

Audiences, anchors and media trust

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between media consumers and television news anchors, specifically focusing on trust. Trust is an aspect of everyday life that helps individuals build relationships with one another. Katz's uses and gratifications theory explains how media consumers seek out the content that makes them feel the most gratified, with trust playing a major role in feeling satisfaction. Additionally, social interaction theory describes the role trust plays from television anchors and viewers, and how increased trust builds social capital. Research methods included a focus group, in which participants explained their feelings toward trust, media use and television news. Research also included an online survey on the same topics. Lastly, interviews were held with on-air news anchors to gain their unique perspective on the relationship trust plays in television news. Trust is considered one of the main qualities that attracts individuals to certain media outlets, including television news, but transparency also plays a significant role. Respondents agreed fabrication of the facts has no role in journalism, but conceded trust can be rebuilt under certain circumstances.

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About the Author

Carl Jaeger is currently a morning show producer for KMSP-TV, the Fox affiliate in Minneapolis, where he produces 90 minutes of live television news five days a week. Carl started as a weekend Assignment Editor at KMSP-TV before becoming a weeknight Assignment Editor. He holds a B.A. in both Journalism and Mass Communication and Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While in Madison, Carl was involved in *The Badger Herald*, one of two daily campus newspapers and also interned in a Capitol press office. His academic interests include viewer/reader engagement, integrating new media into traditional media and political communication. Upon completion of his master's degree, Carl will participate in a journalism exchange program through the International Center for Journalists' Arthur F. Burns Fellowship. He will work in the Berlin, Germany newsroom of international broadcast network Deutsche Welle.

Introduction

Trust is the basic foundation of journalism. Whether it be in newspaper, radio, television or online format, trust is a quality that is essential to the continued foundation of sharing news with consumers. In no other media platform does trust play a larger role than television news, where millions of people routinely welcome individuals into their homes on a regular basis. Because television news is such a personality driven medium, trust is fundamental tenant for anyone delivering news. Consumers rely on these news reports to know what is happening in their community, country and world. It is the job of journalists to synthesize the daily occurrences by attending press conferences, sifting through documents and interviewing sources, determining the truth and presenting it in a manner consumers can digest. The general public does not readily have the resources to gather the array of primary information necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of current events – although access to these resources is increasing with the Internet and social media. In turn, and they place trust with journalists to do that job for them.

Legendary CBS News anchor Walter Cronkite is considered by many to be the most notable figure when it comes to trust and television news. He earned the title of “The Most Trusted Man in America” after he was unmethodically added to a public opinion poll of Senate and Presidential candidates in 1972.¹ Regardless of how it was bestowed, the title is one that stuck with him until his retirement in 1980 and his name continues to be synonymous with trust.

Other network television news anchors have not been as fortunate to maintain the same level of trust throughout their tenure, including Cronkite’s successor, Dan Rather. The storied newsman’s career spanned such milestone events from the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon’s impeachment over the Watergate scandal to the attacks on

¹ Plissner, M. (1999). *The control room: How television calls the shots in presidential elections* (p. 82). New York: Free Press.

New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. But after 23 years anchoring the *CBS Evening News* and 43 years at CBS News, the trust Rather had built up with his audience began to deteriorate after the network was forced to recall a story involving criticism of President George W. Bush's service record in the Texas Air National Guard.² The combination of the public calling Rather's credibility into question, internal arguments with network management and declining ratings led to his premature retirement on March 5, 2005. This scenario suggests trust between anchors and viewers is a vital aspect to success in television journalism, and without it, continuing on proves difficult.

A more recent example of tarnished trust between a network television anchor and the viewing public involves *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams. In early 2015, it was discovered Williams fabricated elements to a story he repeatedly told about his military helicopter coming under attack while covering the War in Iraq in 2003. While the original report Williams filed contained no factual inaccuracies, it was discovered he embellished upon the events while recalling the story numerous times throughout the last 12 years. The fabrications were exposed after Williams filed a report on January 30, 2015, recalling the inaccurate version of events.³ After a military member involved in the 2003 mission pointed out the inaccuracy in Williams' reporting on social media and then the military publication *Stars and Stripes*, other media organizations picked up on the story. This caused serious concern within the NBC News division, and ultimately resulted a six month unpaid suspension for Williams.⁴ After the suspension was leveled, questions were raised about the accuracy of some of Williams' other most notable reports, including his coverage of the fall

² Balleza, M. (2004, September 15). Memos on Bush Are Fake but Accurate, Typist Says. *New York Times*.

³ Somaiya, R. (2015, April 24). Brian Williams Inquiry Is Said to Expand. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/25/business/media/nbc-inquiry-said-to-find-that-brian-williams-embellished.html>

⁴ Tritten, T. (2015, February 6). Soldiers offer eyewitness accounts of the Brian Williams Chinook story. Retrieved from <http://www.stripes.com/promotions/2.1066/us/soldiers-offer-eyewitness-accounts-of-the-brian-williams-chinook-story-1.328256>

of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the devastation facing New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005.⁵

As of this article's publication, the internal inquiry into Williams' fabrications continues, although early reports indicate an investigation found as many as 11 instances of embellished reporting throughout his tenure at NBC News.⁶ While Williams' fate is still to be determined, the effect his fabrications have had on how he is perceived by the public has changed dramatically. According to the research firm The Marketing Arm, which conducts regular rankings of how trustworthy the public views certain public figures, Williams' pre-scandal rating was No. 23 – among the highest of any journalist.⁷ After allegations called his journalistic credibility into question, that ranking dropped to No. 835.⁸ It is to be seen whether Williams can recover from the harm done to his trustworthiness and credibility, but the scenario once again suggests the important role trust plays between journalists and the consuming public.

It is essential to be trusted in order to be a successful journalist. This is especially true for television journalists, since television viewers welcome these individuals into some of the most intimate times of the day; the voices of these anchors are often the first thing they hear in the morning and the last thing they hear at night. A relationship based on trust is not something lost on those on the other side of the camera. Upon his retirement, longtime CBS anchor Bob Schieffer evoked the value of trust and the intimate relationship television anchors have with the public in his emotional farewell address.

⁵ Somaiya, R. (2015, April 24).

⁶ Somaiya, R. (2015, April 24).

⁷ Steel, E., & Somaiya, R. (2015, February 9). Brian Williams Loses Lofty Spot on a Trustworthiness Scale. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/10/business/media/under-fire-brian-williams-loses-lofty-spot-on-a-trustworthiness-scale.html>

⁸ According to The Marketing Arm, the No. 1 most trusted celebrity, as of February 2015, is actor Tom Hanks. Other journalists earning top ranking include ABC's Robin Roberts (No. 11), Ann Curry (No. 32), CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta (No. 62) and ABC's Diane Sawyer (No. 127). Former CBS anchor Dan Rather ranks at No. 924.

...the one thing I will never forget is the trust you placed in me and how nice you were to have me as a guest in your home for so many years. That meant the world to me, and it always will.⁹

The trust between journalists and their followers, especially television news anchors, takes years to develop, but can be significantly damaged in a single inaccurate or irresponsible report. Trust is important not only when it comes to reporting the news, but also other aspects of human life and interaction. Humans rely on trust to build relationships with others, whether it be a neighbor, coworker or the anchor of a national nightly newscast. When a relationship based on trust is violated, individuals tend to seek out an alternative or retreat from the situation all together.¹⁰ This is especially significant in situations involving television news because consumers are offered a limited number of options – the four major networks and three major cable news channels, and competition is fluid and fierce.

Despite constant reports of the decline of journalism, audience data shows television news viewership numbers continue to increase. Network news program audiences increased 5 percent between 2013 and 2014, with an audience increase of 2 percent for morning network news programs.¹¹ Viewership of local news increased 3 percent within the same period. Additionally, local television news advertising revenue in the United States increased 7 percent between 2013 and 2014, totaling \$20 billion.¹² These numbers indicate television news, both network and local, is as relevant as ever in the modern media environment.

⁹ CBS Face the Nation Transcripts May 31, 2015: Jeb Bush, John Brennan. (2015, May 31).

¹⁰ Tsfati, Y., & Cappella, J. (2003). Why Do People Watch News They Do Not Trust? The Need for Cognition as a Moderator in the Association Between News Media Skepticism and Exposure. *Media Psychology*, 30 (5), 507.

¹¹ Mitchell, A. (2015, April 25). State of the Media News 2015. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.journalism.org/files/2015/04/FINAL-STATE-OF-THE-NEWS-MEDIA1.pdf>

¹² Mitchell, A. (2015, April 25).

Ratings data shows the suspension of Williams has had a minor impact on viewers of *NBC Nightly News*, although fill-in anchor Lester Holt has proved strong as a temporary replacement. Television executives are able to manipulate ratings data for their benefit, but by nearly all accounts, *NBC Nightly News* has held on to a majority of its pre-Brian Williams scandal audience. Ratings data released at the ever-important May ratings period, the time in which audiences are closely measured and data is used to set advertising rates, indicated consistent numbers. *NBC Nightly News* maintained its position as the most-watched national broadcast, barely beating its ABC rival *World News Tonight* by 53,000 viewers – less than one percent of total viewership. Similar trends within the sought-after demographics of adults between the ages of 25 and 54-years-old and adults between the ages of 18 and 48-years-old, give a slight edge to NBC.¹³ Even though this data may be counter to question the claim that audiences seek out alternatives – or retreat all together – when trust is violated, it can be attributed to a number of other factors, including the recently-named anchor of *World News Tonight* David Muir, changes in local news broadcasts that impact viewership, as well as the effect increased consumption of digital news has on traditional formats. While a number of factors impact viewership, the principle of trust continues to play a significant role in how people regard the individuals presenting the news and the news organizations they represent.

¹³ Bibel, S. (2015, May 27). "NBC Nightly News' is No. 1 Across the Board. Retrieved from <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2015/05/27/nbc-nightly-news-is-number-1-across-the-board/409118/>

Literature Review

The general concept of trust describes the relationship between two sides: the trustor and the trustee.¹⁴ This relationship can vary, ranging from two neighbors who trust each other with keys to each other's homes, to the relationship between the anchor (trustee) of a network news broadcast and a viewer (trustor) watching from home. While the definition of trust can vary slightly from different sources, nearly all contain an aspect of uncertainty on the side of the trustor.¹⁵ Previous research has found when trust is present, there is "no empirical way for the trustor to verify the intentions of the character of the trustee."¹⁶ Sociologists have determined trust is an essential factor of human nature and without the ability to establish some level of trust, "collective behavior would not be feasible."¹⁷ Humans rely on other people for both information and support, and trust plays an essential role in developing and maintaining that vital connection. Additionally, research conducted by political scientist Robert Putnam connects institutional trust to levels of civic engagement, blaming a decline in the latter, in part, on increased television viewership.¹⁸ Trust is an essential factor in human interaction, whether it is in person, through a television set or on a computer screen.

Trust plays an essential role in how the public chooses what media to consume. Media is ever-present in today's society, from the television in the consumers' living rooms, to the radio in their cars, to the cellphone constantly in their hands. Even before mainstream use of the Internet and the explosion of subsequent news content, there was no way the public could consume all the media made available throughout the day. For example, no one is able to attentively watch all four local newscasts that air live each night

¹⁴ Tsfati, Y., (2003) p. 505.

