Twitter’s full potential as a social network. (Messner 20)

Twitter recently slipped from second to fourth social network with the most active users according to a Global Web Index report released in January 2013; both Google+ and YouTube overtook it (Global Web Index n. pag.).

Ages 35-49 made up 42 percent of Twitter users in 2011 according to Nielson Online (Hong 72). “Twitter isn't, primarily, the province of teens and college students” (Fahri n. pag.). However, Twitter users are two to three times more likely to visit
news websites than the average Web user, making Twitter an ideal place to attract readers in general (Fahri n. pag.).

Some print publications are already successfully using Twitter. The New York Times resourcefully used Twitter to crowd source in late April 2009 when a building collapsed in New York City. The tweet sent from their account read: “Seeking any eyewitnesses to Lower Manhattan building collapse.” The tweet effectively found the newspaper a surplus of eyewitness sources (Fahri n. pag.).

Journalists must be careful when tweeting, even if it is casual Ron Charles, a book critic at the Washington Post, tweeted after he spoke with an anonymous source about the possibility of The New Yorker switching from a weekly publication to a bi-weekly or monthly one (Fahri n. pag.). His tweet read: “Frequent contributor tells me The New Yorker is considering switch to biweekly or monthly. Recession pains” (Fahri n. pag.). Charles said that it seemed to only take a couple minutes for “the whole Internet to go crazy” (Fahri n. pag.). After he was informed via email that his tweet was incorrect, he sent out a subsequent tweet correcting himself, but the original, incorrect tweet had been already been widely retweeted. The Chicago City Paper and the New York Observer picked up the original tweet, and the editor of The New Yorker, David Remrick, came forward to publicly deny the allegation in Charles’ tweet (Fahri n. pag.).

By developing custom hashtags, many newspapers have channeled discussions and debates that occur on Twitter about specific topics.

A day before the Iowa Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriages in the state, the Des Moines Register created its own hashtag, #iagaymarriage.
The tag quickly caught on, becoming so popular that competitors like the Gazette in Cedar Rapids wound up tagging their tweets with it. The Register posted excerpts of some of the resulting discussion, turning it into the 21st century equivalent of the classic man-on-the-street opinion feature. (Fahri n. pag.).

Twitter may be used differently by a college publication than a professional newspaper. A survey of nearly 500 college students at different universities sought to determine which medium students prefer to access their campus newspaper. Results showed that in 2010 5.6 percent of university students preferred using Twitter more than their campus newspapers’ website or print edition and 8.5 percent preferred Twitter in 2011 (“Building Connections” 13).

Journalists should use the network to follow users who can give them early warning about news and trends, become fluent in hashtags and set up keyword searches to gain as much information about specific topics as possible (Fahri n. pag).

Paul Grabowicz, director of the new-media program at the University of California Berkley journalism school, said Twitter should be integrated in newsrooms at least as much as phones and notepads (Fahri n. pag.). “People are busy, but they’re out there consuming and exchanging information on these networks. This is a way of bridging the gap with them and being more engaged with them. News reporters need to be on the ground floor of this, instead of when the horse has left the barn” (Fahri n. pag.).

Facebook
Facebook is a social networking site, created in 2004, with more than one billion users as of September 2012 (Schmeltzer 7). Each user has a profile with pictures and as much personal information as they choose to display, and is able to ‘like’ pages on Facebook, which organizations, like newspapers or businesses, can create. If a user likes a Facebook page, all the content posted by that page appears in that users newsfeed. Users can interact with Facebook pages by commenting, liking or sharing posts made by the page. As of January 2011 approximately 83 percent of United States newspapers had joined Facebook and had an average of 10,591 followers (Hong 75).

A study released by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life project in 2013 shows that most American adults who use the Internet also use Facebook (Kelly n. pag.). “Pew found that two-thirds, or 67%, of American adults who are online use Facebook” (Kelly n. pag.). Of the entire global Internet community, 51 percent use Facebook on at least a monthly basis (Global Web Index n. pag).

There are unique features on Facebook that make it an advantageous social network for print publications to use. According to Marshall (2013) Facebook announced in 2010 it was introducing an algorithm to determine the order of posts displayed on newsfeeds. The algorithm, EdgeRank, “means you see posts from certain friends, brands or news sites more than others, and it determines what you are interested in by working out what you have clicked on, liked, commented on and shared” (Marshall n. pag.). Three components make up the algorithm: affinity, weight and time decay (Marshall n. pag.). A Facebook page's EdgeRank score
decreases if the interactions on each post decreases. “If you are looking to increase the size of your Facebook community and increase engagement, you can use status updates to gather likes, comments and shares; if you are after referral traffic, you want people to share your stories. Most news outlets aim for both engagement and referrals” (Marshall n. pag.).

Richard Moynihan, social media manager at Metro, and Luke Lewis, editor of NME.com and soon-to-be editor of BuzzFeedUK, agree that posting two times a day is not enough. News outlets should post more frequently than brands, ideally every hour or two (Marshall n. pag.). Moynihan says news journalism Facebook pages should post at least six to eight times a day, usually the most important news, which can range from breaking news to the Internet meme of the day (Marshall n. pag.). Lewis says that reducing a page's status updates to two per day decreases the EdgeRank score and lessens referral traffic (Marshall n. pag.).

Moynihan says news outlets should not use their pages to “broadcast” to their viewers but rather, to engage them (Marshall n. pag.). “He suggests driving debate by asking a question, but warns: ‘Never ask a question that’s … very cliché or generic. If there isn’t a genuine question to ask, don’t be afraid to put the post out and let it take off organically with your own community’” (Marshall n. pag.). Be sure to ask questions the audience will have an opinion on, for example, not everyone can articulate their opinion on the latest economic report, but they will have an opinion on gas prices or horse meat (Marshall n. pag.).

Marshall (2013) says Facebook’s EdgeRank algorithm is not explicitly publicly defined, but in general, videos and pictures are more likely to be seen in
users’ newsfeeds than text or links are. The types of stories that get the most shares, which in turn bring the most referral traffic, are lists, stories with a great picture or video and wacky or quirky articles (Marshall n. pag.).

In 2008 only 10 percent of social media users said they used Facebook to regularly access news (“Building Connections” 12). A Pew Internet and American Life survey found that by 2010, 37 percent of people said they had shared or helped disseminate the news via a social media site. The study concluded that news consumers’ preferences are changing to prefer interaction rather than just consumption (“New Ways” 1).

Certain aspects of Facebook allow for abuse or misuse of the social network by newspapers. According to Schmeltzer (2011), Facebook does not refer as much traffic to newspaper sites as Google+ does (7). Schmeltzer says a Facebook page does not benefit a business or organization merely by existing, but the page must be utilized to interact with users and post interesting content. There should be posts a few times a day at varying times to ensure the largest audience will see the posts in their newsfeed (Schmeltzer 8).

Rainie (2013) cited a study that indicates users may be tiring of Facebook. New research suggests that Facebook fatigue may be setting in with some users. Twenty-seven percent of Facebook users surveyed in the U.S. plan to spend less time on the site in 2013, compared with only 3% who plan to spend more time, according to a study from the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. (Rainie 1).
The Pew study also found that 61 percent of Facebook users have taken a break from the service for several weeks or more, but most do not permanently delete their profiles during the break (Rainie 1).

Many print publications are already using Facebook. The Chicago Tribune created Twitter and Facebook accounts in 2008 (Adee 52). Named after the paper’s famous founding figure, Col Robert McCormick, the page, “Colonel Tribune,” was born. The original goal was for the online avatar and increased social media outreach to garner the newspaper website one million views per month, but in reality, the website soon received more than six million views each month. The paper now routinely receives news tips via their social media platforms, in addition to increased traffic on their website (Adee 53).

Facebook may be utilized differently by college publications than by professional newspapers. A survey of nearly 500 college students at different universities sought to determine how the students accessed news from their university newspaper and which medium they preferred to use. Survey results in 2010 indicated that readers most often got news from the paper’s website, the print edition second and last, the newspaper’s Facebook. In 2011 those results changed, moving Facebook to number one, followed by print, Twitter, RSS and the website last (“Building Connections” 13). The same study concluded that young adults’ preference for connecting with their university newspaper via a Facebook post increased from 2 percent in 2010 to 8.5 percent in 2011, at the expense of the newspaper’s website (“Building Connections” 13).
Google+

Google+ was launched in June 2011 in an invitation-only test phase (Schmeltzer 7). Although Google+ is often called Google's best attempt at rivaling Facebook, Google+ operates differently in that users can choose different groups of friends, or circles, to share specific information with. Google CEO Larry Page said Google's goal with the social network is to “make sharing on the web like sharing in real life.” By winter 2011, Google+ content referred 30 percent of Google+’s traffic to newspaper sites, giving it huge potential to surpass Facebook as a news-referring site (Schmeltzer 7). An updated Global Web Index released in January 2013 indicated that Google+ has 343 million active users in comparison to Facebook’s 693 million (Global Web Index n. pag.).

There are unique features on Google+ that make it an advantageous social network for print publications to use. Google+ use may increase a website’s rankings on Google’s search engine. Although it is unknown exactly how Google will manage its search rankings in the future, use of Google+ will continue to affect search engine results by use of the feature, Search, plus Your World. Search, plus Your World allows Google+ users to see the regular search results they would on Google’s search engine, as well as photos, videos and posts from friends in their Google+ networks (Marks n. pag.). Google+ recently added the feature of Communities, which try to bring like-minded people together through public or private conversation pages (Graziano n. pag.).
“It’s the groundwork for a level of search quality difficult to fathom based on what we know today. It (Google+) also ... connects all the other Google products like YouTube, Google Maps, Images, Offers, Books, and more” (Llorens 2).

“... of the global Internet population ... 25% are actively using Google+ and a staggering 51% are using Facebook on a monthly basis” (Global Web Index n. pag.).

Certain aspects of Google+ allow for abuse or misuse of the social network by print publications. Google+ is more similar to Facebook than other social networks, but it does not have as many users. As of January 2013, Facebook had 350 million more active users than Google+ (Global Web Index n. pag.). In general, the perception of Google+ is that it is a “ghost town” (Bilton n. pag.). Many view Google+ as Google’s best attempt at Facebook, and since Facebook has more users, Google+ can be seen as a failure and a social network not worth investing more time in (Bilton n. pag.).