¹⁵ Tsfati, Y. (2003) p. 505

¹⁶ Seligman, A. (1997). *The problem of trust*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

¹⁷ Tsfati, Y. (2003) p. 505

¹⁸ Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

at 10 p.m. The same goes for listening to all the drive time radio programs each morning on the way to work, or reading the contents of multiple newspapers each day. With the increase of online media publications, blogs and social media platforms, the consuming all available media becomes even a greater impossibility. Consumers must decide what content they will consume, and driving factor of which is “need gratification.”¹⁹ The public is presented with a seemingly unlimited variety of media sources and messages to consume each day, and ultimately, “individuals seek out media content to satisfy personal objectives.”²⁰

This phenomenon can be described by the uses and gratification theory, first developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974.²¹ Uses and gratification theory attempts to explain how the public consumes a “dazzling array” of media messages for a variety of reasons, and that the “effect of a given message is unlikely to be the same for everyone.”²² What remains constant between all media consumers is the need to feel gratification from the content to which they are exposed. Throughout the day, audiences are making specific and often subconscious decisions about what media to consume in an effort to fill a need – or gratification. According to the uses and gratification theory, consumers are aware that there are a variety of different sources that have the ability to fulfill their needs, and consumers strategically select the sources that will best fulfill their needs over alternatives.²³

Uses and gratifications theory explains why consumers chose specific media outlets over others, including television news stations. The general public is aware that all four local newscasts (affiliates of CBS, ABC, FOX and NBC) will fulfill their need to be informed,

¹⁹ Griffin, E. (2012). *A first look at communication theory* (8th ed., p. 358). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

²⁰ Williams, A. (2012). Trust or Bust?: Questioning the Relationship Between Media Trust and News Attention. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 119.

²¹ Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 509.

²² Griffin, E. (2012). p. 358.

²³ Williams, A. (2012). p. 119.

but what sets them apart from one another is the specific needs each fills. This can include set design, onscreen visual aesthetics, perceived news bias, on-air talent characteristics and trust, among other qualities.

The perceived credibility of a source is also a significant factor that can impact an individual's media consumption habits. As explained by the uses and gratification theory, individuals do not have the ability to consistently pay attention to all media options available and therefore must strategically consume the content that is most beneficial. Credibility plays a significant factor in how an individual decides what to consume, frequently choosing to reject a specific news source if its credibility is called into question.²⁴ That credibility is built up over time by developing trust. Additionally, research on source value, how strongly a consumer feels about a media entity, indicates consumers will most frequently choose sources they "trust over sources they mistrust."²⁵

Audiences tend to consume media they find trustworthy and credible, as compared to sources they find skeptical, but the type of media may also play a significant factor in how trust is perceived.²⁶ Trust of newspaper reporters is positively correlated with the attention paid to newspaper news, but the same is not true for the newspaper as a whole.²⁷ The concept of "person-based trust" – trust that is "directed from one individual to another," such as a reporter to a reader – is most prominent in newspapers.²⁸ Unlike newspapers, there is no significant relationship between the trust felt toward television news reporters and the amount of attention paid to television news. Instead, trust of the corporation owning the television news station is the significant determinant for attention spent on television news. If viewers trust the organization as a whole, they are likely to consume

²⁴ Chaffee, S., & Mcleod, J. (1973). Individual vs. Social Predictors of Information Seeking. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 237-245.

²⁵ Williams, A. (2012). p. 120.

²⁶ Williams, 122.

²⁷ Williams, A. (2012). 122

²⁸ Williams, A. (2012). p. 123.

more. Additionally, the same research indicates as trust of online news content increases, trust of television news decreases. This is significant since the number of online news sites continues to grow, thus further increasing competition. It is important to emphasize trust among mainstream television news sources, because the higher the trust, the higher level of media consumption.

While the research of Ann E. Williams determined a lack of significance between trust of television news and the amount of attention viewers paid to it, Yariv Tsfati and Joseph Cappella found when people trust the mainstream media, they consume more mainstream news.²⁹ At a time when there is an ever-growing number of news sources, specifically online, Tsfati's research indicates the essential role trust plays in building and maintaining an audience. The general notion of trust is associated with media skepticism, defined as "the perception that journalists are not fair and objective in their reports, that they do not always tell the whole story, and that they would sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal and commercial gains."³⁰ Certain levels of media skepticism and uncertainty always exist, as audiences must rely on journalists to provide information on events transpiring around the world they are not present to witness firsthand. Because the majority of media consumers are not able to independently verify news facts, a certain level of trust toward the journalist presenting the information must exist. The goal among journalists is to minimize skepticism and increase trust, something that is developed over time. When levels of trust are high, individuals consume more mainstream media and become more engaged citizens.³¹

Williams' aforementioned research indicates the more an individual trusts a news source, the more attention he or she will pay to that particular source. Attention is an

²⁹ Tsfati, Y. (2003) p. 504.

³⁰ Tsfati, Y. (2003) p. 506.

³¹ Tsfati, Y. (2003) p. 504.

important factor in analyzing television news habits because increased attention is an indication of viewer engagement and retention. Two factors found to be most positively associated with television news attention are income and length of residency in a particular location. The latter is likely explained by the connection between “increased community attachment” and the “desire for increased community awareness for information that can be introduced to interpersonal exchanges to enhance social ties.”³² This connection is explained by social capital theory.

The modern definition of social capital describes the “generalized trust, norms and reciprocity networks that are essential to a thriving democracy.”³³ Social capital describes the resources available to individuals through their social interactions. Those with a large and diverse social network are believed to have more social capital than someone with a smaller network.³⁴ Williams divides social capital theory into three distinct categories: institutional trust, social trust and informational trust.³⁵ All three of these categories are relevant to the television news industry.

Conceptual Categories of Trust³⁶

<i>Form of Trust</i>	<i>Scope of Trust</i>	<i>Manifestations of Trust</i>
Interpersonal trust	Person-to-person	Trust of news reporters
Institutional trust	Person-to-system	Trust of news corporations
Informational trust	Person-to-content	Trust of news content

³² Williams, A. (2012). p. 123.

³³ Rothstein, B. (2002). How Political Institutions Create and Destroy Social Capital: An Institutional Theory of Generalized Trust. Göteborg University, 2.

³⁴ Valenzuela, S., Park, N., & Kee, K. (2009). Is There Social Capital in a Social Network Site?: Facebook Use and College Students' Life Satisfaction, Trust, and Participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 875-901.

³⁵ Williams, A. (2012). p. 118.

³⁶ Williams, A. (2012). p. 119.

Institutional trust involves the trust an individual has in government agencies and corporate entities, social trust involves the trust an individual has in other people and informational trust involves the trust an individual has in the presented content.³⁷ Television news factors into each distinct areas of social capital. Social trust involves the relationship between an individual television anchor or reporter, developed through loyal and repeated viewing over time. Institutional trust involves the feelings an individual may have toward a particular media company, beyond the specific individuals who represent the institution. These two types of social capital can work in tandem, but can also clash. For example, a viewer who likes a particular television anchor may also like the organization which that anchor is associated. However, in some cases, a viewer may be fond of a particular news station, but not trust a particular anchor. Alternatively, a viewer may be fond of a particular news personality, but not the news station he or she works for. Viewers may also strongly like or dislike specific companies that own television news stations (for example, 21st Century Fox and its ownership of the Fox News Channel, or Comcast's ownership of NBC News and MSNBC). Additionally, informational trust describes the relationship between viewers and the news information presented. The trust a viewer places in a television news anchor, reporter or station involves the development of social capital.

Social capital theory describes the important role trust plays in all aspects of our lives, from the traditional 1-way relationships viewers form with television anchors to the 2-way relationships individuals form with other individuals. Putnam describes the important role trust plays as “building social synergy,” and argues the presence and development of both institutional and social trust “promotes communal connection and

³⁷ Williams, A. (2012). p. 119.

collective action.”³⁸ Much of Putnam’s research focuses on the role trust plays in creating a more engaged and involved community. Numerous academic studies exist supporting the claim that “trust promotes political and civic engagement,” with Putnam going as far to say trust is the “lubricant of cooperation.”³⁹ When trust in others is present in a communal setting, research shows an increased level of interaction, which helps create the “social bond” that causes individuals to become more engaged and connected with their communities.⁴⁰

This is relevant to television news because much of Putnam’s research examines the decline of social capital, with increased television viewing as the proposed culprit. Putnam argues social connectedness and trust among individuals is built through social capital.⁴¹ This can include volunteering for a school’s Parent Teacher Organization, belonging to a church, volunteering for a charity organization, talking with neighbors or participating in a sports league with the latter serving as inspiration for the title of Putnam’s 1995 essay *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital*.⁴² He concludes the decline in social capital is due to time displacement: people are spending more time watching television and less time engaged in their communities.⁴³ While the causes and effects of the decline of social capital are debated in more recent research by Putnam and many others, it is clear television news plays a unique role in the shift. While consumers are watching more television, most of the content does not include anything that increases or promotes the idea of social capital. This is not the case with television news, as increased viewership develops a level of trust among television anchors and viewers, an important factor in social

³⁸ Williams, A. (2012). p. 117.

³⁹ Putnam, R. (2000).

⁴⁰ Putnam, R. (2000).

⁴¹ Putnam, R. (2000).

⁴² Putnam, R. (1995). *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*. *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1), 65-78.

⁴³ Putnam, R. (1995).

capital.⁴⁴ This is especially true with local television news. With increased trust comes loyalty to a particular television station or anchors, as well as knowledge or awareness of events happening in the community. Trust is the key aspect of social capital, as “the more we connect with other people the more we trust them, and vice versa.”⁴⁵ The trust between a television news anchor and the viewer sets the foundation for other key aspects necessary for a relationship between that viewer and his or her community. While an overall increase in television viewership may be to blame for the decline in social capital, an increase in television news helps develop some of the foundational aspects of community building and understanding, including trust.

⁴⁴ Williams, A. (2012). p. 117.

⁴⁵ Shah, D. (1998). Civic Engagement, Interpersonal Trust, and Television Use: An Individual-Level Assessment of Social Capital. *Political Psychology*, 19(3), 171.

Research Questions

Trust is an important factor for journalism, especially in the field of television news. There is a unique bond between a viewer and the television news he or she consumes. What role does trust play in this relationship? As outlined in the introduction, trust between television news anchors and their audience is something that is developed over time, but can be lost in an instant. This research will seek to answer the following questions:

RQ₁: How important is it for consumers to trust the source of their news, both local and national? How important is it for viewers to trust the anchors that deliver the news, both local and national?

RQ₂: In what ways can journalists (including television news anchors) restore trust with the public?

RQ₃: What complementary role does new media (online and social media) have in building trust with news organizations, news personalities and their audience?

Methods

Research for this study was conducted by a variety of methods, including focus groups, interviews and surveys.

The focus group took place on May 11, 2015 and consisted of a planned series of discussions among participants in an effort to uncover attitudes and perceptions involving news consumption, television news viewing and trust towards in personalities.⁴⁶ Focus group members were composed of the desired demographic (television news viewers) and were selected through a convenience sample. A general set of questions and topics was outlined ahead of time by the moderator, but the direction of the conversation was guided by the discussion. The moderator ensured the content of the conversation remained relevant to the topic at hand (television news and anchor trust). With moderate involvement, he guided participants towards topics relevant to the research objectives, but encouraged interaction among participants to produce organic feedback. The seven focus group participants were self-identified television news viewers living in the Minneapolis-St. Paul television market. The makeup of the group is as follows:

	Age	Gender	Occupation
Focus group participant No. 1	27	Male	Ph. D. student, educational psychology
Focus group participant No. 2	26	Male	Financial advisor
Focus group participant No. 3	28	Female	Nutrition councilor
Focus group participant No. 4	25	Male	Medical school student
Focus group participant No. 5	27	Female	Teacher
Focus group	28	Male	Political fundraiser

⁴⁶ Davis, J. (2012). Advertising research: Theory and practice (2nd ed., p. 151). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

participant No. 6			
Focus group participant No. 7	27	Male	Newspaper journalist

Participants were briefed on the general format of the focus group and the basic goals of the research. Before any research was conducted, it was made clear all participation was voluntary and not for compensation. All participants signed a consent form, consistent with the policies put forth through the University of Minnesota’s Institutional Review Board. Only one focus group was held. There was no set time for the duration of the focus group, and the entire duration was approximately one hour. All responses were recorded digitally and notes were taken during the proceedings. The digital recordings are saved on a password-protected computer drive and will remain there until the final research report is complete (by August 31, 2015). Participant identities will remain confidential, although participants are identified by participant number in the discussion transcript to track consistency throughout the responses.