According to Marks (2012) Google+ has much potential for brands and businesses, but the network is not used enough. “The bottom line is that while Google+ holds promise, there isn’t a lot for businesses and brands to do on it yet. Even the most popular brands on Google+ are only updating about once a day, and most aren’t responding to comments from fans” (Marks n. pag.).

Google+ may be used differently by a college publication than a professional newspaper. “Google+, for example, is dominated by males and also has many students who use the site” (Marks n. pag.).

Pinterest
According to Mozdzer (2012), Pinterest is a social network based on images, where users can post photos with links on various topic boards.

“The posts show up as a stream of images, like photos pinned to a bulletin board. Each user can create and pin to dozens of different topic boards, to share different types of content. As with Twitter, you can follow other people — or individual boards — on Pinterest, to see what items they are pinning” (Mozdzer n. pag.). Users are also able to search for pins by entering keywords in the search bar, and view pins at random, by category or by the most popular ones (Mozdzer n. pag.).

There are unique features on Pinterest that make it an advantageous social network for print publications to use. Pinterest is visually oriented and optimized for sharing art from print publications like photos, page layouts and graphics (Mozdzer n. pag.). “The simplicity and visual appeal give posters a different approach to attract interest for their content” (Mozdzer n. pag.).

“The key, as with any social network, is engaging your audience. Invite readers to contribute their own content to boards, as the Atlanta Journal Constitution does. Keep the pins interesting — and don’t be afraid to share content that isn’t from your news site” (Mozdzer n. pag.).

Certain aspects of Pinterest allow for abuse or misuse of the social network by print publications. Pinterest’s stigma as a site used for wedding planning and crafting has remained. “Pinterest might have a reputation as a social network for sharing recipes and fashion tips, but news organizations are embracing it in innovating ways” (Mozdzer n. pag.).
Some print publications are already using Pinterest. “Several news organizations have boards that highlight their front page each day. The pins link back to the newspapers’ websites” (Mozdzer n. pag.). Some newspapers use Pinterest for inspiration of their own. The Washington Post pins things about political candidates so they can be ready to write an interesting political profile.

The Washington Post’s Pinterest account also includes a board full of pins of graphics, visualizations and maps created by Post staff (Pinterest n. pag.). Other print publications, like Los Angeles Times, use Pinterest to pin things besides content from their newspaper. As of February 2013, Los Angeles Times had 68 pin boards with 1,472 pins ranging from cocktail recipes to children’s room designs to photos of the space shuttle Endeavor (Pinterest n. pag.).

Some newspapers have boards designated for content from other papers. “The Guardian of London has a board called "On Our Radar," in which it links to news stories from other sources” (Mozdzer n. pag.).

Newspapers are using Pinterest’s visual appeal to create guides to the communities they serve. “From The Morning Journal’s guide to Ohio golf courses, to the Denver Post's Favorite Colorado Places board, newspapers are using the visual ability of Pinterest to offer a public service to readers” (Mozdzer n. pag.).

Photo sharing

There are different social networks available for photo sharing.

Instagram is an app available on iPhone and Android smartphones that allows users to take a picture, crop it, use a filter on it to create visually pleasing effects and
upload it to Instagram to share with their users. Instagram, introduced in 2010, employs hashtags to make photos searchable, and users can be tagged by using the @ symbol and their username, similar to a Twitter handle. All photos can also be geotagged (Graham n. pag.).

Facebook acquired Instagram in 2012 for $1 billion. Because of the acquisition, Instagram photos are no longer integrated with tweets when shared on Twitter; they are viewable only by clicking the URL to view the photo on the Instagram website (Graham n. pag.).

“Instagram has 80 million members, and millions of photos are uploaded monthly. ‘It’s a never-ending fountain of free content,’ says Chris Silva, an analyst at Altimeter Group. ‘If I’m doing anything graphically based, I’d be foolish to pass this up’” (Graham n. pag.).

Flickr is a photo and video hosting social network launched in 2004. Users with an account can upload photos to share, but an account is not required to browse Flickr’s photos. Each photo can have descriptive tags and a geotag to label it at a specific location. Users can designate each photo as private or public (Flickr n. pag.). There are unique features on Flickr that make it an advantageous social network for print publications to use. Newsrooms can use Flickr to share work they have done, such as well-designed front pages. Higgerson (2012) suggests newspapers upload some of their photo archive with a Creative Commons license. He says only generic photos like a picture of a crowd at a football game or the town center should be used, so the newspaper can reserve its valuable photos (Higgerson n. pag.).

Synthesis
Adopting new ways to disseminate news content will ensure more interaction and news consumption. In 2011, “One survey found that while 31 percent of respondents read a print newspaper the day before, 34 percent went online for news. That number jumped to 44 percent when other digital delivery forms were included” (“Newspapers Connect” 83).

According to Greer (2011) the circulation size of newspapers correlates with how much newspapers have integrated social media into news dissemination and interaction with readers.

While smaller papers lag behind and some tools are not being used to their full potential, newspapers appear to be well poised to continue their role as the chief source of local news by reaching audiences in places they're congregating digitally. The fact that newspapers have adopted such a wide array of new tools in a relatively short time bodes well for the spirit of innovation necessary for them to thrive in the 21st century. (“Newspapers Connect” 94).

Greer (2011) studied news consumption by young adults, most of whom attend a university.

The findings for local newspaper use and for news consumption overall are clear: Social media are gaining in popularity as news delivery tools. While the percentage of participants who identify social media (Facebook and Twitter) as their preferred way of getting local news is still small, clearly shifts have occurred in how young adults access news content in digital form. While news delivery is a secondary function of social media, networks sharing and
recommending stories has changed the way readers connect with their local newspaper — and likely the way they connect with most traditional news companies online. Rather than going to a newspaper website as a primary destination online, readers are increasingly entering these sites through stories shared by friends and colleagues. (“Building Connections” 14).

Chapter 3

Methodology
Chapter 3 explains the methods used for data collection, sources used, how the data is presented and delimitations in the study.

Data Sources

The qualitative data came from experts in the fields of college newspaper publications, professional newspaper publications and social media integration. Each source was interviewed using interview questions tailored to obtain answers pertaining to the original research question about the best social media practices for a daily university newspaper.

Six newspapers’ Twitter accounts were observed for one month in order to gather quantitative data about the type and frequency of activity on Twitter.

Participants

The interview participants were social media experts with extensive knowledge of how a newspaper should integrate social media into its everyday practices. Erica Anderson is the manager of the Media and News division of Twitter at the headquarters in San Francisco, California. She has also worked for MTV, NBC and CBS where she managed Katie Couric’s online presence. Jennifer Evans Cairo founded SugarSpun Marketing in 2010, a company that helps small to mid-sized businesses formulate a sustainable social media plan. She is also an adjunct faculty member as social media chair for a miniMBA program at Rutgers University and authored her own book titled, “Pinterest Marketing: An Hour a Day.”
The six newspaper Twitter accounts that were observed were: Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Michigan Daily (University of Michigan), The Daily Collegian (Pennsylvania State University) and Mustang Daily (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo). The first three are well known and respected professional publications; they were chosen in order to observe how professional newspapers handle content on Twitter. The college newspapers’ Twitter accounts were observed in order to see how daily newspapers at universities of at least 20,000 students, the size of Cal Poly, were utilizing Twitter as a social network.

**Interview Design**

The following questions were asked to interview participants in order to elicit responses about the best social media practices:

1. Do you think certain social networks would be more beneficial for disseminating different types of content created by newspapers? If so, please specify which networks are most ideal for which type of content.

2. Are there any social networks a newspaper should not employ, or are there any habits or actions a newspaper should avoid on specific social networks?

3. How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print?

4. How can a newspaper use social media profiles to increase marketing or sales revenue?
5. Do you have recommendations for the number of times per day a newspaper should post on other social media profiles, or tips on content for the posts (i.e. – hashtags, photos, videos, links, etc)?

Erica Anderson:

1. Would you recommend that the main Twitter account for a newspaper retweet their journalists or editors?
2. How important do you think it is for newspapers to adhere to AP Style on their Twitter accounts? Or do you think Twitter is a more causal conversation?
3. Are there any techniques that are specific to a university newspaper, like specific hashtags or anything that would be different than just a national news organization? Or a way that would engage our demographic more?

Jennifer Evans Cairo:

1. How can a newspaper best utilize Pinterest?
2. Which network(s) should a newspaper use to share photos by its photographers (Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, etc)?
3. How would you, as a professional in the social media industry, describe the impact that a social media plan can have on a newspaper?

Data Collection
Data collection for this study involved two interviews with experts in the field of social media. During each interview the interviewees were asked a series of questions tailored to their area of expertise that were designed to collect qualitative research based on the original research question about best social media practices for a daily university newspaper.

In order to collect quantitative data as well, six newspapers’ Twitter accounts were observed for one month in order to gather data about the type and frequency of tweets from each respective account. The data was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and Excel was used to calculate averages and totals.

**Data Presentation**

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and then transcribed into direct quotations. Parts of the interviews were paraphrased in the study in order to provide clarity to the meaning. One interview was conducted via email because of the time difference between her location and California.

Data was also collected from six newspapers’ Twitter accounts in order to determine how many times per day each publication tweeted, whether the tweets were of editorial or advertising content and to observe how they interacted with their followers. The findings were recorded as quantitative data in an Excel spreadsheet and subsequently calculated into rates and percentages in order to provide clear comparison between the publications’ Twitter activity.

**Limitations**
A lack of time available for research and data collection placed limitations on this study. The study was conducted as a senior project and had to be completed within the 10-week quarter system at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, California

Delimitations

The time restraint resulted in the presence of delimitations within this study in the form of the amount of interview responses collected and the length of the study of Twitter account activity by print publications. Because of the lack of time, only two interview participants were selected. However, they were selected based on their experiences and qualifications as experts in the field of social media. If more time was allotted to complete the study, more interviews would have been conducted.

The interview with Jennifer Cairo was conducted via email because of her location on the East Coast and her limited availability during the time allotted to collect the interviews.

The constrained time also limited the amount of data that could be collected from print publications Twitter accounts. If more time was allotted to complete the study, more than six Twitter accounts could have been observed for longer than one month, which would provide a more comprehensive account of the newspapers’ interaction with Twitter.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis
Chapter 4 will provide descriptions of the experts in their respective fields, as well as their answers to interview questions. Their responses are summarized as direct quotations and paraphrases. Chapter 4 also includes a summary of the data gathered from Twitter accounts over a one-month period.

Social Media

Jennifer Evans Cairo was a social media expert chosen for this study. Cairo founded SugarSpun Marketing in 2010; the company helps small to mid-sized businesses formulate a sustainable social media plan. Prior to founding the company, Cairo was editor-in-chief of Search Engine Guide for six years, an Internet site focused on educating small businesses about online marketing. Cairo is an adjunct faculty member as social media chair for Market Motive, an online training facility, at Rutgers University’s miniMBA program. Cairo recently authored a book titled, “Pinterest Marketing: An Hour a Day.” Cairo has also worked with many companies to help them integrate social media, including the Washington Times.

Social Media and Twitter

Erica Anderson is a media and Twitter expert chosen for this study. She currently works for Twitter at its headquarters in San Francisco, California, where she is the manager of the Media and News division of Twitter. She works to help partner Twitter with news organizations and develop the best techniques for news organizations on Twitter. In the past she worked for MTV, NBC and CBS where she worked for Katie Couric to help her manage her social media and digital presence. In
December 2012 Anderson was named one of Forbes Magazine’s “30 Under 30 in Media.” She earned her undergraduate degree from the Indiana University School of Journalism. Anderson created and launched Twitter for Newsrooms — a kit designed to aid newsrooms in their adoption of Twitter. She also co-produced the first online Town Hall for President Obama, which allowed people to ask him questions via #AskObama.

**Questionnaires**

Each expert was asked the following questions regarding social media best practices. They were also asked three questions specific to their expertise; those questions are answered in subsections following the first five questions that were answered by both experts.

1. Do you think certain social networks would be more beneficial for disseminating different types of content created by newspapers? If so, please specify which networks are most ideal for which type of content.

Question 1 was asked to gain insight from experts on what sort of content should be posted on Twitter versus Facebook or other networks.

- Jennifer Cairo: “For more consumer driven papers like USA Today, the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune, a more B2C (business-to-consumer) focused site like Facebook is going to be the natural tie-in to using Twitter. An interesting trend I’ve seen lately is also an exploration of Tumblr by many of the broader market newspapers who have a heavy emphasis on lifestyle reporting” (Appendix A).
• Erica Anderson: “I would recommend, instead of thinking about the
type of content, I would recommend thinking about when content is
new, always sharing it on Twitter” (Appendix B).

2. Are there any social networks a newspaper should not employ, or are there
any habits or actions a newspaper should avoid on specific social networks?

Question 2 was asked to determine whether the expert thought certain
actions on social networking sites could be detrimental rather than beneficial,
and to clarify which actions those are.

• Jennifer Cairo: “One of the biggest mistakes I see newspapers making
is actually over sharing on sites like Facebook. Very few news
organizations are capable of pulling true engagement on more than
two or three posts per day on Facebook. ... Since people aren’t going to
interact with every single story that gets posted, EdgeRank for the page
drops and Facebook ends up showing the individual posts to less and
less people. This cycle then feeds on itself and exposure drops
dramatically” (Appendix A).

• Erica Anderson: “I think having an environment where Twitter is
encouraged and used at the top sets a great example. So some of the
best news organizations I talked about today, such as The New York
Times and BBC, their editors are using Twitter, setting an example of
how it can be used to find information, verify information, to distribute
stories” (Appendix B).
3. How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print?

Question 3 was asked to gain the expert’s opinion on how social media might be utilized to increase reader interaction.

- Jennifer Cairo: “Consumer generated media campaigns are often a great fit in this regard. I saw several newspapers doing wonderful things with citizen reporting and citizen photography during the London Olympics last year by utilizing hashtags on Twitter and Instagram. ... Another simple step is to ask questions when posts are made to social media. Asking what readers think about a key point from the article not only gives them a reason to click through to read the article, but also gives them a reason to respond to the post on Facebook, thus spreading awareness of it to their own connections” (Appendix A).

- Erica Anderson: “By sharing behind-the-scenes information that no one else has, by sharing great content. You know, not just sharing the headline, but actually writing specific content like a teaser or a question. Engaging people to click-through, to ask you a question back, to capture them” (Appendix B).

4. How can a newspaper use social media profiles to increase marketing or sales revenue?

Question 4 was asked to gain expert insight on the marketing side of the social media and newspaper industry. Other questions pertain to best practices for
increased interaction and readership, but this one specifies how a newspaper might make monetary gains from social media.

- Jennifer Cairo: “For a newspaper, social media is all about creating enough engagement to keep the consumer connected via those channels so they can be on the receiving end of the best of the best stories being shared by the brand. This helps keep continuous exposure and drive sustainable growth in traffic” (Appendix A).

- Erica Anderson: “We’re seeing more experimentation on that in areas other than news. ... But I would say just focus on doing what you do well by creating high quality content and sharing it in real time and you’re going to see rewards in terms of followers and engagement” (Appendix B).

5. Do you have recommendations for the number of times per day a newspaper should post on other social media profiles, or tips on content for the posts (i.e. – hashtags, photos, videos, links, etc)?

Question 5 was asked in order to gain insight about which social media tools are the most useful and most beneficial for engaging readers.

- Jennifer Cairo: “In general, I don’t recommend more than three posts per day on Facebook unless you are seeing significant engagement. ... On Twitter, there’s far more space for posting and I see no reason why companies cannot post a dozen or more times per day. Even higher numbers are doable if you create and promote multiple Twitter accounts ... for your paper and tweet accordingly. ... Multimedia like
photos and videos being included in posts to these networks also increases their potential engagement, sharing and traffic value” (Appendix A).

- Erica Anderson: “Use hashtags to give a sense of the subject matter or the event, use @replies to cite your sources, to say who you’re writing about or who wrote this. Use links, but not always. But the worst thing I think a news organization can do is treat their Twitter feed as an RSS feed and just have a headline and a link — it’s not engaging, it’s not what people expect on Twitter” (Appendix B).

The following three questions were asked to Jennifer Cairo specifically to gain her expert opinion on the specific topics within the broader realm of social media.

1. How would you, as a professional in the social media industry, describe the impact that a social media plan can have on a newspaper?

Question 1 was asked to help clarify the many routes social media use can take and how a newspapers’ adoption of the networks can affect it. A newspaper can adopt a social media policy that incorporates staff members’ personal accounts, or a policy that is only in regards to official newspaper social media accounts.

- Jennifer Cairo: “For some papers, the answer has been to tightly control what can be said online in any situation by someone who is employed by the paper. ... We are moving into a realm where companies are going to have to understand that social media isn’t simply a part of marketing, it’s a part of life” (Appendix A).
2. Which networks should a newspaper use to share photos by its photographers (Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, etc)?

Question 2 was asked to clarify how a newspaper can best disseminate photos taken by its photographers.

- Jennifer Cairo: “For extremely high quality photos that have a type of artistic value or that may be picked up by other publications and shared with credit, it’s hard to beat Flickr. ... For instant, on-the-ground style reporting, it’s tough to beat Instagram. Roving reporters, citizen journalists using hashtags and even staff photographers can share a different style of photograph on this site and can generate a lot of buzz and loyalty” (Appendix A).

3. How can a newspaper best utilize Pinterest?

Question 3 was asked to gain an expert opinion on how a newspaper might use Pinterest to interact with readers. Pinterest has many different possible uses, and it can be unclear as to how a newspaper might utilize the network.

- Jennifer Cairo: “The best newspapers are not using Pinterest solely to link to their own content. ... Pinterest is more than an RSS feed and should be treated as such by marketers. ... One thing that few papers seem to have taken up on but that I feel holds enormous potential is the idea of curating boards to match features at the paper” (Appendix A).
The following three questions were specifically asked to Erica Anderson in order to gain her expert opinion on the news industry and its utilization of Twitter.

1. Would you recommend that the main Twitter account for a newspaper retweet their journalists or editors?

   Question 1 was asked to clarify whether or not the official newspaper account should retweet its own reporters or editors or stick solely to its own content.

   • Erica Anderson: “Yeah, I definitely would. I think you can think about that main account as, like I said, your quarterback. A lot of times your readers are going to come, and maybe they know specific people, but really they just know that brand name and so I think you can utilize it and probably its volume” (Appendix B).

2. How important do you think it is for newspapers to adhere to AP Style on their Twitter accounts? Or do you think Twitter is a more causal conversation?

   Question 2 was asked to learn the opinion of a Twitter expert about whether or not it is necessary to pay strict attention to grammar and AP Style details on Twitter.

   • Erica Anderson: “I think that you should have the highest standards that you do in any medium, and I think that’s what’s going to be important for Twitter as a complement to you. There have been times when I’ve needed to cut certain words because I’ve needed to attribute what I was saying to the person who said it” (Appendix B).
3. Are there any techniques that are specific to a university newspaper, like specific hashtags or anything that would be different than a national news organization? Or a way that would engage our demographic more?

Question 3 was asked to gain the opinion of an expert about how a university newspaper can be more engaging to its college age demographic.

- Erica Anderson: “Well I think you need to have a brainstorm and come up with something creative that students identify with. So, to me the way you engage people is you have a call to action, like: ‘What makes you proud to be a Mustang? #mustang.’ Then when you’re doing stories about student life, you use #mustang; you just kind of create connections. I’m sure you can find more creative stuff than that, but you want it to be natural. You don’t want to force people into awkward stuff. ... And, come up with a segment. Like every Friday at 3 p.m., talk about the best things happening on the weekend and it’s #mustanglife or whatever” (Appendix B).

**Social Media Use by Newspapers Research Question**

The following research question was developed to encompass all aspects of how a university newspaper might best utilize a social media policy. There are dozens of unique aspects of social media that need to be managed, many of which will be outlined following the research question. Since each social network comes with its own set of acceptable practices, answers from literature about best social media practices are divided by network.
What are the best social media practices for a daily university newspaper?