Three different subjects were interviewed as part of this research. All subjects were part of the desired demographic (television news viewers) and had varying backgrounds. Subjects are well-known television news personalities currently affiliated with one of the four major television stations (WCCO, KSTP, KMSP and KARE) in the Twin Cities market. All interviews were held in person. All participants were made aware of the conditions of the interview and signed a consent form indicating voluntary participation, consistent with the policies put forth through the University of Minnesota’s Institutional Review Board. None of the interview subjects were compensated in any way for their participation in the research. All interviews were digitally recorded, and notes were taken during the exercise. Because on-the-record interviews for on-air talent often require approval from the affiliated corporate companies, all interviews will remain confidential and the identities of the interview subject will not be revealed. Rather, the interview subjects will be identified by

the number to track consistency. Digital and physical information containing the responses and identifying factors are stored on a password-protected computer and will remain there until this research is completed. (by August 31, 2015). There were no preconditions to any of the interviews. Before the interviews, interview subjects were given a vague description of the research goals, mainly that it focuses on the relationship between anchors and audiences, and the role trust plays in that relationship. The interview subjects are as follows:

	Role	Network	Gender
Interview subject No. 1	Anchor	KMSP/FOX	Male
Interview subject No. 2	Anchor	WCCO/CBS	Female
Interview subject No. 3	Anchor/reporter	KMSP/FOX	Male

An online survey was distributed on May 28, 2015 and was active until June 12, 2015. The goal was to receive 100 survey responses, and once that goal was met on June 12, 2015 the survey was closed. In total, 101 individuals participated in the online survey. All survey respondents digitally agreed to consent, and none were compensated in any way. The survey was distributed through the researcher’s social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). The link to the survey was then shared and retweeted by a number of individuals, further expanding its reach. Because of this method of survey distribution, the sample should be considered a convenience sample. The survey was designed, distributed and collected through Qualtrics survey software. The survey included the following types of questions.

- Dichotomous questions (yes or no, agree or disagree)
- Multiple-choice questions
 - o All multiple-choice questions included the option to select all that apply.

- All multiple-choice questions included an “other” option where respondents were able to enter a custom response.
- Interval level questions
 - Scales ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” or “extremely important” to “not at all important,” depending on what was most appropriate for the given question.
 - Six scale options were provided for each of the interval level questions.

Survey respondent identities will remain confidential and survey data will be deleted at the completion of this research, by August 31, 2015. Survey respondent demographics is as follows:

Age group	Percentage of responses (100 total respondents)
0 to 17-years-old	0 percent
18 to 29-years-old	70 percent
30 to 45-years-old	20 percent
46-years-old or older	10 percent
Prefer not to answer	0 percent

Gender	Percentage of responses (100 total respondents)
Male	33 percent
Female	67 percent

Note: Nielsen, the dominant and most widely used method for measuring television viewership, typically breaks down viewers into the following age groups:⁴⁷

- 13 to 17-years-old

⁴⁷ Nielsen Report: U.S. Media Trend by Demographic. (2012, April 17). Retrieved from <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2012/report-u-s-media-trends-by-demographic.html>

- 18 to 34-years-old
- 35-54-years-old
- 55-years-old and above

While advertisers and television networks are concerned with younger viewers between the ages of 18 and 54-years-old, a significant portion of the news viewing public falls in the 55-year-old and above category. Based on 2014 data, 40 percent of all individuals aged 65-years-old and above watched network news on a nightly basis, compared to just 11 percent of those between the ages of 18 and 29-years-old.⁴⁸ Because many of these older viewers are the most loyal and devoted television viewers, both locally and nationally, their viewpoints were included in the data.

Additionally, the majority of survey respondents reside in the Twin Cities broadcast market, but a minority of respondents reside in other parts of the United States. Because this research is focuses on the relationship trust plays between anchors and consumers – both locally and nationally – all responses were considered, regardless of location.

⁴⁸ Suls, R. (2014, January 9). Who is this man? Many Americans don't recognize top news anchor. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/09/who-is-this-man-many-americans-dont-recognize-top-news-anchor/>

Results

Results from the focus group, survey and interviews indicate the strong feelings the general public has toward trust and television news. Research shows subjects nearly unanimously agree trust is an important value when it comes to journalism, including television journalism, but their feelings differ when that trust is violated. Additionally, there are differing viewpoints when it comes to rebuilding trust once it has been violated.

Focus group participants clearly indicated the prevalence of social media to find and disseminate news. Whether the original source of the content was television, print or online, nearly all content was first discovered through social media. Specifically with television news, full broadcasts were rarely viewed in its entirety; rather, individual segments or portions of a live broadcasts were consumed. This manner of news consumption presents unique implications regarding the relationship between a viewer and a television anchor, as summarized in the *Discussion* section.

Participants all agree social media impacts the way they view journalism, both in traditional (television, newspaper, radio) and non-traditional (online, social media) forms. One participant bluntly said:

I think social media has by and large made me distrustful of mainstream media, therefore I often seek out alternative viewpoints.

This observation runs in tandem with claims made by Tsfaty and Capella (2003), who argue those who are more skeptical of mainstream media have “less mainstream news as part of their media diets.”⁴⁹ With the increased prevalence of social media, it is much easier for consumers to seek out alternative news sources other than those considered to be

⁴⁹ Tsfaty, Y. (2003) p. 506.

mainstream. One focus group participant spoke of the act of curating a list of trusted sources, through “likes” on Facebook or “followers” on Twitter. He said that list is developed over time by following journalists and news organizations with credible, trustworthy reputations via his personal social media account. In this way, the individual is able to go to one outlet to get news content he or she has specifically curated with interesting, reputable and truthful information. While all respondents generally agreed upon this process, one added there is still significant weight put on news that comes from established and reputable sources, including major national newspapers, network news outlets and wire services.

Respondents generally claimed they had the skills necessary to determine whether or not a source was credible or trustworthy. Many developed relationships with certain news outlets over time, the most prevalent being National Public Radio, and its local adaptation, Minnesota Public Radio. One respondent offered an insightful analogy on determining whether news was credible, comparing it to the basic principle of understanding social science.

We're also talking about facts and conclusions and it's important that when you're listening to articles or you're listening to radio journalism that you are paying attention as to whether the content is based on objective empirical data or details rather than speculation or things of that nature. I think that plays a huge role in whether I trust a piece of news media.

Observations were also made about how journalism, especially television journalism, is personality driven. Often times there is one main face or name associated with an entire news entity (for example, Brian Williams and NBC News). When that

individual is reputable and trustworthy, the news organization is strong. But if that individual makes a mistake, the news organization that individual works for is not necessarily held at fault. Additionally, participants acknowledged at the end of the day, journalism is a business that needs to thrive financially. This often times results in strategic news placement; sometimes the biggest news story of the day must make way for another story that connects better with viewers. This can include stories that may be more sensational, contain better visuals – television is a visual medium, after all – more familiar with viewers. Ultimately programming is selected to attract more viewers.

While participants acknowledged that lack of truth or reporting of inaccuracies would impact their view of a journalist, it was unanimously agreed that the repercussions vary based on the act. The key to restoring trust, according to one respondent, was to quickly establish transparency.

I think it depends on a couple things: one how they handled it, so if the second they figured it out they fire the person or discipline them, or at least investigate it to find out what's going on, then I would be inclined to keep trusting that source. Whereas if they figure it out and [they try] to sweep it under the rug and it comes out a year later then that would make be a lot more suspect of it.

There was also a distinction made between different types of journalistic violations. As a whole, the group was more forgiving of the errors and inaccuracies made by Brian Williams' reporting of the War in Iraq. While Williams embellished certain aspects of his reporting, including being involved in a helicopter attack, he was still at the scene of the incident and reported on events that actually happened. He was not making up events or sources. Instead, he placed himself in a situation that he was not actually present for in

retellings of the story. One respondent juxtaposed the Brian Williams incident with the inaccurate reporting by *Rolling Stone* in the article “A Rape of Campus.”⁵⁰ She noted the reporter failed to fact check sources, the repercussions the falsities had on innocent individuals portrayed in the report and the damage the story had on national conversations of sexual assaults on college campuses. While she did not excuse Williams for his inaccurate reporting, she noted the harm caused by his reporting was forgivable, unlike the harm caused by the *Rolling Stone* article.

Participants collectively agreed the errors and exaggerations presented in Brian Williams’ reporting were wrong, but they were willing to forgive the anchor if steps were taken to acknowledge the mistakes and to ensure they would not happen again. The word “transparency” kept coming up, with many believing the way the incident was handled by NBC played as significant role as the error itself. A timely acknowledgement of the incident and a thorough explanation of what happened – and why it happened – will play an essential role in his recovery, according to participants. One participant’s observation summed up the general feeling of the group as a whole:

I think there’s an issue of transparency. There’s a dichotomy between the practice of sound journalism ethics and being part of a media landscape that is building personalities and sensationalizing things to construct popularity and ratings. And he is part of that media landscape and his best way to recover his reputation is to own up to everything – like I said transparency – and then get back to work to prove to everyone that he is the journalist that everyone thought he was before this incident.

⁵⁰ Sheila, C. (2015, April 5). Rolling Stone and UVA: The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Report. Retrieved from <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-what-went-wrong-20150405>

A number of participants did not solely place blame on Brian Williams, but pointed to the modern news environment that emphasizes scandal, rumors and falls from grace. One participant said he did not believe Brian Williams' actions made him a bad journalist or a bad person, he is "more broadly an illustration of what he's a product of in a media culture that demands personalities." Others were quick to judge the manner in which NBC News handled the situation, essentially silencing Williams throughout the entire scandal. One respondent said he believed the situation would have been better if NBC allowed Williams to stay on the air, explain his actions and continue his job, slowly working to regain trust. That same respondent noted we, as a society, are quick to condemn but also quick to forgive. The six-month suspension "casted a shadow" over Williams, not only preventing him from acknowledging his mistake and explaining his actions, but also showing that he lacks support from the leadership at NBC New. Another respondent said the suspension, and accompanying investigation, kept the story in the spotlight, adding:

I'd be much quicker to forgive someone if they were given an immediate avenue or channel to respond versus just blindly trying to cover it up or put it away or silence it over time.

The majority of focus group participants believed that Brian Williams could recover from the incident. After a sincere apology, most agreed the best course of action was for Williams to get back to work with his head metaphorically down and to start working towards reestablishing himself as the credible journalist he was once known to be. An apology is important to clear the air, they argued, but showing audiences he is committed to truth and trust is the best step toward rebuilding his status. The outlier in the group was the individual who had a degree in Journalism and Mass Communications and is currently

employed at a major national daily newspaper. While acknowledging there may be a role for Williams at NBC News in the future, he was skeptical of a return to reporting from the field or another chance behind the *NBC Nightly News* anchor desk. The respondent said, simply put:

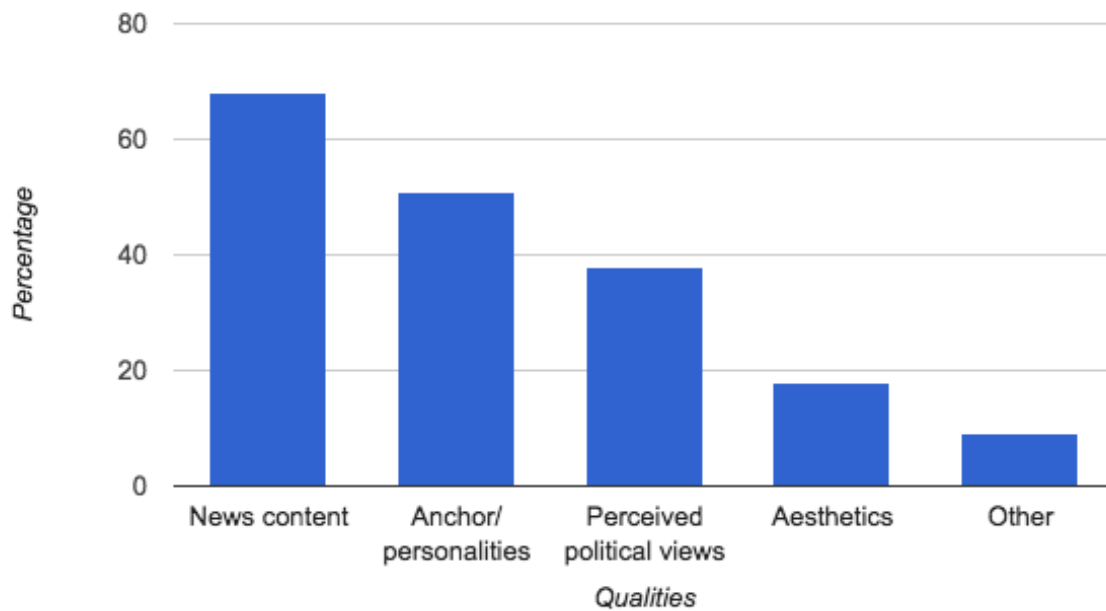
He can repair his appeal, but not his trust.