- “The findings for local newspaper use and for news consumption overall are clear: Social media are gaining in popularity as news delivery tools. While the percentage of participants who identify social media (Facebook and Twitter) as their preferred way of getting local news is still small, clearly shifts have occurred in how young adults access news content in digital form” (“Building Connections” 14).

- “While news delivery is a secondary function of social media, networks sharing and recommending stories has changed the way readers connect with their local newspaper — and likely the way they connect with most traditional news companies online. Rather than going to a newspaper website as a primary destination online, readers are increasingly entering these sites through stories shared by friends and colleagues” (“Building connections” 15).

Twitter

- “What you can do to drive follower growth? 1. Tweet your beat. 2. Share what you’re reading. 3. Use hashtags. 4. @Cite your sources” (Twitter for Newsrooms n. pag.).

- “Hashtags can increase engagement almost 100% (2x) for journalists and 50% (1.5x) for news organizations” (Twitter for Newsrooms n. pag.).

- “News organizations that tweet 20% fewer URLs and 100% more @mentions grow followers 17% more than expected” (Twitter for Newsrooms n. pag.).

- “Twitter also can function much like a free version of "Cover It Live," used by larger papers” (“Building Connections” 93).
“Twitter is being used like a streaming RSS service for news stories that promotes and re-distributes previously published news content. News organizations should address this lack of community engagement and develop guidelines that do allow for a better dialogue with their audiences” (Messner 20).

**Facebook**

- “If you are looking to increase the size of your Facebook community and increase engagement, you can use status updates to gather likes, comments and shares; if you are after referral traffic, you want people to share your stories. Most news outlets aim for both engagement and referrals” (Marshall n. pag.).

- “Facebook’s algorithm, EdgeRank, means you see posts from certain friends, brands or news sites more than others, and it determines what you are interested in by working out what you have clicked on, liked, commented on and shared” (Marshall n. pag.).

- “He suggests driving debate by asking a question, but warns: ‘Never ask a question that’s ... very clichéd or generic. If there isn't a genuine question to ask, don't be afraid to put the post out and let it take off organically with your own community’” (Marshall n. pag.).

- “Unless they're interesting enough to draw comments, simple status updates aren’t going to move you into Top News feeds. Objects such as creative games that require a response (i.e., trivia or caption contests) open up opportunities to add highly weighted interaction and build affinity with new users” (Lodico
Google+

- “It’s the groundwork for a level of search quality difficult to fathom based on what we know today. It (Google+) also connects all the other Google products like YouTube, Google Maps, Images, Offers, Books, and more” (Llorens 2).
- “Because Google now refers about 30 percent of all traffic to newspaper sites, Google+ has the potential to surpass Facebook as a news referring site” (Schmeltzer 7).
- “Our goal with Google+ is to make sharing on the web like sharing in real life,” said Larry Page, Google CEO, in a July 14, 2011, investor call” (Schmeltzer 7).

Pinterest

- “Each user can create and pin to dozens of different topic boards, to share different types of content” (Mozdzer n. pag.).
- “The simplicity and visual appeal gives posters a different approach to attract interest for their content” (Mozdzer n. pag.).
- “The key, as with any social network, is engaging your audience. Invite readers to contribute their own content to boards, as the Atlanta Journal Constitution does. Keep the pins interesting — and don’t be afraid to share content that isn’t from your news site” (Mozdzer n. pag.).
- “Several news organizations have boards that highlight their front page each day. The pins link back to the newspapers’ websites” (Mozdzer n. pag.).
• “The Guardian of London has a board called "On Our Radar," in which it links to news stories from other sources” (Mozdzer n. pag.).

Photo sharing networks

• “Instagram has 80 million members, and millions of photos are uploaded monthly. ‘It’s a never-ending fountain of free content,’ says Chris Silva, an analyst at Altimeter Group. ‘If I’m doing anything graphically based, I’d be foolish to pass this up’” (Graham n. pag.).

• “I’m not suggesting newspapers should put their entire archive online (the archive remains one of the most valuable things we have), how much harm could it do to put a batch of useful pictures – town centre shots, crowd shots from a football match, archive images around big events, one picture from a large event – onto Flickr with a Creative Commons license which permits reuse so long as it is credited? In my opinion, no harm at all” (Higgerson n. pag.).

Social Media Data

For this study it was important to turn to experts in the fields of social media and news in order to gain experts opinions on how to best utilize social media at a university newspaper. The ever-changing nature and relatively recent development and adoption of social media by the news industry has resulted in very limited or up-to-date literature available on the subject. The experts, who currently work within the social media field, can provide the best possible suggestions for how a newspaper might utilize social media. Jennifer Cairo and Erica Anderson were each
asked questions to aid in clarifying the existing literature. Twitter accounts were also observed in order to gather data that will be able to provide examples of how other newspapers are utilizing that social network. The responses from the social media experts are summarized in the following tables. The following questions were developed to clarify the original research question.

Should different content from print be disseminated via different social media networks?

This question was formulated in order to create a clear response about how a newspaper should disseminate its content via social media networks. Due to each social network’s unique characteristics, the possibility remains that only certain types of newspaper content should be posted to that network. There is a limited amount of literature that clarifies whether or not only certain types of news content should be shared on Facebook, etc. Instead of specifying which networks content should be channeled through, literature specified how the content should be posted on each network.

Although the experts agreed with the literature that the type of content is not so important as long as it is engaging and of high quality, they did note subtle differences between social networks and which types of content belongs in each. Erica Anderson stated that the type of content should not be considered at all and instead emphasized the quality of the content, but Jennifer Cairo said newspapers with more niche content could benefit from focusing on differing networks, such as
LinkedIn for newspapers with business content, Facebook for newspapers with lots of lifestyle stories and Twitter for both.

Table 1: Different Uses for Social Media Networks

*Should different content be disseminated via differing social media networks?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Cairo</td>
<td>Yes, and consider exploring social networks like Tumblr to engage a different demographic with lifestyle-type content.</td>
<td>Consider Facebook for consumer driven content and LinkedIn for more business type content. Use Twitter for both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Anderson</td>
<td>The type of content is not as relevant as the timing of content.</td>
<td>Always post information on Twitter when it is new. Timeliness is the key factor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there any habits a newspaper should not employ on specific social networking sites?

The second question was asked to more specifically address the original, single research question. By addressing this question with published research and then garnering experts’ opinions on the subject, the question helps clarify bad practices on social media.

The literature clarified many bad practices on social media networks, in general, the experts agreed with the literature, and also specified those actions as ones to avoid. The literature said to be wary of using Twitter as a place to simply post headlines and URLs. “Twitter is being used like a streaming RSS service for news stories that promotes and re-distributes previously published news content” (Messner 20). Literature also noted newspapers should avoid frequently posting on
Facebook if the posts did not receive a high level of interaction in the form of likes, comments or shares. Without interaction from users, the EdgeRank algorithm gives that post a lesser ranking on users’ newsfeeds, meaning the post shows up further down the newsfeed stream, or not at all. The downward spiral worsens if the newspaper posts frequently without much interaction.

The experts were in agreement that it is better to post less on Facebook and more on Twitter, but in both cases, to be sure the content posted is of good quality and is posted in an engaging, interesting or intriguing way.

Table 2: Social Media Habits to Avoid

*Are there specific habits a newspaper should be sure not to employ on social networking sites?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Cairo</td>
<td>Posting too much on Facebook.</td>
<td>It reduces the page’s EdgeRank score. Only share the best of the best content and rely on other users to naturally share the rest of the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Anderson</td>
<td>Treating the Twitter feed like an RSS feed.</td>
<td>Instead, pose questions and rewrite for Twitter. Do not use the 140 characters to paste the headline and URL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print?

This question was asked to clarify more specific actions that would help a newspaper successfully utilize social media networks. There are certain techniques a newspaper can use on social media to drive online traffic, increase interaction and
ultimately increase readership. This question garnered knowledge from experts and was used to gather information published in literature.

Most of the specific suggestions centered on the idea that a newspaper should not treat social media as an RSS feed to disseminate news as shovelware. The literature and experts were in agreement that newspapers needed to pose questions, or otherwise engage with users on social media, rather than simply post headlines and links. As Marshall recommends: “He suggests driving debate by asking a question, but warns: ‘Never ask a question that’s ... very clichéd or generic. If there isn't a genuine question to ask, don't be afraid to put the post out and let it take off organically with your own community’” (Marshall).

### Table 3: Increase Social Media Interaction and Traffic

*How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Cairo</td>
<td>Use hashtags and ask questions.</td>
<td>Hashtags can create consumer generated media campaigns. Ask questions on posts to give users a reason to read and interact with the social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Anderson</td>
<td>Do not simply use headlines and post unique, quality content.</td>
<td>Quality content will attract people. Pose questions, do not just “shovel” content from print to social media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, the experts essentially stated that a newspaper must make a poignant effort to engage with users on social networks, rather than simply
post material without engaging questions, hashtags or other relatable social media-specific content.

**How often should a newspaper post on its social media?**

This question was formulated in order to clarify the original research question and to gather more specific responses regarding the timing of social media posts. The previous questions specified best practices in regards to different types of content and how a newspaper might use social media to encourage engagement, but questions about the ideal frequency of posts on social media networks remained. Some literature varied from the experts’ opinions, but in general the ideas were similar.

Although one source of literature (Marshall), said a Facebook page from a news journalism organization could get away with posting six to eight times per day, most literature and the experts were in agreement that newspapers should show more discretion on social media profiles such as Facebook. Jennifer Cairo said Facebook in particular would punish social media profiles that posted too much without receiving much interaction in return.

Very few news organizations are capable of pulling true engagement on more than two or three posts per day on Facebook, yet many post upwards of a dozen stories per day. ... Since people aren’t going to interact with every single story that gets posted, EdgeRank for the page drops and Facebook ends up showing the individual posts to less and less people. This cycle then feeds on itself and exposure drops dramatically. (Appendix A).
Experts and literature were in agreement, however, that dozens of posts per day on Twitter was acceptable, optimal even. The permission to post comes with the warning that the posts should not be simple copies of headlines and links, but interlaced with engaging questions and always contain high quality content.

Table 4: Frequency of Social Media Posts

How often should a newspaper post on its social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Cairo</td>
<td>Usually no more than three posts per day on Facebook. Dozens of posts per day on Twitter is fine.</td>
<td>More than three times per day on Facebook results in decreasing EdgeRank score and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica Anderson</td>
<td>For Twitter, often, but only if the content is diversified.</td>
<td>Use @replies to cite sources, don’t just put a headline and a URL, use hashtags and be engaging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twitter Data

In addition to gathering information from literature and social media experts, this study included a one-month observation of various newspapers’ Twitter activity. Six newspapers were selected for observation: Mustang Daily (the student-run newspaper at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo) was observed in order to gather a sense of how the newspaper utilized its Twitter accounts. The two other university newspapers chosen for observation on Twitter, The Daily Collegian (Pennsylvania State University) and The Michigan Daily (University of Michigan), were chosen because the universities have a slightly larger student population than Cal Poly, and because the newspapers have high quality reputations. The three professional newspapers chosen for observation were chosen based on

All six Twitter profiles were observed for 30 days between February 9, 2013 and March 10, 2013. Data from each profile was recorded for the number of tweets and retweets each day, the number of followers the profile had, the content of the tweets (whether it contained editorial or advertising content), as well as other general observations as noted in the following descriptions of each profile.

Each newspaper’s Twitter activity is summarized in the table below.

(Appendix C)

Table 5: Twitter activity data February 9, 2013 – March 10, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total tweets (tweets &amp; retweets)</td>
<td>2,138</td>
<td>1,282</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. tweets/ day</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Followers</td>
<td>7.7 million</td>
<td>468,000</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
<td>16,889</td>
<td>29,006</td>
<td>3,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total retweets</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. retweets/ day</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New York Times

Of the six Twitter profiles observed, The New York Times had the most followers by approximately six million. It also had the largest number of tweets.
during the 30 days, at 2,138 tweets. Of those tweets, 232 were retweets from other New York Times accounts, reporters or editors. The largest amount of tweets in one day was 99 and the least was 41. On average, the newspaper tweeted from its main account 71 times per day. The newspaper has multiple specialty profiles, including NYT Sports and The Caucus, which tweets about Congress, as well as many others. The main Twitter account, @nytimes, occasionally retweeted its own journalists. @nytimes posted frequently, but the tweets almost always only contained a headline and a URL.

**Los Angeles Times**

At approximately 500,000 followers, Los Angeles Times had the smallest following of the three national newspapers observed. The main Los Angeles Times profile tweeted 1,282 times during the 30-day period. Of those tweets, 109 were retweets from other LA Times accounts, editors and reporters. The largest amount of tweets in one day during the 30-day period was 93 and the smallest amount was 21. On average, the newspaper tweeted from its main account 43 times per day. The newspaper utilized many specialty profiles and occasionally retweeted its own journalists. The small description at the top of the @latimes handle noted that all its Twitter handles were named at latimes.com/twitter, where 64 Twitter handles were listed, ranging from columnists to coverage of the Los Angeles Lakers.

**The Washington Post**

The Washington Post main Twitter handle had nearly 1.5 million users as of March 2013. During the 30-day observation period The Washington Post tweeted 1,684 times from its main account, 379 of which were retweets from other
Washington Post accounts, reporters and editors. The most tweets from the main account in one day was 116 and the least was 22. On average, the newspaper tweeted 56 times per day from its main handle. The account frequently retweeted its own journalists. Other Washington Post Twitter handles include Post Politics and the Capital Weather Gang. None of the smaller Twitter profiles were listed in the description at the top of the main Twitter account, and because the newspaper mostly retweeted its journalists and not its other Twitter profiles, it was more difficult to find those accounts to follow.

The Michigan Daily

The Michigan Daily had nearly 17,000 followers as of March 2013. The Michigan Daily tweeted 123 times from its main account during the 30-day observation period. Of those tweets, zero were retweets. The largest number of tweets in one day was 14 and the smallest number was zero. On average, The Michigan Daily tweeted four times per day. The Michigan Daily did not post a tweet on nine of the 30 observation days, mostly weekends. The main account listed the two other specialty Twitter profiles for arts and sports in the description on the main Twitter profile, but during the 30-day observation period never retweeted the profiles; @michigandaily did not utilize the retweet tool at all during the observation.

The Daily Collegian

The Daily Collegian Twitter had approximately 29,000 followers as of March 2013. The Daily Collegian tweeted from its main account 423 times during the 30-day observation period. Of those tweets, 82 were retweets from its other accounts, editors and reporters. The largest amount of tweets in one day was 81 and the least was one.
On average, the newspaper tweeted from its main account 14 times per day. The main Twitter, @dailycollegian, did not list its other specialty handles in the description, but it frequently retweeted them, making them easy to discover. The other handles included Collegian Footblog and TDC Sports, among others. The Daily Collegian Twitter frequently retweeted its own journalists.

**Mustang Daily**

Mustang Daily had approximately 3,200 followers as of March 2013. Mustang Daily tweeted from its main account 64 times during the 30-day observation period. Of those tweets, 36, or more than half, were retweets from its other accounts, reporters and editors. On average, Mustang Daily tweeted two times per day. The largest amount of tweets in one day was 14 and the smallest number was zero. During the 30-day observation period, there were 11 days that Mustang Daily did not tweet or retweet from its main account. The main Twitter profile, @mustangdaily, did not list the other specialty profiles on its description, but retweeted them often enough that it was easy to find the profiles. @mustangdaily occasionally retweeted its staff members or others from the university, such as the men’s head basketball coach. The other handles were for arts and sports content.

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**Chapter 5**

*Discussion and Recommendation*

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**Summary**
This study was conducted with the goal of finding the best social media practices for newspapers. Due to the growing presence of online journalism and the changing news dissemination tactics, it is necessary for newspapers to cultivate their online presence on social media networks. Since new networks are continuously developed and users' preferences are constantly changing, it is necessary for newspapers to develop a social media plan not only for best practices in the present, but a plan so that the newspaper might monitor and stay on top of trends. By staying up to date and utilizing skillful social media tactics, a newspaper can garner more interaction, online traffic and an increased readership. In order to obtain timely information about newspapers and their utilization of social media it was necessary to consult experts in addition to literature on the subject. Each expert answered questions tailored to their wealth of knowledge that were crafted to help clarify the original research question: What are the best social media practices for a daily college newspaper?

1. How would you describe the impact that a social media plan can have on a newspaper?

2. Do you think certain social networks would be more beneficial for disseminating different types of content created by newspapers? If so, please specify which networks are most ideal for which type of content.

3. Are there any social networks a newspaper should not employ, or are there any habits or actions a newspaper should avoid on specific social networks?
4. How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print?

5. How can a newspaper use social media profiles to increase marketing or sales revenue?

6. Do you have recommendations for the number of times per day a newspaper should post on other social media profiles, or tips on content for the posts (i.e. – hashtags, photos, videos, links, etc)?

Each expert was also asked three questions specific to their wealth of knowledge gained from experience in their respective fields.

**Discussion and Recommendations for Practice**

By comparing the data from literature summarized in Chapter 2 with the data gathered from experts in Chapter 4, the following conclusions can be made about best practices for each of the following social networks.

**Twitter**

Both experts agreed that posting more than a dozen times per day on Twitter is not only acceptable, but also probably necessary. Jennifer Cairo emphasized the benefit of multiple Twitter accounts, and said a newspaper was particularly liberated to post frequently on Twitter from different handles such as sports and lifestyle. Erica Anderson said the most important element was the quality of the content in each tweet. A newspaper should not tweet out every article it produces, but pick and choose the best quality content and present it on Twitter in an engaging and palatable way — i.e., not as a headline with a URL.
The literature emphasized the importance of generating quality content, utilizing hashtags and not treating Twitter as an RSS feed for the newspaper. Twitter should be used as a place for a newspaper to have a conversation with its readers. “News organizations should address this lack of community engagement and develop guidelines that do allow for a better dialogue with their audiences to make use of Twitter’s full potential as a social network” (Messner 20).

Based on the observation of six separate newspaper Twitter accounts, the following assumptions can be made.

Most of the newspapers observed still use the shovelware technique of copying the headline and URL from the article into the 140-character tweet, despite agreement between the experts and literature that doing so is a bad practice.

Newspaper Twitter profiles that listed their additional accounts in the short description at the top of the profile made it easier to find those profiles to follow. Newspapers should list other handles by their paper in the description at the top of the main Twitter profile.

All the Twitter handles, except for The Michigan Daily, retweeted their own reporters and editors when the content was appropriate.

During the 30-day observation period, none of the six handles tweeted advertising content. All content related back to articles or news. Erica Anderson, the Twitter expert, said she has not noticed any news organizations utilizing Twitter in an advertising sense.
After observing activity on Twitter accounts, reviewing existing literature on the subject and interviewing experts in the social media field, the following conclusions can be made about best practices on Twitter:

The network should not be treated as an RSS feed. A newspaper should foster engagement with its followers by asking questions, posting intriguing and quality content and by utilizing hashtags. Different accounts should be utilized to cater to niche audiences in arts, sports or other topics, and the main newspaper account should interact with and retweet those accounts. The editors and reporters at a paper should be well versed in Twitter etiquette specific to the newspaper and should interact with and retweet the newspapers' account in order to drive followers and traffic. Timely content should always be tweeted. Use more @mentions in tweets and less URLs.

Facebook

The experts agreed that the one of the worst things that can be done on any social media network is to treat it like an RSS feed. Jennifer Cairo emphasized that point by acknowledging that many newspapers recognize the ease of disseminating content via Facebook and simply schedule a mass of posts containing each article from that day. However, she said, that results in a decreased EdgeRank score, which creates a downward spiral of fewer views on posts and less engagement.

The literature was in agreement with the experts and noted that posts scheduled to Facebook, and not naturally posted, decrease the EdgeRank score, which in turn decreases the number of people that see posts from that account displayed prominently on their newsfeed. Richard Moynihan emphasized the point that
Facebook should not be used to broadcast, but rather to engage with users (Marshall n. pag.).