The goal of the survey was to gain perspective on the role trust plays on television news consumption. It provided a platform to gain insights from varying demographics, including age and gender. Overall, survey respondents have a favorable feeling towards journalism. Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated it was “extremely important” for citizens to be aware of current events, with 100 percent indicating it was at least “somewhat important.” In terms of trustworthiness, 30 percent of respondents indicated they “strongly agree” that journalists are trustworthy, with the vast majority (97 percent) indicating they at least “somewhat agree” that journalists are trustworthy.

The current media landscape includes more news options than ever before, from traditional forms like television news and newspapers, to more modern mediums, like streaming services and social media. Survey responses support the research by A. Williams, who found consumers trust newspapers the most, followed by television news and lastly online news sources.⁵¹ While the trust level of all three mediums were high, respondents feel much stronger that newspapers are trustworthy, as compared to television and online outlets. Over half of respondents say they “strongly agree” or “agree” newspapers are trustworthy (53 percent), as compared to television (43 percent) and online (27 percent). This being said, there is no doubt the line between many of these different media forms

⁵¹ Williams, A. (2012). p. 125.

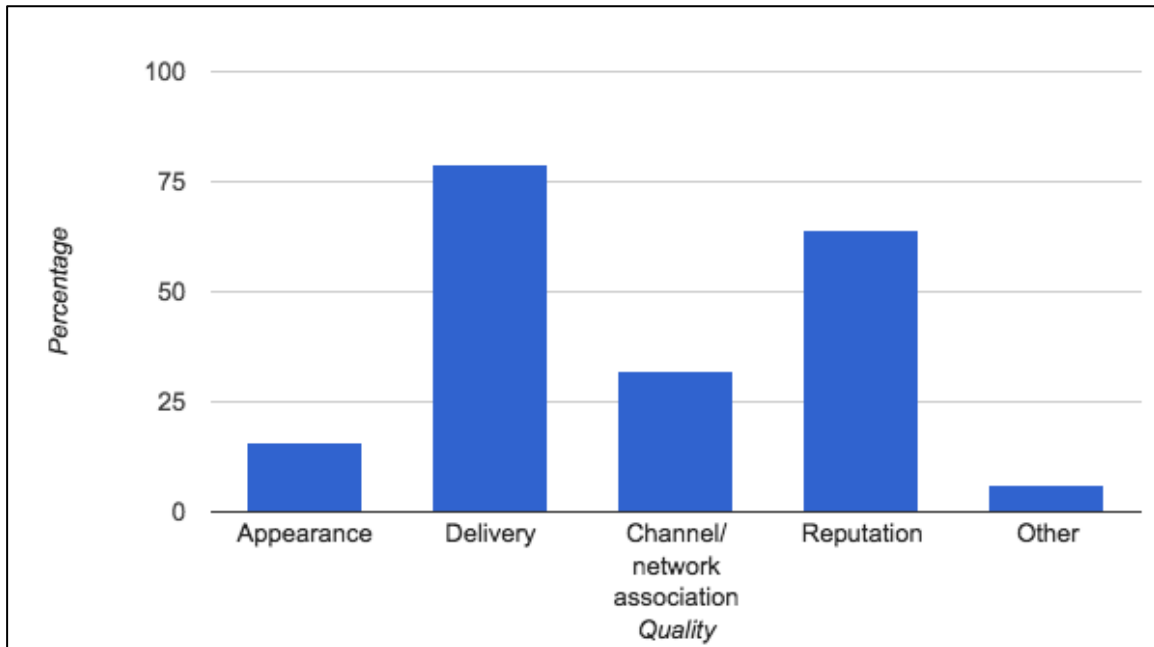
continue to blur. For example, a daily newspaper that prints seven days week will likely have a social media presence, provide live streams of major events promoted through social media platforms and promote additional digital coverage on stories found in printed copies. While conventional wisdom says people, especially those of a younger demographic, are watching less television news, recent data from the Pew Research Institute indicates a slight increase in viewership among local and national news broadcasts between the years of 2013 and 2014 (see p. 8). Competition for these viewers continues to increase among the local, cable and national television news platforms, so it is important to know what draws individuals to a specific broadcast.



Graph 1. What draws you to a particular broadcast, either local or network (select all that apply)?

Overall, news content was the most selected factor, with 72 percent of respondents saying it plays a role in the decision making process. Fifty-four percent of respondents also stated anchors/respondents play a role in overall appeal. Perceived political views (40 percent) and aesthetics (19 percent) also factor in what in what draws a consumer to a

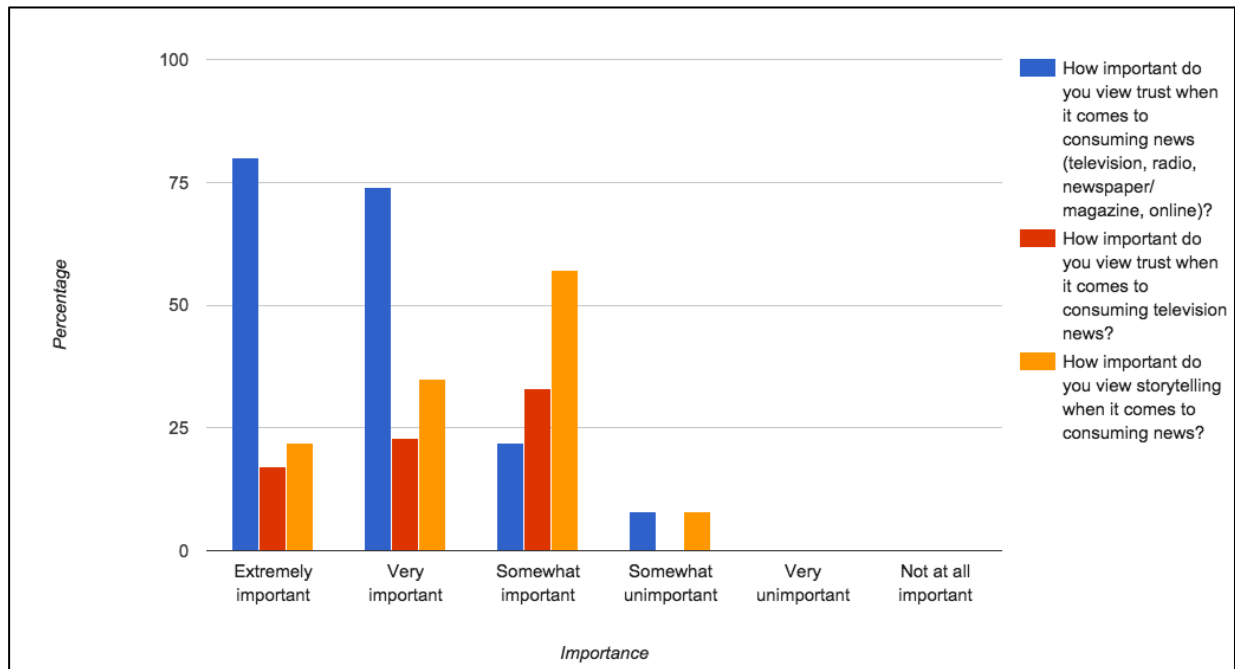
particular broadcast. Respondents who selected the “other” category had a wide range of additional factors, including locality, “quality journalism on real news,” and “stories connected to my life.”



Graph 2. What draws you to a particular anchor (select all that apply)?

Respondents also offered views on what draws them to a particular television news anchor, both local and national. Seventy-nine percent of respondents chose delivery as a factor that draws them to a particular news anchor. Reputation also plays a significant role, with 64 percent of respondents saying it is a factor drawing them to a particular news anchor. Reputation is closely associated with trust, as both are built up over time and one relies on the other. Similarly, it can take years to develop both a favorable reputation and high level of trust with viewers, while both can be lost with a single inaccurate report or fallacy. A strong reputation likely coincides with a higher level of trust and a poor reputation may lead to a lower level of trust and, consequently, poor standing with the general public. Other factors that draw individuals to a particular news anchor include

channel/network association (30 percent) and appearance (15 percent). Answers designated as “other” include: personability, objectivity and strong interviews skills.

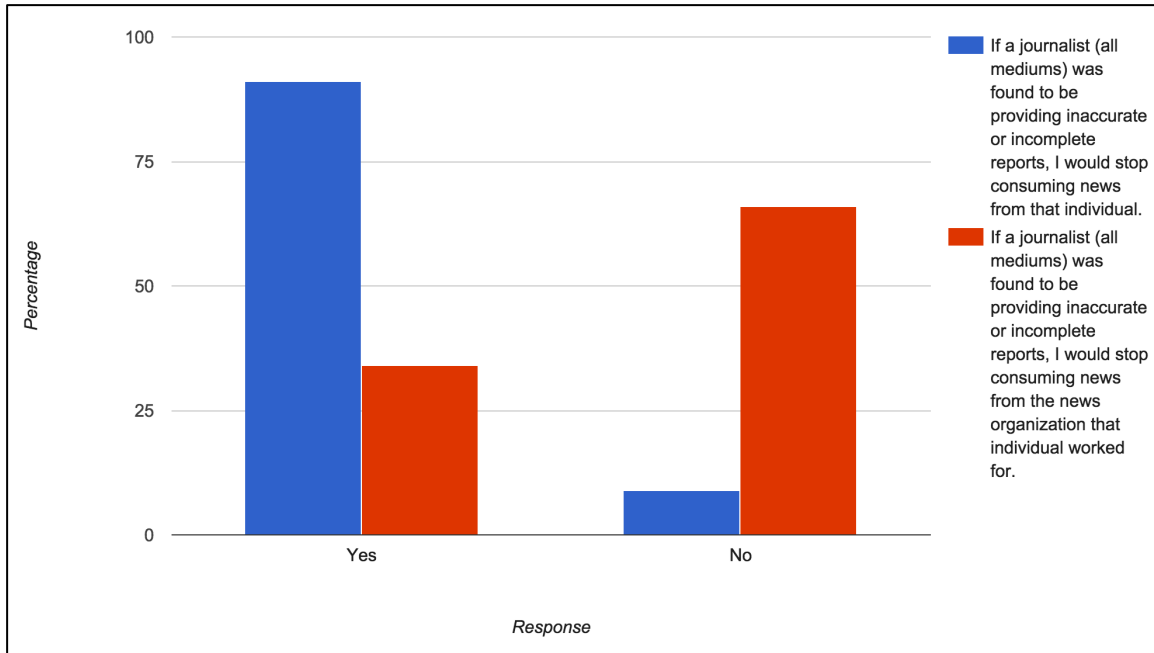


Graph 3.

When respondents were asked about trust, the important role it plays in broadcast journalism becomes clear. Of all the survey respondents, 80 percent said trust is “extremely important” when it comes to consuming news media and 74 percent said trust is “very important” when it comes to consuming television news. One hundred percent of respondents said truth was “extremely important,” “very important” or “somewhat important” in both the overall news media and television news categories. Not a single respondent selected “somewhat unimportant,” “very unimportant” or “not at all important” for either question. While the general purpose of journalism is to share the news in an informative, succinct and accurate manner, there is also an element of storytelling that engages and entertains viewers. Regardless, a majority of respondents said storytelling is less important when it comes to presenting news, and agreed elements of truth should not be sacrificed for “good storytelling.”