After consulting literature and experts on best practices for Facebook, it can be concluded that a newspaper should post every day, but only if it has interesting and engaging content. A newspaper must not simply broadcast all of its content, and it must remember to build engagement on each post before it starts posting more frequently. A newspaper should also rely on its editors, reporters and readers to more organically share content with their Facebook friends. Ideally, readers would naturally share the newspaper's content via Facebook. Facebook should be used to share articles, but try to pose a question to interact with users. Reply to users on social media if they ask the newspaper direct questions and it is a civilized, mature discussion. Posting photos is can attract interaction, but try diversifying the posts. For example, instead of always posting albums from men's basketball games, try posting only the best picture a few hours before the entire album to gain interaction and create buzz around that photo.

**Google+**

The literature about Google+ suggests that the network has the potential to surpass Facebook as far as usefulness for newspapers. Google+ traffic currently refers a larger percentage of its users to news sites than Facebook does, suggesting both its use and audience are more apt to be readily utilized by the news media (Schmeltzer 7). Google+ has huge potential for businesses and brands, but it is not yet enough widely used to have as much use Facebook or Twitter do currently (Marks n. pag.).
Google+ is similar enough to Facebook that similar assumptions can be made about best practices for the network. By skillfully selecting content to share on Google+ and interacting with other users, a newspaper can utilize Google+ to gather a loyal following and drive traffic. It should not be treated as an RSS feed. Videos and pictures will grab attention and interaction similar to the way they do on Facebook. The social network should be utilized now in order to gain a solid content base and following, so that newspaper content begins to show up in other users Google searches.

**Pinterest**

According to expert Jennifer Cairo, newspapers should utilize Pinterest to curate more than its own content. Cairo said the same principle of not treating Facebook or Twitter as an RSS feed applies to Pinterest as well. Newspapers should use Pinterest to curate interesting information about features or topics often covered in the paper. Jennifer Cairo suggests the example of curating pictures and links about a sporting event after a newspaper runs a feature on that event. She also suggests journalists use the network to spark story ideas and gather interesting information to include in articles.

The existing literature agrees with the experts on how a newspaper ought to utilize Pinterest. “The key, as with any social network, is engaging your audience. Invite readers to contribute their own content to boards, as the Atlanta Journal Constitution does. Keep the pins interesting — and don’t be afraid to share content that isn’t from your news site” (Mozdzer n. pag.). Mozdzer also says several news organizations use Pinterest to highlight their front pages and other visually pleasing
graphics created by the news organization each day. The literature also notes that many newspapers use Pinterest for inspiration of their own, by curating boards to help with feature stories.

Los Angeles Times uses Pinterest to foster creativity and networking between news organizations with a board that invites other news organizations to join and share content of their own. The description of the board says in part, “If you are a newspaper with an account on Pinterest, I invite you to be a part of this board. Please pin any of your publication’s original content, but in moderation.” As of February 2013 the board had 736 followers, 1,195 pins and 154 contributors, including the San Luis Obispo Tribune, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal (Pinterest n. pag.).

By examining both the responses from experts and existing literature on the utilization of Pinterest, the following assumptions can be made: Newspapers should use Pinterest to share photographs and other visually appealing graphics created by the staff. Newspapers should also use the site to network creative ideas with other media organizations by participating in shared boards and curate interesting photos and information by pinning things not created by the newspaper.

**Photosharing networks**

The experts emphasized the importance of sharing high quality photographs on social media networks. Jennifer Cairo said Flickr is the optimal place to share photos with high artistic value or that could be picked up and run by other news organizations with credit. Cairo said Instagram is the best way to create buzz and a loyal following by using it to share photographs from staff photographers and for a
more on-the-ground style of reporting. Finally, she recommended Pinterest for sharing photos as long as the pins linked back to the newspaper’s website and fit the social networks service ideal of being an “inspiration and idea platform.”

Cairo suggests consumer driven campaigns as a way to drive users and increase loyalty. “The paper in Cincinnati has a hashtag for local photography of the area. They host an annual contest and then put out a print book that showcases the best of these images. These are the types of things that build loyalty and exposure over time, which helps keep readers coming back over and over” (Appendix A).

The literature mostly agrees with Cairo. Instagram has at least 80 million members, millions of photos uploaded to the site each month and photos made searchable by hashtags. Chris Silva described Instagram as a “never-ending fountain of free content” and suggests that any business involved in any sort of graphic design would be foolish not to use Instagram (Graham n. pag.).

Higgerson (2012) suggested Flickr be used in a way similar to what Cairo suggested. Newsrooms should upload some of their photo archive of universal photos such as a crowd at a football game, with a Creative Commons license, so that people can discover the photos outside the context of media and so the photos can be used with attribution.

By examining both the literature and the experts, the following conclusions can be made: newspapers should utilize Flickr to share photos with a Creative Commons license. Newspapers should use Instagram to cultivate a loyal following and to share more personal or behind-the-scenes content gathered from the editing process in a newsroom and from reporters and photographers on the ground.
Social media general guidelines and further recommendations for practice

In general, the idea most emphasized by literature and by the experts was that newspapers should not post on social media networks simply for the sake of posting. Any post on a network must contain quality content or an engaging means of dissemination, such as an interesting question, or ideally, both.

Many other social media sites besides the ones discussed in this study could be beneficial for a newspaper to utilize. Tumblr, for instance, has been experimented with by many newspapers, something Jennifer Cairo said may not make sense at first glance, but could help the newspapers delve into a new demographic of readers. It is important for newspapers to stay innovative and ready to experiment with new social media networks that will be developed.

Study Conclusion

The findings of this study make it apparent that continuous qualitative research needs to be conducted on the best social media practices available for newspapers. Due to the ever-changing nature of social media and the current state of change in the media industry, research must be continuously done in order to stay up-to-date on best practices. Because of the constantly changing technology and development of new social networks, the findings of this study are not applicable to every newspaper, and for newspapers they are currently applicable towards, new best practices will develop in the future due to the changing nature of news consumption preferences. This study can serve those well who are looking for social
media guidelines for their newspaper or other media organization. The study findings and required for practice are particularly applicable to other daily university newspapers.

References


Appendix A

Interview transcripts: Jennifer Evans Cairo
Holly Dickson: “How would you, as a professional in the social media industry, describe the impact that a social media plan can have on a newspaper?”

Jennifer Evans Cairo: “This is an excellent question and to be honest, we haven’t reached a stage of the game where anyone seems to be able to agree on a set standard. The thing I see popping up a lot within the MSM (mainstream media) realm is newspaper owners and editors who are absolutely terrified one of their journalists, editors or staffers will say something personally on social media that will get them sued. After all, it’s a big change from the days when a slip up at a party meant a half a dozen people heard something to the current atmosphere where a drunken Tweet can make the front page news the next day. For some papers, the answer has been to tightly control what can be said online in any situation by someone who is employed by the paper. I ran across some very interesting perspectives on this last year while doing some consulting for a major East Coast newspaper conglomerate. The Poynter blog had some articles on the outcome of some employee/media company issues as well as some warnings about what is and isn’t legal from this perspective. A good social media plan should be designed to help employees navigate the tricky waters of separating their personal life from their business lives on social media. It shouldn’t be designed to work as a gag. We are moving into a realm where companies are going to have to understand that social media isn’t simply a part of marketing, it’s a part of life. It’s part of why hiring people that show good judgment may be every bit as important as hiring people who are decent writers.”

HD: “Do you think certain social networks would be more beneficial for disseminating different types of content created by newspapers? If so, please specify which networks are most ideal for which type of content.”

JEC: “The networks that work best can heavily influence the type of content from the newspaper. For a business focused newspapers like the Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, etc there’s enormous potential in exploring LinkedIn along with Twitter and other outlets. For more consumer driven papers like USA Today, The New York Times and the Chicago Tribune, a more B2C (business-to-consumer) focused site like Facebook is going to be the natural tie-in to using Twitter. An interesting trend I’ve seen lately is also an exploration of Tumblr by many of the broader market newspapers who have a heavy emphasis on lifestyle reporting. Whether it’s for the reblogging potential or the ease of use in sharing links, Tumblr seems to have caught the industry’s eye. I personally question whether the demographic of Tumblr (which skews fairly young, think late teens to early 20s, females) is a good fit for these type of companies, but the truth is that might be exactly why it is being explored. Sometimes the way to build a new readership is to take your message to them in a format where they are already comfortable and then to hope that exposure carries over to your other properties.”
**HD:** “Are there any social networks a newspaper should not employ, or are there any habits or actions a newspaper should avoid on specific social networks?”

**JEC:** “One of the biggest mistakes I see newspapers making is actually over sharing on sites like Facebook. Because it’s so easy to get the content out there, it’s very tempting for editors to simply do a massive scheduled blast of the day’s stories. Unfortunately with Facebook’s EdgeRank algorithm closely monitoring the level of engagement each and every post on a company’s page receives, this shotgun blast strategy ends up shooting most newspapers in the foot. Very few news organizations are capable of pulling true engagement on more than two or three posts per day on Facebook, yet many post upwards of a dozen stories per day. Since people aren’t going to interact with every single story that gets posted, EdgeRank for the page drops and Facebook ends up showing the individual posts to less and less people. This cycle then feeds on itself and exposure drops dramatically. Many newspapers have millions of followers, but have updates that are only displaying to hundreds or a few thousand people. Posting only the best of the best content to a Facebook page and relying on your audience to share from the newspaper site itself tends to provide a much stronger overall strategy and exposure.”

**HD:** “How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and increase readership online or in print?”

**JEC:** “A lot of it is in how things are tied together. Consumer generated media campaigns are often a great fit in this regard. I saw several newspapers doing wonderful things with citizen reporting and citizen photography during the London Olympics last year by utilizing hashtags on Twitter and Instagram. For metro newspapers, I’ve also seen some wonderful community based campaigns. The paper in Cincinnati has a hashtag for local photography of the area. They host an annual contest and then put out a print book that showcases the best of these images. These are the types of things that build loyalty and exposure over time, which helps keep readers coming back over and over. Another simple step is to ask questions when posts are made to social media. A lot of companies will put up the headline and maybe a photo, but they forget to give people a reason to engage with them. Asking what readers think about a key point from the article not only gives them a reason to click through to read the article, but also gives them a reason to respond to the post on Facebook, thus spreading awareness of it to their own connections.”