Similarly, near-unanimous results showed credible news needs to be fact based and truthful, with nearly 100 percent of respondents saying they “strongly agree” or “agree” with the statement. This anomaly ends when the topic turns to incomplete or exaggerated aspects of the news. Despite the strong feeling that news must be based on trust, survey respondents were more sympathetic toward reports based on exaggeration and rumor. When asked whether there were specific circumstances in which credible news can be based on exaggeration, 15 percent said they “strongly agree” with the statement, and over half answered affirmatively. Forty-four percent of respondents said they “somewhat disagree” or “disagree” that credible news can be based on exaggeration. Similar results were found on whether or not credible news can be based on rumor; although, respondents slightly preferred to not support the statement. This is a slight shift compared to whether or not exaggeration should be accepted.

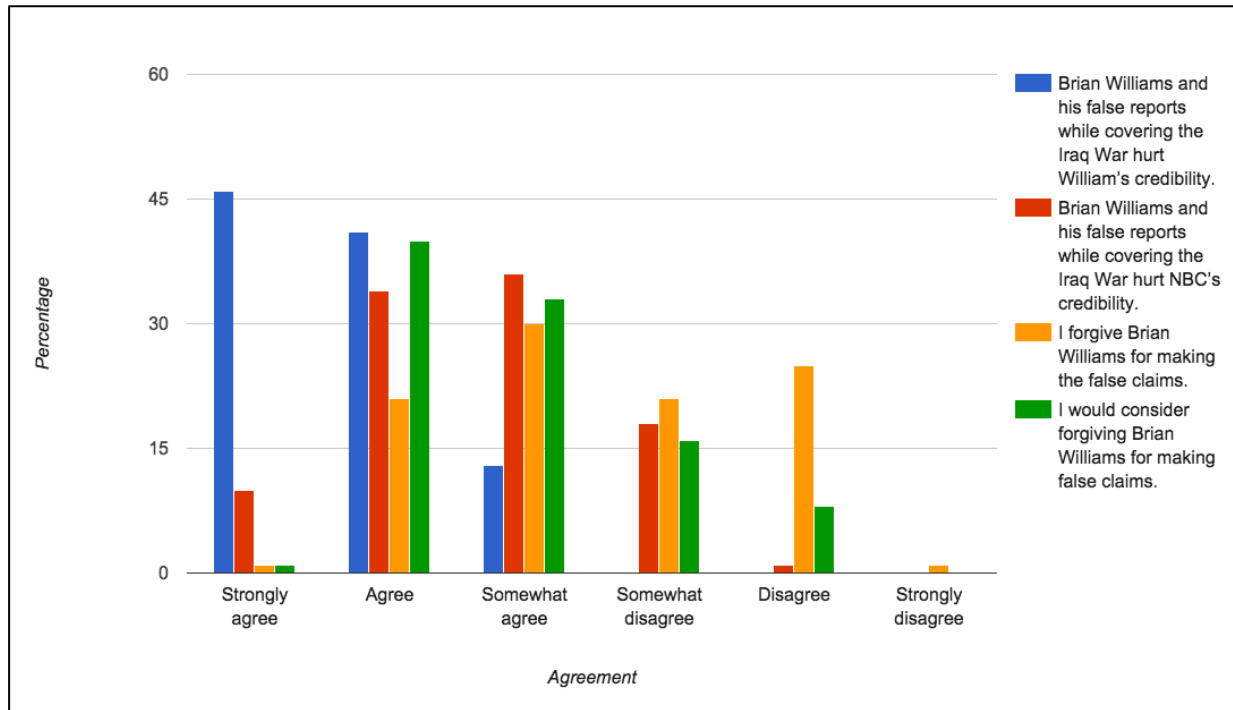
Survey respondents also indicated their feelings towards a journalist who is found to be reporting inaccurate or incomplete news. When comparing the difference between newspaper, television and online journalists, feelings are quite consistent, although it is slightly more likely they would stop consuming news from a television journalist whose reporting was found to be inaccurate or inconsistent, as compared to newspaper or online journalists found guilty of the same act. Survey results also indicated in the case of an inaccurate or incomplete television news report, more blame would be placed on the individual journalist rather than the news organization he or she worked for. If a journalist was found to be reporting inaccurate or incomplete information, 91 percent of respondents said they would stop consuming news from that individual, whereas only 34 percent of the same respondents said they would stop consuming news from the media organization the individual worked work.



Graph 4.

The vast majority of survey respondents said they were familiar with *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams (92 percent), which was confirmed by 88 percent of respondents correctly identifying the network he works for. Similarly, 95 percent of respondents say they are familiar with the incident resulting in the six-month suspension of Williams. Survey respondents unanimously agreed Williams’ false reports involving his Iraq War coverage hurt his credibility. One hundred percent of respondents indicated they “strongly agree,” “agree” or “somewhat agree” his actions hurt his credibility, with 46 percent “strongly agreeing” with the statement. Respondents were slightly more forgiving of NBC, with 80 percent indicating they “strongly agree,” “agree” or “somewhat agree” his actions hurt the network, as compared to 20 percent who indicated they “somewhat disagree” or “disagree” his actions had a negative impact. At the time of the survey, sentiments toward Williams and the willingness to forgive seemed mostly undecided. Over half of respondents indicated they “somewhat agree” or “somewhat disagree” that they had forgiven Williams for his actions, with overall sentiment slightly favoring a lack of

forgiveness. These feelings could change in the future, as 77 percent of respondents indicated they would consider forgiving William. This shift has strong implications as to how NBC should handle the situation when Williams returns from his suspension.



Graph 6.

While responses from consumers offer value insight into trust's role in television news, those who deliver the content also offer a unique perspective. While all three interview subjects offered perspectives that differed slightly, all shared one common theme: the importance of authenticity. Each subject independently discussed the role authenticity plays in building a relationship of trust.

You can tell talent who are mailing it in everyday, you can tell the talent who... are just on top of their game. ... You can tell the ones who are just reading a script and you

can tell them ones who are not engaged; it's brutally, painfully obvious when you turn on the TV set. (No. 3)

I think one of the easier ways to keep that trust is to No. 1, go on the air and be authentic, because I think phoniness is quickly interpreted by the audience, I think you can sense phoniness – even the audience that isn't familiar with TV can sense a phony. (No. 1)

Interviewee No. 2 is in a unique situation because the individual is married to another high profile individual in the Twin Cities broadcast news market. A balance needs to be found where people feel like they are “part of the family” but also not subject to constant reminders of her personal life. She described anchoring the evening news “as just being yourself. Talking to a friend and saying this is what we have.”

In addition to playing a crucial role in the operational functions of ethical journalism, trust is also essential to the continued financial success of media organizations – including television news. While acknowledging there was an entertainment factor to television news that does not exist in other mediums, interviewee No. 3 said people tune in to a particular broadcast on a nightly basis to be simultaneously informed and entertained. But above anything else, trust plays an essential role, “because if you don't have that trust factor you don't have anything.”

If they don't come back to you, your bosses aren't going to be able to sell spots, and if you're bosses aren't able to sell spots somebody's not getting paid and ultimately that's us. (No. 3)

All interviewees agreed that trust plays a crucial role in delivering the news – with one repeatedly calling it the “stock and trade” of the business. Trust is developed through hard work over time, but also developed in moments that convey raw, authentic and relatable experiences. While broadcast television news involves showmanship, including studio lights, makeup and trendy wardrobes, interviewees agreed trust is developed through transparency and authenticity. The three respondents did have different views on how those factors are established and ultimately thrive. Respondent No. 1 discussed how his reaction to a particular news story unintentionally developed a strong bond between him and the audience.

We had a story about a kid who had committed suicide because he was bullied, and on the air that day, live, I opened up about my own experience with that and all the realities that came with that and I think that moment there was a shift in how I felt about the job and there was a portion of the audience who felt differently about me because of that. (No. 1)

Interviewee No. 2 said trust and reliability is developed by meticulously reviewing over stories before they air not just for inaccuracies, but also for information that could be perceived as being anything less than objective. She said the presence of trust between her and her audience is organically developed over time through consistent and accuracy and is not something manufactured. While trust between an audience and an anchor is of the utmost importance, she says there is not a constant reminder about developing and maintaining trust. Rather, it comes with performing all the skills necessary to be a successful anchor.

I don't think of it as 'I want to be trustworthy, I'm trying to be.' I'm thinking 'There's my information, I've gone through it, I'm giving the most up to date information, the most accurate information', and then ... for me, it's just being yourself. (No. 2)

Interviewee No. 3 spoke of the intelligence of viewers, saying they expect a certain level of trust and credibility on a daily basis. He spoke of the correspondences he regularly reviews regarding potential issues, adding “they don’t put up with us not giving it our best every day” and if they feel that is not the case “they will let us know about it.”

Interviewee No. 3 equated the relationship between a television news anchor and the audience to a relationship with a spouse, whereas “sometimes you just have to say sorry a lot.” This same policy rings true when it comes to engaging with viewers who feel like their trust has been violated. He added when he is contacted by a viewer who feels a story lacked balance from a certain perspective, he engages directly with that individual, and offers a sincere apology and thorough explanation of why the story was covered in the specific manner.

I always try to respond and my first sentence is "I'm sorry I disappointed you, here's why I did that way I did or why I reported the way I did last night or tonight' and if there's something I left out I apologize to you and I will do my best to get it right next time. ... And I always try to take an honest look at what I did wrong, what they're accusing me of messing up and trying to make an honest attempt to respond to them or correct it in the future. ... No one should be exempt from criticism and they keep us on our toes, they really do. (No. 3)

Interviewee No. 1 also spoke about quickly acknowledging any mistakes and holding himself accountable for the situation that caused the impression trust was violated. He also said addressing the issue in an honest and timely manner plays an essential role.

I would try to get ahead of it by just quickly admitting that I messed up and I apologize – no excuses – I own it, I think taking ownership of it, not blaming others. ... It came out of my mouth, I apologize. (No. 1)

Interviewee No. 2 recalled a situation where a reporter misreported an essential fact in a story, drawing criticism from both local and national media critics. She said acknowledging the error was an essential step in the recovery, as well as looking forward to and reaffirming a commitment to providing quality content in the future.

You really have to improve yourself. ... I want people to know that they can count on us and we're telling you to trust what we know, that we've worked hard to present things and to present the facts. ... It's like any relationship, rebuilding trust, once that trust is violated it takes a while – if ever – to rebuild it. (No. 2)

She acknowledged that it took a significant amount of time to recover from the error, but ultimately it was accomplished by refocusing on big, investigative pieces that resonated with viewers and displayed the station's commitment to quality and trustworthy journalism.

All the interview subjects expressed sympathy with the situation NBC News faces in light of the situation involving its star anchor, Brian Williams. In discussing how the network and Williams handled the situation, as well as decisions they both face, the

interview subjects offered a unique perspective on the relationship between an anchor and his or her audience. Respondent No. 2 said the situation reminded journalists of how fast years of credibility can be eroded, especially with social media and the prevalence of 24-hour news outlets.

It causes all of us to take pause and [realize] that we're only one slip up away from losing credibility and the lesson in all of that is you can spend an entire career trying to establish a brand of credibility and it can all get destroyed in one incident in a matter of hours. (No. 3)

He questioned the length of Williams' of suspension – 6 months – and wondered if a shorter suspension would have achieved the same goals, serving as a reminder to the audience that the network took the violation of trust seriously and allowing Williams to recover in the court of public opinion. He also believed Williams would be able to make a return to NBC News upon the completion of his suspension, adding, "I like to think that the audience has moved on." He also questioned whether other factors contributed to the situation, noting that NBC News's parent company, Comcast, was amid a multi-billion dollar merger with Time Warner Cable. He wondered what role internal politics played, as the company was trying to finalize a major acquisition and the Williams situation brought embarrassment to the company.

Interviewee No. 2 said she believed the violation of trust between Williams and audiences would be "difficult to bounce back from," but also acknowledged viewers tend to have short memories. She was more concerned with the lack of Williams' clear admission of guilt and the absence of a sincere apology. She also agreed with the actions NBC News had taken as a result of Williams' action, saying it allowed the network to conduct its own

investigation and determine whether it was something viewers truly cared about. She added there is a difference between exaggerating facts involving one's personal life and exaggerating facts in a news story.