**HD:** “How can a newspaper use social media profiles to increase marketing or sales revenue?”

**JEC:** “It’s actually pretty amazing what well utilized social media efforts can do to the page views and return readership of a newspaper. My agency worked with a paper last summer to help them make some changes to their approach on Facebook and Twitter. Within a month of implementing those changes, they actually saw double digit increases in traffic coming into their web site via those channels. Even more impressive, the time on site for those visitors was strong as well. For a newspaper,
social media is all about creating enough engagement to keep the consumer connected via those channels so they can be on the receiving end of the best of the best stories being shared by the brand. This helps keep continuous exposure and drive sustainable growth in traffic.”

**HD:** “Do you have recommendations for the number of times per day a newspaper should post on other social media profiles, or tips on content for the posts (i.e. – hashtags, photos, videos, links, etc)?”

**JEC:** “Oh, kind of hit this one above. In general, I don’t recommend more than three post per day on Facebook unless you are seeing significant engagement. Once a paper has strong engagement, I think it’s safe to test the gradual increase of posting so long as you are carefully watching for any associated drop in engagement. I would generally apply a similar rule of thumb to LinkedIn, posting only the best of the best. On Twitter, there’s far more space for posting and I see no reason why companies cannot post a dozen or more times per day. Even higher numbers are doable if you create and promote multiple Twitter accounts (Lifestyle, Metro, Sports, Politics, Op-Ed) for your paper and tweet accordingly. Multimedia like photos and videos being included in posts to these networks also increases their potential engagement, sharing and traffic value. Also, while social media management tools offering post scheduling can work very well, Facebook tends to ding content posted via third party tools, so it’s important to use Facebook’s native scheduling tool and to post content directly to the site.”

**HD:** “Which network(s) should a newspaper use to share photos by its photographers (Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram, etc)?”

**JEC:** “It depends on the purpose of sharing the photographs. For extremely high quality photos that have a type of artistic value or that may be picked up by other publications and shared with credit, it’s hard to beat Flickr. I’ve seen several companies employ very strong photo sharing campaigns with other media outlets by hosting images there. For instance, on-the-ground style reporting, it’s tough to beat Instagram. Roving reporters, citizen journalists using hashtags and even staff photographers can share a different style of photograph on this site and can generate a lot of buzz and loyalty. That said, it’s important to remember that Instagram doesn’t allow you to link back to a story or content on your site, so it’s still a bit of a stand-alone engagement platform. This may fit for some papers, but isn’t a natural or worthwhile fit for all of them. In terms of Pinterest, it’s important to look past the idea of simply sharing photos and recognize that Pinterest is a visual-based bookmarking service that serves as more of an “inspiration and idea platform” than anything else. This means that papers need to set up their Pinterest efforts in a way that properly segments content and offers up the type of content that fits their target market. Curating boards featuring recipes from local restaurants or boards that feature links to special interest stories can be a great way to utilize both the existing content of the paper as well as great content from other media properties.”
**HD:** “How can a newspaper best utilize Pinterest?”

**JEC:** “The best newspapers are not using Pinterest solely to link to their own content. I see this mistake happening fairly often with print magazines and it’s a true shame. Pinterest is more than an RSS feed and should be treated as such by marketers. In terms of newspapers, there are the obvious board routes like I mentioned above...recipes, DIY projects, local features, etc... One thing that few papers seem to have taken up on but that I feel holds enormous potential is the idea of curating boards to match features at the paper. For example, if a metro paper does a huge special feature spread for the local home and garden show, it would make sense to curate a board around that topic. If they feature a highlight of a local sporting event, it might be worthwhile to invest some time curating a board that features content on the event. Links to blog profiles or articles about the participants, links to online retailers that sell jerseys and branded gear, etc. Pinterest becomes a place to share the resources that journalists use while putting a story together, so readers can dig deeper on the stories that interest them.”

**HD:** “Is there anything else you'd like to add?”

**JEC:** “I think that’s it. I got pretty wordy up there. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out!”

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**Appendix B**

*Interview transcripts: Erica Anderson*
Holly Dickson: “Do you think different social networks would be beneficial for disseminating different types of materials from newspapers?”

Erica Anderson: “I would recommend, instead of thinking about the type of content, I would recommend thinking about when content is new, always sharing it on Twitter. I don’t have an opinion on that, other than I think Twitter should be thought of as, since it’s a real-time information network, to share everything there first and to build from there.”

HD: “Do you think there are social networks a newspaper should not use or are there any habits a newspaper should specifically avoid?”

EA: “I think that journalists should be encouraged to use Twitter as responsible individuals and employees. I think having an environment where Twitter is encouraged and used at the top sets a great example. So some of the best news organizations I talked about today, such as The New York Times and BBC, their editors are using Twitter, setting an example of how it can be used to find information, verify information, to distribute stories. So I think that’s what’s really important is encouraging leadership of news organizations to be engaged and that will create a positive downstream affect for journalists in the whole newsroom.”

HD: “Would you recommend that the main Twitter account for a newspaper retweet their journalists or editors?”

EA: “Yeah, I definitely would. I think you can think about that main account as, like I said, your quarterback. A lot of times your readers are going to come, and maybe they know specific people, but really they just know that brand name and so I think you can utilize it and probably its volume — I bet it has a lot of followers — utilize that to do something like ‘Follow Friday.’ I think that’s kind of old-school now, but still using something like that to recommend different writers to follow is really smart, to reward them.”

HD: “How can a newspaper use social media to increase interaction with users and gain online or print readership?”

EA: “By sharing behind-the-scenes information that no one else has, by sharing great content. You know, not just sharing the headline, but actually writing specific content like a teaser or a question. Engaging people to click-through, to ask you a question back, to capture them. So you have to think a bit about writing content differently for Twitter, while recognizing that if you give them everything they want in that 140 characters, that headline, you know they might not come back to your site. So I think you really have to put a focus on kind of copy editing for Twitter, and then by testing things out you’ll be able to begin to see what works and what doesn’t work to drive followers. So I think that’s important.

We just launched Twitter Cards — and that’s a way to allow people to expand their tweet to see a summary and a headline and we’re looking at that right now as a
possible product that’s going to drive engagement for news organizations. So I’d say keeping on top of different products that we’re releasing, and learning about the ones that could potentially drive you more value, and experimenting with those.”

**HD:** “How important do you think it is for newspapers to adhere to AP Style on their Twitter accounts? Or do you think Twitter is a more causal conversation?”

**EA:** “I think that you should have the highest standards that you do in any medium, and I think that’s what’s going to be important for Twitter as a complement to you. There have been times when I’ve needed to cut certain words because I’ve needed to attribute what I was saying to the person who said it. Even though I was taking it and rearranging it, or cutting down the headline, I still needed to make sure I attributed it to that person, so I took a hit on the first 30 characters — I wanted to add my own thoughts to it. So I just think having the highest standards is really important on Twitter and you guys will figure out what that means.”

**HD:** “Do you have an opinion on how a newspaper might use Twitter to increase sales or marketing revenue?”

**EA:** “So, it depends on what your newspaper strategy is — like if you’re trying to get people behind your pay wall, or you know, offering people promotions. We’re seeing more experimentation on that in areas other than news. For example, an NFL sports team tweeted out something like ‘Buy tickets today to the game, use this promo code and get 15% off.’ So people are doing that on Twitter, and it’s really working. How that works for news yet, I don’t know — we haven’t done experiments. But I would say just focus on doing what you do well by creating high quality content and sharing it in real time and you’re going to see rewards in terms of followers and engagement.”

**HD:** “Do you have recommendations for the number of times per day a newspaper should tweet or which types of content should be in the tweet?”

**EA:** “I would take a step back and say that it should be diversified. You can go to media.twitter.com/newsrooms and download a bigger presentation than the one I gave today, and it’s all best practices. And it’s going to tell you stuff like using hashtags to give a sense of the subject matter or the event; using @replies to cite your sources, to say who you’re writing about or who wrote this; using links, but not always. But the worst thing I think a news organization can do is treat their Twitter feed as an RSS feed and just have a headline and a link — it’s not engaging, it’s not what people expect on Twitter. So I would say it has to be diversified and I would say you’ll find out what the right cadence is for you.

When I worked in television news, when I was working for Katie Couric, I tried to recreate the evening news on Twitter. So, during the day there’d be certain news stories I’d tweet about in the morning because she was going to talk about it later, whether it was a question, ‘What do you think?’ or ‘What unanswered questions do you have about this subject?’ Then, later in the day, I might have her tweet a quote about the story that’s coming up that would tease it. So that’s television broadcast,
but I think for print you have to think about what are the different elements inside your newspaper that are really key. Like is it headlines today, weather today, sporting event scores, corrections — treating all that stuff as it’s appropriate on the Twitter feed and not worrying as much about what’s too much or what’s too little, it’s all about high quality.”

**HD:** “Are there any techniques that are specific to a university newspaper, like specific hashtags or anything that would be different than just a national news organization? Or a way that would engage our demographic more?”

**EA:** “Well, what’s your mascot? (The Mustangs). Well, I think you need to have a brainstorm and come up with something creative that students identify with. So, to me the way you engage people is you have a call to action, like: “What makes you proud to be a Mustang? #mustang.” Then when you’re doing stories about student life, you use #mustang, you just kind of create connections. I’m sure you can find more creative stuff than that, but you want it to be natural. You don’t want to force people into awkward stuff. You know, like #university — way too broad. If you’re at a national newspaper convention and you’re from a university, like “this is what universities think about this…” You know, that makes more sense, but I’d say find something that really speaks to student life. And, come up with a segment. Like every Friday you guys do at 3 p.m., talk about the best things happening on the weekend and it’s #mustanglife or whatever.”