It'd be one thing if you're talking about a story in your personal life that happened – he was talking about news stories and saying I saw this... and this is what happened... but, listen, when I heard it, the first thing I thought of was, 'Oh my God, you violated the trust'. (No. 2)

Interviewee No. 1 offered a different perspective on the situation, saying he did not foresee Williams' return to the anchor chair, adding, "I think there is already such a sour taste in the public's mouth against journalists that that is working against him." He also criticized the unvetted apology Williams posted to Facebook after the incident.⁵² Rather than justifying his actions, as Williams did in a Facebook post, Respondent No. 1 said a major flaw in his apology was the lack of admission of guilt, and that Williams' course of action made the situation worse.

"I think he went too far with the apology... he could have just said, 'You know what, I'm on the air everyday and through the wash of time – I'm on the air and I go on these talk shows and I keep adding things to the story. Is it wrong? Yes. And in my position is it wrong? It's really wrong to do it – yes and I apologize.'" (No. 1)

He was the only respondent to mention the violation of trust between Williams and the *NBC Nightly News* staff. Interviewee No. 1 said the constant leaks of internal information

⁵² NBC Nightly News Facebook page. Brian Williams response to Lance Reynolds. 04 February 2015.

showed a lack of support for Williams from his staff, adding, “his own colleagues questioning his favorability within the organization doesn’t bode well for him.”

The interviewees also acknowledged the significant role social media plays in building a trustworthy relationship with audience members, with one interviewee describing it as “kind of an extension of their own personality.” It offers anchors an outlet to share behind the scene photos and information with viewers, allowing them to feel they are a part of the entire news production process. Interviewee No. 3 says social media allows him to share facets of his personal life with viewers, enabling them to feel they are included in his life. It also provides anchors an outlet to directly connect with viewers, whether they are engaging in productive conversation on Twitter or congratulating a viewer on a birthday or major achievement posted to Facebook.

It’s a real trust factor, a real honor factor to have them come to us and it’s a huge responsibility too because you don’t want to let them down. You absolutely do not want to let them down. (No. 3)

Interviewee No. 1 said social media increases the connection between himself and viewers, and allows for timely and direct responses. Before social media, Interviewee No. 1 said, if viewers wanted to interact with on-air personality, they would either have to call the station and leave a voicemail, or write a letter and send it in the mail. And with both methods, it took considerable effort to provide a sufficient response. The immediacy factor of social media changes this dynamic, he said. He also discussed the intimacy news anchors have with their audiences, and mentioned that anchors are invited into audience home during some of the most private times of day. When the social media factor is included in

the process, it allows television anchors to seem “less like that person on TV and more like a friend.”

I think people, they invite you into their home, especially those of us in the morning, I think the morning time period is much more personal, I think people are waking up with you in their bathrobes ... they are literally inviting you in, so I think social media is kind of an extension of that. (No. 3)

Discussion

RQ₁: How important is it for consumers to trust the source of their news, both local and national? How important is it for viewers to trust the anchors that deliver the news, both local and national?

While trust plays a significant role in how viewers choose what media to consume, it is only one of many factors considered. More so than any other quality, convenience plays a key role in how people choose to consume content. Many people, especially millennials, spend a significant amount of time curating social media news sources and filling their feeds or timelines with information they find trustworthy, relevant and entertaining. This group is much more likely to view a news story if it is presented on social media than they are by tuning in to a local or national news broadcast. These individuals develop trust by perceived reputation, content and by recommendation from other trusted sources.

Numerous interview and focus group participants observed that trust is something television personalities build up over time, saying it often takes years to develop a solid and trustworthy relationship with an audience. Additionally, it was noted how quickly that trust can deteriorate. One interview subject noted television journalists are just one inaccurate story away from the end of their careers. That same interview subject made an observation that was unique to television news: that people tune in because they want to be informed, but also because they want to be entertained. Responses from survey participants indicated this understanding, with many acknowledging that rumor and exaggeration can play a role in television news. While there is a difference between exaggeration and inaccuracies, oftentimes the type of gripping storytelling that attracts viewers includes an emphasis on certain elements that make the story more entertaining to consume. Research indicates

consumers understand this unique element to television news and realize the role it plays in creating entertaining programming.

Viewers acknowledge trust plays a major role then it comes to choosing a television news station, with the majority agreeing credible news must be fact based and truthful. And while the majority of viewers say they trust the news they watch on television, it is to a lesser extent than how the same group feels about the importance of trust. While trust is the principle most discussed in this research – and something respondents widely agreed was necessary in television news – there are a number of additional factors that play an factor. Interestingly, some of those factors closely align with the value of trust. Transparency also plays a major role in how the public trusts the media. This includes exposing any conflicts of interest, acknowledging when mistakes are made and maintaining an unbiased tone.

RQ₂: In what ways can journalists (including television news anchors) restore trust with the public?

Media consumers acknowledge the increasingly fierce competition between media entities increases the potential for stories to contain shocking, exaggerated or inaccurate content. While these qualities are not without criticism, they can be managed by admitting mistakes and demonstrating the steps that are being taken to ensure they do not happen again. There is power in admitting a mistake publically, owning up to the consequences and working to minimize any collateral damage. The public is also willing to forgive many of these transgressions, including the errors made in Brian Williams' reporting of the Iraq War. Interestingly, consumers want individuals who make these mistakes to come forward and publically show that they are working to reestablish trust with their audience. Silence is viewed as an admission of guilt, denial or a failure to take responsibility. After admitting to

a misstep of falsity, the public wants to actively see what that news agency or news figure is doing to restore trust. Admission and action is how trust is rebuilt. While a situation involving false reporting should be avoided at all cost, if a situation does arise, it can be used as a way for anchors to expose their human side; a humble reminder to the audience they are imperfect and willing to learn from their mistakes. While consumers view trust as an essential aspect of television journalism, they also understand anchors are people who are prone to mistakes, inaccuracies and exaggerations. While repeated behavior is not – and should not – be accepted, the public as a whole is generally forgiving after a sincere admission or apology.

These factors are not viewed equally, as some are easier to forgive than others. This is illustrated by comparing the situations involving Williams and “A Rape on Campus” by Rolling Stone. Admitting to the errors was not enough to convince some research subjects to forgive *Rolling Stone* for reporting errors. This situation points to the difference between reporting exaggerations that do not harm anyone – but sensationalize a story – and reporting mistakes that can impact the national dialogue on a specific topic. Additionally, the issue of campus sexual assault is one that has garnered significant media coverage in recent months, and with that increased attention brings increased outrage. Trust is still the foundation of journalism. The more trustful the public is of a media personality or organization, the more information they are likely to consume.

It is important to note the feeling viewers have toward specific reporters who violate trust and the organizations those individuals work for. Research indicates television news viewers are able to separate the reporter from the organization he or she represents. This is especially relevant in the case in the case involving Williams and NBC News, as it shows viewers do not blame the news network for the actions of one individual, even if that individual is the face of the network. Data on ratings supports this argument, with *NBC*

Nightly News maintaining its ratings prominence amid the Williams scandal and the appointment of a temporary air, Lester Holt.⁵³ This shows news organizations are about more than just an individual person, and a violation of trust from one reporter does not necessarily contaminate an entire news organization.

RQ₃: What complementary role does new media (online and social media) have in building trust with news organizations, news personalities and their audience?

With the changing media landscape, most notably the rise of social media and personalized newsfeeds, the role trust plays is evolving. Consumers are able to find sources they trust and block out sources they do not. Social media also allows anchors to form a personal relationship with viewers. Before the widespread use of social media, these relationships were difficult to form because of the one-way model of information sharing. With the rise of social media, anchors are able to interact with viewers just as easily as viewers can interact with anchors. This allows television news audiences access to the lives of news anchors beyond what can be seen on television: it offers a view into their personal life. While anchors must still be concerned with sharing too much on social media, there is a balance that if struck, can form a bond with the viewers. This enhances and builds the level of trust.

Social media also shifts power to the consumer. If they are unhappy with a story or feel an anchor is acting unethically, they are able to not only share that information directly with the anchor, but also with their social media networks. Trust is built up by reputation, recommendations and time. If a news organization or anchor participates in a report that

⁵³ Bibel, S. (2015, May 27).

displays signs of deceit, a consumer can indicate his or her dissatisfaction by simply commenting or unliking, in addition to changing the channel.

While social media can help build trust between a television anchor and an audience, there are also significant downfalls. In the quest to gain more “likes” or “followers,” a larger social media presence also opens anchors up to a higher level of scrutiny. Critiques – whether warranted or not – that used to go unnoticed now can be shared with a wide audience. Additionally, there are more outlets to share instant feedback. While there are many benefits to social media in respect to building trust with an audience, social media platforms are a public forum that can amplify conversations that may hinder relationship building. Caution should be exercised.

The relationship between an anchor and their audience is unique. Television news is especially so, in the sense that it is a personality driven medium where content is often communicated through through storytelling. Regardless of how television news is different other types of media, trust plays an important role in attracting and maintaining an audience. Trust, accuracy and transparency should all be considered when writing, producing and delivering the news. Those qualities – especially trust – take a significant time to develop, yet can vanish in an instant. When trust is violated, the best way to regain it is to admit to it, apologize and display commitment towards maintaining trust between an anchor and his or her audience.

Further Research

An understanding of trust between television anchors and the public is represented by prior research and examined with a focus group, online survey and expert interviews. There are, however, many more areas to explore. The focus group was selected through a convenience sample, consisting of individuals who are for the most part of the same age, income, educational background and political beliefs. Although this group was able to offer valuable insights, it would be beneficial to conduct additional focus groups with more diverse backgrounds.

Additional information on this topic could be gathered with a more precise online survey. Survey participants were also selected by a convenience sample and privy to biases of the researcher's social circle. This includes a large number of individuals who work in the journalism industry, especially television news. The survey could also be distributed in methods other than social media, in order to account for those who are avid television news consumers but not social media users. The survey would also benefit from a larger sample of respondents who identify as avid television news consumers, rather than just news consumers.

The television anchors interviewed as part of this research offered valuable insight into their relationship with the public, including the unique challenges they face. The research would benefit from additional interviews, specifically from the perspective of national television news anchors. It would also be insightful to interview anchors who had been personally involved in a situation of mistrust. Even with the promise of confidentiality, interviewees were reluctant to discuss situations in which they were personally involved.

Through this research, it became clear that the increase in online media has a major effect on the journalism industry as a whole. Further research would target the effect this is

having on the general public's perception of electronic media personalities – not just on television news outlets.

This research was completed and written while Brian Williams was still suspended from his role as anchor of *NBC Nightly News*. His suspension is expected to end in August 2015, with details of his future at the network still undetermined. Regardless of whether he returns to NBC News, ends up in another role at the network or leaves for a competitor, television news viewers are sure to have opinions about his reinstatement. There is ample opportunity for follow-up research to examine how viewers feel about his return and how they feel about Williams as he attempts to rebuild trust with consumers.

Conclusion

In order to be successful in television journalism, it is essential for an anchor to have a solid relationship with his or her audience built on trust. Anchors can conceptually be viewed as a brand, charged with being the face of the company they work for. Similar to how a marketing executive will manage public perception and reputation of a product, the same must be done with an anchor. While managing personalities is much different – and some may argue more difficult – than a product or a brand, its importance is the same. When people tune in to television news, whether local or national, there is a necessary element of comfort that must exist to establish a relationship. Through time, authenticity and reputation management, a deeper relationship is formed on the foundation of trust.

Similar to any brand, the conduct and presentation of anchors must be managed to ensure an environment where a trusting relationship can flourish. This includes a set of checks and balances designed to maintain a high standard of ethics when it comes to conduct both on and off the air. With the omnipresence of social media, anchors must be aware of the likelihood that any inaccuracies, exaggerations or questionable conduct will be discussed in a public forum. While social media has the ability to build a unique, personal relationship with an audience, it also has the potential to draw attention to criticism.