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**Appendix C**

*Twitter Data: Observed February 9, 2013 through March 10, 2013*
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<th>Tweets/day</th>
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| Feb. 10 | 49 | 0 | 0 | 49 | 21 | 0 | 1 | 22 |
| Feb. 11 | 74 | 0 | 18 | 92 | 32 | 0 | 0 | 32 |
| Feb. 12 | 70 | 0 | 4 | 74 | 42 | 0 | 13 | 55 |
| Feb. 13 | 64 | 0 | 19 | 83 | 49 | 0 | 44 | 93 |
| Feb. 14 | 73 | 0 | 14 | 87 | 41 | 0 | 5 | 46 |
| Feb. 15 | 78 | 0 | 12 | 90 | 39 | 0 | 0 | 39 |
| Feb. 16 | 49 | 0 | 0 | 49 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| Feb. 17 | 41 | 0 | 0 | 41 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| Feb. 18 | 53 | 0 | 0 | 53 | 35 | 0 | 1 | 36 |
| Feb. 19 | 51 | 0 | 2 | 53 | 44 | 0 | 2 | 46 |
| Feb. 20 | 71 | 0 | 18 | 89 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 38 |
| Feb. 21 | 65 | 0 | 5 | 70 | 41 | 0 | 2 | 43 |
| Feb. 22 | 60 | 0 | 5 | 65 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 43 |
| Feb. 23 | 53 | 0 | 1 | 54 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 33 |
| Feb. 24 | 78 | 0 | 24 | 92 | 34 | 0 | 6 | 40 |
| Feb. 25 | 69 | 0 | 13 | 82 | 25 | 0 | 6 | 31 |
| Feb. 26 | 69 | 0 | 6 | 75 | 48 | 0 | 2 | 50 |
| Feb. 27 | 66 | 0 | 13 | 79 | 39 | 0 | 1 | 40 |
| Feb. 28 | 72 | 0 | 10 | 82 | 40 | 0 | 2 | 42 |
| Mar. 1 | 74 | 0 | 15 | 89 | 65 | 0 | 0 | 65 |
| Mar. 2 | 46 | 0 | 1 | 47 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Mar. 3 | 47 | 0 | 1 | 48 | 21 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Mar. 4 | 72 | 0 | 3 | 75 | 49 | 0 | 0 | 49 |
| Mar. 5 | 90 | 0 | 9 | 99 | 77 | 0 | 11 | 88 |
| Mar. 6 | 71 | 0 | 13 | 84 | 40 | 0 | 11 | 51 |
| Mar. 7 | 84 | 0 | 8 | 92 | 60 | 0 | 2 | 62 |
| Mar. 8 | 75 | 0 | 5 | 80 | 57 | 0 | 0 | 57 |
| Mar. 9 | 44 | 0 | 0 | 44 | 25 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
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Appendix D

Social Media Policy for Mustang Daily

Based on the conclusions from the study of how newspapers can best utilize social media, the following guidelines have been developed. In general, they should be followed in order to conduct best practices on social media.

General rules, guidelines and tips

The most important guideline, which applies to all social networks, is to only post quality content. Great content, such as interesting articles, photos and graphics, will attract users more than anything else. Quality is more important than quantity on every network. If the quality of the content in a post on social media is good, it also must be presented in a way that is not a simple “copy and paste” technique. In other words, rewrite headlines and ask questions on social media to interact with users. Don’t just post the headline of an article with its URL to mustangdaily.net.

Adhere to the highest style guidelines. In general, follow AP style for all social media posts. Although social media is a less formal conversation than Mustang Daily’s newspaper or website, it is important to appear knowledgeable and professional. Exceptions can and should be made for spacing and formatting issues on social media networks.

In general, unless the mistake was serious enough to be libelous or to put someone in danger, do not delete posts with mistakes in them. Be transparent and post a correction as soon as possible. Do your best to make the correction widely seen by tagging, retweeting, etc.

Consider creating a staff position to manage all existing social media networks and invest time in creating Mustang Daily profiles on sites that haven’t yet been utilized by the newspaper. The position would make sure all social media sites were properly utilized, relieve some of the section editors’ stress from devoting additional time to social media, stay up-to-date on best practices and possibly also manage Mustang Daily’s web presence on mustangdaily.net.

Twitter

- Tweet frequently, but be sure not to simply copy and paste headlines and URLs.
- Interact with followers by posing well-thought-out questions that don’t seem too obvious to be answered.
- Quality is more important than quantity.
- Utilize hashtags and @mentions, or tagging, on tweets.
- Because Mustang Daily does not have so much content that tweeting every article is an overload, every article should be tweeted, but spaced throughout the day and with an engaging 140-characters.
- Tweet at various times throughout the day, rather than in a clump of a few hours.
• The main Mustang Daily account should retweet the best content from the sports and arts accounts, and vice versa, but not every tweet should be retweeted.

• Update the description on the main Twitter profile to say something similar to: “Independent student newspaper bringing news to the Cal Poly community since 1919.” That statement most similarly mimics the majority of other college newspaper Twitter handles that have more followers and tweet more often than Mustang Daily. Also include the Twitter handles from the arts and sports Mustang Daily Twitter accounts in the description so followers of the main account can easily find those profiles to follow.

• Diversify tweets by posting tweets that ask questions or share articles applicable to Cal Poly from media sources other than Mustang Daily.

• Retweet Mustang Daily editors and reporters.

• The Mustang Daily Twitter account tweeted the least of the six newspaper Twitter profiles observed in this study. Attempt to tweet more often and more regularly. Posting zero content from Thursday through Sunday is not ideal. The Twitter handle should be consistent and tweet something every day.

• “News organizations that tweet 20% fewer URLs and 100% more @mentions grow followers 17% more than expected” (Twitter for Newsrooms n. pag.).

Facebook

• Only post the best content on Facebook.

• In general, more than three posts per day on Facebook requires each post to receive a large amount of interaction (in the form of likes, comments and shares) in order for the Facebook page’s EdgeRank score to remain high. The EdgeRank score for a page will decrease if that profile posts many posts without receiving much interaction. A lower EdgeRank score means the post shows up lower on user’s newsfeeds, or not at all, which contributes to the downward spiral effect of posting more content and less people actually seeing it.

• Until a Facebook page develops a loyal following, it’s better to post only a couple times per day, and work on gaining interaction on those posts rather than posting more frequently.

• Invite fans of the Facebook page to interact with each post by posing questions to start a conversation. Be sure the questions are genuine, and not simple questions that seem too obvious to answer.

• Post links, videos and photos to garner interest and an increased EdgeRank score.

• Don’t be afraid to post content not created by Mustang Daily. For example, share things the Cal Poly community is interested in anyway and already sharing amongst themselves, such as an article that names Cal Poly as one of the best universities comparable to an Ivy League.

• Invite more Facebook users to like the Mustang Daily Facebook page.

• Posts should be spread throughout the day and week in order to ensure that the most people see the posts in their newsfeeds.
Google+

- Mustang Daily should begin to utilize Google+ so that as the network gains more followers and grows in prominence on the social media scene, the newspaper will already have a solid content base on the network.
- Studies have shown that a much higher percentage of traffic on Google+ is referred to newspaper sites than the percentage of traffic that Facebook refers is. Mustang Daily can target a more news-focused audience on Google+ by posting content and developing a following on the network.
- Content on Google+ affects Google+ users web searches. For example, once a user is in Mustang Daily’s circle on Google+, related content from Mustang Daily’s Google+ profile will show up higher on the Google search results page for that user. If a user searched for “Cal Poly Rose Parade float,” normally nothing from Mustang Daily would show up in the first page of results. But if Mustang Daily had shared an article about the Rose Float on Google+, that article would show up much higher in the results for users in Mustang Daily’s Google+ circle.
- The same general guidelines should apply to Google+: post engaging, interesting and quality content. Don’t treat it as an RSS feed.

Pinterest

- Create a Pinterest account for Mustang Daily in order to share content created by Mustang Daily staff, garner inspiration for graphics, articles or photographs and to engage with users.
- Mustang Daily should create pins of its great visual content such as graphics or photographs.
- Any pin created by Mustang Daily should link back to the article on the website. If the content of the pin only appeared in print, the pin should still link back to mustangdaily.net.
- Share visually pleasing page designs as pins on Pinterest.
- Be sure to not just share Mustang Daily content on Pinterest and repin pins from other users. The Los Angeles Times has hundreds of pins that range from its own front pages, to fuzzy animals to travel in South America.
- Create pin boards and invite users to add their own pins to it. It could be used to inspire articles that users would like to see covered, or just used to engage users.
- Contribute content to pin boards open for collaboration. For example, Los Angeles Times has a board that states in part: “If you are a newspaper with an account on Pinterest, I invite you to be a part of this board. Please pin any of your publication’s original content, but in moderation.” The board has hundreds of followers and contributors, including the San Luis Obispo Tribune and The New York Times.
- According to literature and experts cited in this study, there is no evidence to suggest that a news organization can pin too much. However, make sure all
content being pinned is of high quality and check to be sure links work and redirect to a reputable site before pinning.

Photo sharing
- Pinterest can also be used to share photos taken by Mustang Daily staff. The pins should always link back to the article on the Mustang Daily website that the photo appears in, or to the main mustangdaily.net site.
- Mustang Daily should utilize Flickr for photo sharing. The experts recommended uploading generic photos (such as a crowd at football game) with a Creative Commons license that allows the photos to be used with attribution.
- Outstanding photographs should also be uploaded and shared on Flickr, although literature suggests that a newspaper should not share its entire photo library on Flickr; just enough to get the content out there and create a buzz.
- Mustang Daily should utilize Instagram much more frequently. Literature suggests that Instagram is an optimal place to share graphic content from newspapers. Experts consulted in this study said Instagram is one of the best networks to create a loyal following and should be used to share sneak peaks and insider pictures, as well as pictures from articles and daily life around Cal Poly.
- Utilize hashtags and tagging on Instagram.
- Instagram is great for an “on-the-ground” style of reporting. Reporters could be encouraged to upload Instagram pictures from stories they are reporting on.
- Instagram pictures should sometimes, but not always, be shared on Twitter and Facebook as well.

Style Guide
A style guide with entries taken from The Associated Press Stylebook 2012 and Mustang Daily style guidelines will be included in the project, or Mustang Daily social media guidelines. The entries were selected because of the experts’ recommendation that tweets, and all social media posts, adhere to the highest style possible.