The successful management of anchors requires knowledge of external communication and reputation management. Because anchors are viewed as a mascot or spokesperson for the station in which they are employed, the public's perception matters. The images and personalities of anchors are those the public associates with the station as a whole, and a solid reputation is key toward building and maintaining a continued audience. While their image can be promoted or marketed like any other product, their reputation is a key element to success. If an anchor lacks the qualities of authenticity or trustworthiness, his or her ability to connect with an audience is greatly diminished. While all humans are

prone to lapses in judgment, when it involves a business that places so much emphasis on trust, such circumstances require immediate transparency. Viewers are likely to forgive when trust is violated, but requires full admission and reassurance similar actions will not occur in the future.

Trust is a concept humans rely on to form successful and functional relationships with other people. Beyond the scope of television journalism, trust plays a significant role in all personal and professional relationships. Without trust, a relationship cannot function. While this research shows nearly all participants believe trust is essential when it comes to journalism, an increased number of consumers indicate a lack of overall trust in media. Gallop indicates Americans' trust in media shows a steady decline of 14 percent between 1999 and 2014.⁵⁴ There are many explanations for this decline, including the rise in partisan cable television and the increase in alternative digital news sources. While the overall trend of distrust toward media may be troubling, it only reinforces the important role trust plays in the relationship between television news anchors and audiences. Trust is essential in all relationships, whether it's a spouse, co-worker or anchor, and significant effort is necessary to ensure trust thrives into the future.

⁵⁴ McCarthy, J. (2015, September 17). Gallup: Trust in Mass Media Returns to All-Time Low.

Supplement 1
Online Survey

1) I offer consent under the following conditions:

- The purpose of this study is to look into the relationship between viewers and the news they consume. The survey will take less than 15 minutes to complete. All answers will remain confidential and will not be associated with respondent's name or identity. I am taking this survey voluntarily and am not being compensated in any way, other than assisting in an academic effort. Questions and comments can be directed to Principal Investigator Carl Jaeger (University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication) at jaege061@umn.edu.

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree

2) What is your age?

- a) 0 to 17-years-old
- b) 18 to 29-years-old
- c) 30 to 45-years-old
- d) 46-years-old or older
- e) Prefer not to answer

3) What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Prefer not to answer

4) Have you watched local broadcast television news (WCCO, KSTP, KMSP, KARE) in the last week (on television or online)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

5) Have you watched network broadcast television news (CBS, ABC, NBC) in the last week (on television or online)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6) Have you watched cable news (CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, HLN) in the last week (on television or online)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7) What draws you to a particular broadcast, either local or network (select all that apply)?

- a) New content
- b) Anchors/personalities
- c) Perceived political views
- d) Aesthetics (set design, graphics, presentation)
- e) Other

8) What draws you to a particular news anchor (select all that apply)?

- a) Appearance

- b) Delivery
- c) Channel/network association
- d) Reputation
- e) Other

9) Answer the following question considering the attached scale.

Scale: Extremely important, very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, very unimportant, not at all important

- a) How important do you view trust when it comes to consuming news (television, radio, newspaper/magazine, online)?
- b) How important do you view trust when it comes to consuming television news?
- c) How important do you view storytelling when it comes to consuming news?

10) Rate the following.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

- a) Credible news must always be fact based and truthful.
- b) There are occasions where credible news can be incomplete.
- c) There are circumstances where credible news can be exaggerated.
- d) There are circumstances where credible news can be based on rumor.

11) Rate the following.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

- a) I trust the news I read in a newspaper.
- b) I trust the news I read on the Internet.
- c) I trust the news I view on television.

12) Rate the following.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

- a) If a newspaper reporter was found to be reporting incomplete or inaccurate stories, I would stop consuming that news source.
- b) If a television reporter was found to be reporting incomplete or inaccurate stories, I would stop consuming that news source.
- c) If an Internet reporter was found to be reporting incomplete or inaccurate stories, I would stop consuming that news source.

13) If a journalist (all mediums) was found to be providing inaccurate or incomplete reports, I would stop consuming news from that individual.

- a) Yes
- b) No

14) Are you familiar with Brian Williams?

- a) Yes
- b) No

15) What television network is Brian Williams most closely associated?

- a) CBS
- b) ABC

- c) FOX
- d) NBC
- e) Other

16) Are you familiar with the reasons why Brian Williams is currently suspended from his employer?

- a) Yes
- b) No

17) Rate the following.

Scale: Strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree

- a) Brian Williams and his false reports while covering the Iraq War hurt William's credibility.
- b) Brian Williams and his false reports while covering the Iraq War hurt NBC's credibility.
- c) I forgive Brian Williams for making the false claims.
- d) I would consider forgiving Brian Williams for making false claims.

18) Rate the following.

Scale: Extremely important, very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant, very unimportant, not at all important

- a) It is important for citizens to be aware of current events.
- b) Journalism plays an important role in society.
- c) Journalists are trustworthy.

Supplement 2
Focus Group
May 11,2015

CJ: Where do you get your news from?

- Internet, Twitter, video form, Facebook, NPR, business news via Twitter, Bloomberg, Twitter, MPR to and from work, articles on Twitter and Facebook, MPR, daily clips from various website (work), Slate, social media, magazine (hard copy) New Yorker, Economist, Foreign Affairs

CJ: How often do you watch TV news?

- 4: watch clips online, full Daily Show
- 6: Morning news a couple times a week, Fox 9, ABC or CBS, if I don't feel like reading something during breakfast, whatever is doing the most political news or sports is what I watch.
- 2: If I'm in a neutral environment I'll put on a news source like CNN or CNBC, but ... if it's a big event a big news story then I'm definitely tuned into CNBC for live coverage, I remember that last time... the Boston bombing... was the last time I was turned into live news and that was kind of, that was a weird story with them making the news and misleading information but that was the last time I remember tuning in.
- 7: I rely on CNN or other cable stations for breaking news coverage. I was glued to the TV during the Boston bombing manhunt and get sucked into similar coverage. I get election night coverage from these same outlets.

CJ: Growing up watching local news?

- All yes but one
- 5: we would watch if we knew someone who was going to be on it, like a sports story if we knew someone who was playing.

CJ: What role does trust play in general?

- 4: I think it plays a large role, but I'm not sure I would watch the news even if I knew I could trust them, just because I'm not necessarily captivated and I want to chose when I want to access this information, just not everyday.
- 1: I think social media has by in large made me distrustful of mainstream media therefore I often see out alternative viewpoints.
- 2: With that, we already kind of have curated our sources so before the default was to watch local news and as of now we are tuned into various outlets that are prone to provide us with information that were more interested in on a regular basis.
- 7: It's important, because without trust, you're just like other talking heads.

CJ: How do you know whether you can trust a news outlet?

- 2: for me it falls more under a brand umbrella so, my example, the Economist doesn't have authors to it, so I wont touch on that, so on Bloomberg, I wont click a certain author I couldn't name in the entire news source but I read a couple articles each day and I know what can be quality reporting, what can be filler from day to day, but at the same time with it being Bloomberg, it's the lead source for business, which I pretend to read during work, its what I trust. If it didn't have that name I don't know if I would be clicking there.

- 5: There's a lot of weight that comes with news sources that are noteworthy and then there's also people that post things on Twitter and Facebook and I never click on them.

CJ: How do you decide what to read, and based on what you read, what to believe?

- 6: It varies for straight, what are the facts sort of news, the thing I get the most news is from NPR and I feel like the way they do it, they don't ever really offer opinions, except for very rarely, and usually its more like a movie review, so its like, ok, but that's a baseline for whatever is said here, I'm pretty confident you can at least trust that it's the best available information, which isn't to be said mistakes aren't made, but its not like slanted in any way, at least that's how I feel, its more like opinion that harder to sort that out and I guess to be honest, because im pretty liberal, I read more liberal news sources and liberal authors and sort of figure that at least from my own world view, the conclusions that are drawn based on the facts that are talking about are more than likely to be something that I would believe and accept.
- 1: We're also talking about facts and conclusions and its important that when your listening to articles or you're listening to radio journalism that you are paying attention as to whether the content is based on objective empirical data or details rather than speculation or things of that nature. I think that plays a huge role in whether I trust a piece of news media.

CJ: Marquee journalists: what do you read what to do read, why do you seek out what you seek out? Does it have anything to do with the people who are presenting the news?

- 1: yes, most of the time I seek out columnists who's views generally align with my own. And then in addition to that, present their reported pieces or opinions in a manner that is articulate and interesting. I think I value those things quite a lot. It's a biased consumption of media.

CJ: Station you like, top personality is exaggerating or not being truthful, would that change the way you feel about that organization? Would you be willing to forgive and keep consuming?

- 3: I think it would change my opinion of them if it was the top person that I would think they are pretty connected to the organization at large and I fell like it would be pretty hard to ignore that or believe that the organization at large didn't have an idea that it was going on.
- 6: I think it depends on a couple things, one how they handled it, so if the second they figured it out they fire the person or discipline them, or at least investigate it to find out what's going on, then I would be inclined to keep trusting that source, whereas if they figure it out and they're trying to sweep it under the rug and it comes out a year later then that would make be a lot more suspect of it. I think it also depends on the type of error, so I think a lot ... recent news like BW, his whole story of being shot done is I personally was not really bothered by that because it wasn't the actual news, it wasn't ... Jon Stewarts things "finally someone is being held accountable for the lies in the war in Iraq and its, I care far more about whether there were WMD than whether I random reporter was shot down.
- 5: Whereas the RS article about rape at UVA and that being reported incorrectly bothered me way more than BW falsify his own past in a way that was inappropriate and unprofessional.
- 2: As an aside, I would also categorize people in the news under different categories, whether it be from an entertainment slant, being a mainstream media, and I think

my example that comes to mind is the Fareed Zakariya and the global news show that he has in the morning, he was pretty much caught red handed plagiarizing, but he doesn't present himself as an entertainer, granted he's on CNN World so he's obviously driven by ratings which in itself creates that kind of dilemma, so I see him more as an intellectual, presents a broad world view from an intellectual standpoint versus maybe some other big talking heads out there that draw audiences not because they're even keeled in what they're reporting but because they're – shock – shock value and they get the big stories.

CJ: If a reporter is found to be lying or making us stuff, is that something that will permanently change the way you feel about them? The person.

- 6: It goes back to what it is exactly, if clearly they're faking sources or something like that, or – a source told be this – and later its found out that's it fabricated – then I probably would be like I would never trust that person again. But if its like sources really did tell them that but they were fooled by their sources or again when I think about the BW thing, I don't know exactly, but I genially think he genially believed it happened to him. I think he believed – until people were like, no you weren't shot down I think he thought he was. Its like people's memories over time change. So its something like that I was like – I could trust him again if he starts reporting – it's not like he was lying about everything.

CJ: How should BW go about – if he comes back – rebuilding his reputation or taking account for the mistakes he made?

- 1: I think there's an issue of transparency, but I agree that it comes down to what Geoff was saying, there's a dichotomy between the practice of sound journalism ethics and being part of a media landscape that is building personalities and sensationalizing things to construct popularity and ratings and he is part of that media landscape and his best way to recover his reputation is to own up to everything – like I said transparency – and then get back to work to prove to everyone that he is the journalist that everyone thought he was before this incident.
- 2: I think one thing that would be interesting in this day in age is, like, the news cycle is pretty quick but ta the same time were very quick to suspend or put people up and blame individuals, whereas in the BW case, the news network using his as someone who is the face of their network would have been better served to have him continue with his job while still having an outlet to say – own up to it – like were all saying he should and any professional people make mistakes and people own up to it and that's how you regain credibility immediately after something happens but in the situation where the network suspends him indefinitely I think it casts a shadow over that individual where I think that we as people are quick to forgive people and give them another chance, but that shows he has lack of support from people who are holding him. So its almost confusing for someone who consumes media if the network itself is allowing us to make out own judgment without getting all the information or having it out in the public for as long as it has without the answers that he cant explain.
- 3: Its like what [6] was saying earlier that in some regard you would trust the news source again if you felt like the news or the network was holding the reporter responsible but your saying the opposite in that you're not trusting them because they are not backing the person.
- 7: Delivering actual reporting from the field is a no-go for me and Brian Williams. He can repair his appeal, but not his trust.

- 2: But I think the idea of – the quick to suspend – just to think the network is airing it out and clearing out their closet, and skeletons by placing everything on an individual is almost a cop out you see it in so many areas, whether it be politically how our political cycle goes on endless political smear campaigns, it focuses on the negativity and that in itself might be a news story and what may draw people, but from a personal standpoint it'd be much quicker to forgive someone if they were given an immediate avenue or channel to respond versus just blindly trying to cover it up or put it away or silence it over time.
- 5: I think that it would be hard for BW to go straight back into the role he previously had, like I think he would need to be doing something different, whether it be on the ground reporting in X place, a different role to sort of gain his credibility back in a new way.
- 1: I also don't think that BW did what he did because he's a bad journalist or a bad person, I think he did it because ... or what he did is more broadly an illustration of what he's a product of in a media culture that demands personalities, so he can get fired from his job, CNN can condemn him, but that doesn't mean that CNN doesn't have another BW waiting in the wings to take over, so the fact that they use him as an example doesn't mean that the system is fixing itself. It just means that someone else is going to gain popularity and then make the same mistake that he made.

CJ: Don't watch a lot of news, do you foresee yourself as watching more news, or what would make you watch more news?

- 1: I'm a print person
- 3: I don't foresee myself tuning in. I think it has more to do with, I don't mind watching the news in video form – I enjoy reading it as well – but I don't mind watching it, it's more of time, I don't want to tune in to this specific time.
- 2: I think I'm more prone to read things as well for information and current events, I will say that I would be drawn to local, city wide news if it was segmented, if it was a little more progressive in the way they presented it, and made it more consumable and in more quick fashion, I think one of the reasons maybe local news has been hurt is because, in most cases I've experienced, local news syndicate, their websites are pretty jankey ... you don't usually find what you're looking for, it's not consumable wherever you land, whereas other news sources, for better or worse, like your HuffPo, now a days your BuzzFeed, it's like a magnet and you're on that website and you're continually consuming content and it's like a maze – you're never getting out of there, I feel like I end up on local news source if it's something that I'm directed to or shared or something I trust. Like you would share something, but I would never end upon a local news site if it wasn't for them sharing it, so that's why I would never really end up on local news site.
- 5: I think it's not conducive to my lifestyle now, to sit down and watch a whole news hour from start to finish, where I can turn on the radio when I'm driving to work and it's always on and it's something I genuinely think will be good content and a good format and informative or I have a free minutes, so let me check my phone, and this is an interesting link so I'll click on that. So it's very much like an immediacy that is not the same with local TV news.
- 6: I think I listen to a lot of radio because I'm driving to and from work or I'm cleaning or something like that and I can't watch something and do those things but I can listen. The other thing that makes it hard for me to watch TV news something is it's kind of like only one third of it is something I actually care about because one third is going to be commercials and one thing is them doing like fluff stories that I

have basically no interest in at all and then one third I am actually interested in, but I'd much rather go to a source, like a website, BF is a good example, probably 2/3 of the things on BF I have zero interest in but I can very easily see, ok I read the headline on that so I won't click on it, and then I will click on the story I am interested in and will read the whole thing and ... if there was a way to watch TV news where I could skip all the fluff but not get CNN rambling for 4 hours on the same news story, I'm like give me something more than 4 hours on one tiny piece of news that would make me more inclined to watch TV news – or at least watch it on my phone or something like that.

- 4: I agree with much of what was said, and another thought about TV news, again coming back to this trust thing and the incentives or not only what the org is saying but what the people are saying, they're all sort of for-profit commercial-driven entities, whereas NPR or MinnPost – they don't have incentives other than providing good news and I think there's this VICE on HBO, which is not news, but a subscription based high quality TV thing that was focused as my demographic, then maybe I'd tune in.

Supplement 3
Interview No. 1
Thursday, June 11, 2015

CJ: Tell me about the relationship you have with your TV audience.

1: I think for me, because I'm not a traditional anchor, and I've done traditional news and I've done an infotainment style show, I think I have even more of a connection because on an infotainment show, like a Good Day LA or for us The Buzz, you can be a little more yourself and I think my doing that, and opening yourself up – mistakes and all – weird stuff in your life and all – I think you develop a much thicker bond with people, and I think that bond, in most cases, turns into trust.

CJ: How important is that trust?

1: I think it's important and I think one of the easier ways to keep that trust is to No. 1, go on the air and be authentic, because I think phoiness is quickly interpreted by the audience, I think you can sense phoiness – even the audience that isn't familiar with TV can sense a phony and I think that's number one, and number 2, if you make a mistake, you get ahead of it, you admit it quickly, and you don't do it in a grand fashion. You apologize, you don't add a lot of fluff to it, you say, hey I messed up and I apologize ... for example Paula Dean went on and on and did three mea culpas and it was like, you could have done one and that would have been the end of the story.

CJ: How do you built trust?

1: I can pin point one of the ways I really opened up, and that was locally, we had a story about a kid who has committed suicide because he was bullied, and on the air that day, live, I opened up about my own experience with that and all the realities that came with that and I think that moment there was a shift in how I felt about the job and there was a portion of the audience who felt differently bout me because of that.

CJ: Trust between you and your audience violated?

1: I would try to get ahead of it by just quickly admitting that I messed up and I apologize – no excuses – I own it, I think taking ownership of it, not blaming others, not blaming editors or a producer writing a tease or an editor writing a script, it came out if my mouth, I apologize and... you know.

CJ: Brian Williams situation?

1: I think it's a little messy. I think there are a lot of leaks about how, I think there were a lot of leaks internally that added to the chaos of... I think once again, they didn't jump on it as quickly as they needed to jump on it and they let him do what I mentioned earlier, his apology almost made it worse because you almost over explain what happened and then, if people weren't paying attention to the story, they really were paying attention to it because his apology was so voluminous and over bloated and actually, his apology caused him more problems. So I think there was mishandling on the front end and ever sense then, there have been leaks within the organization that has made it seem like NBC doesn't have a good grasp of the situation and how to handle it properly.

CJ: How did Brian Williams handle it?

1: I think he went too far with the apology, I think he went too far with it, I think it probably would have hurt him and maybe some of the results would have been any different but he would have just said – you know what, I’m on the air everyday and through the wash of time – I’m on the air and I go on these talk shows and I keep adding things to the story. Is it wrong? Yes. And in position is it wrong? It’s really wrong to do it – yes and I apologize. But by saying his apology of, well I was actually in the other helicopter – it just made it worse.

CJ: Do you foresee a situation where he can return to the anchor job?

1: No. I think there is already such a sour taste in the public’s mouth against journalists that that is working against him and again – the drip, drip, drip of headlines and leaks internally from NBC, whether it’s a question of staff, his own colleagues questioning his credibility, his own colleagues questioning his favorability within the organization doesn’t bode well for him.

CJ: Social media bad?

1: It’s fundamentally changed it because it’s a direct route to the person. So if you wear I tie they don’t like, or you give an opinion they don’t agree with, it used to be, it was a very long process, they would have to write a letter, and they’d have to send it, and you’d get it a week later. Or they would call the operator – the receptionist – and you would maybe get a summary of those calls at the end of the week. Now you get off the air – or even during a commercial break – and you know right away that Betty in her town is upset that your ties ugly or she doesn’t agree with you on a particular topic.

CJ: Social media good?

1: Yeah, because it goes back to connectivity. I think people, they invite you into their home, especially those of us in the morning, I think the morning time period is much more personal, I think people are waking up with you in their bathrobes and it’s – they are literally inviting you in, so I think social media is kind of an extension of that. When you respond to them directly, answer their questions directly, I just think it adds to that level of comfort that they have with you. I think it does – if they can interact with you it makes you seem less like that person on TV and more like a friend.

CJ: What makes a loyal viewer?

1: I think what makes them is you being a reflection of the people watching. I think whether it’s the set, whether it’s the format – that’s way you see so many morning shows having a coffee cup, because it’s reflective of the person watching. They’re drinking coffee and you are. So again, you’re not this omnipresent voice of god, - okay it’s XXX and XXX telling you what’s going on. I think also what makes a loyal viewer is if you are representing their slice – you are representing, show casing, putting in the spotlight – things and people and events that matter to them. Whether they are in a small town in the DMI, whether they live downtown – whether they live in the small town of the big metro you are showcasing things that matter to them.

Supplement 4
Interview No. 2
June 11, 2015

CJ: Relationship with audience?

2: Almost 20 years now, so... the relationship I have with my audience, I think it's, you know when I initially got here, I think that in television your audience has this innate sort of reaction, they either immediately like you just based on the way you deliver the news and they way you look maybe, and the way you interact, so initially they were not quite sure but it was hard for me when I first came because one of the anchors had left and was a favorite anchor, so when I came in I think a lot of people transferred that being upset to me, but I think over the years it built up and – I like to think a good relationship, I think the audience, a lot of them think of me as family, or they know me, and that's with a lot of anchors.

CJ: How did you build that trust, relationship?

2: You know, I think they see you day in and day out and then you do stories that are objective – I think that's a big thing that people these days, viewers these days, you know they have so many outlets they can go to and a lot of these outlets – certain networks maybe ... or hosts or anchors – as being one way or another – conservative... liberal... and maybe not as objective. I think that's a big thing, when you do stories and you present the story and give the information that they can learn from and deduct and you know make a well informed decision from that, or maybe learn something from that, I think that's how you build up the trust.

CJ: How important is trust?

2: Trust nightly, obviously the news that you present to people, I mean obviously were going through stories, you read the stories you want to make sure they're accurate, they're fair, they're objective because as a producer sometimes you don't realize your putting things in and maybe it doesn't sound like its slanted one way or another, but certainly there may be a certain word here or there, so as an anchor we do go through all those scripts and make sure it's the most up to date information, so there's that aspect of it, and the way when you're on the air presenting it, I guess I don't think of it as "I want to be trust worthy, I'm trying to be," I'm thinking there's my information I've gone through it, I'm giving the most up to date information, the most accurate information, and they you kind of – for me – its just being yourself. Talking to a friend and saying this is what we have.

CJ: What role does personality and personal life have in the relationship with your audience?

2: Some people it's a turn off, people don't want to watch and some people really enjoy that, when we first started off working together I was really concerned about it because I didn't want that to intrude on the professional relationship. I didn't want it to get in the way of the news – of our job, presenting the news and giving information...

I think it does play a role for some people, they enjoy that and they feel like they are part of the family.

CJ: Trust violated? Rebuilt trust?

2: We had in incident where we had an investigative reporter... you know the incident... this place out of New York... dog/duck, they were feeding dogs to people and then the newspaper did a story on it... City Pages did a story on it and so it was really hard, we were mocked about it because the person was actually saying duck and not dog, so it's hard to built that trust. You really have to improve yourself and whats interesting, the Brian Williams thing, you would think trust is one of the most important things between a news station ... or any news outlet and the audience, that trust is really important. But if you look at a lot of the polls people did, they say 'I don't care that Brian Williams embellished that or said that, that doesn't matter to them. For me, that matters, I want people to know that they can count on us and were telling you the trust what we know, that we've worked hard to present thing and to present the facts. So, it took a while to recover from that so the only thing we can do is keep don't big stories and big investigative pieces, presenting new information cause it's like any relationship, rebuilding trust, once that trust is violated it takes a while – if ever – to rebuild it, and then there are people who car about it and people who don't care about it.

CJ: How did NBC handle the situation?

2: I think they're being very careful about it, as they should, this is the face of their news division, I think they wanted to look and make sure – they wanted to see what else was out there and as you know, shortly after there were stories that crop up about him embellishing a little bit here and there. I think they're in a difficult situation, they really are, and I think they're trying to gauge and see 'are we going to take a hit if we bring him back' 'has the trust been violated,' so I'm sure they are out and they're looking to see what viewers think. But I think they handled it the right way – what are they going to do – fire him right off the bat? They wanted to make sure, and probably get all their ducks in a row to see, is this a trend or a pattern with him? And I'm sure they're doing the research do see 'do viewers care?'

CJ: Will he be back?

2: Personally, I think it's something that is difficult to bounce back from because there's several cases of him embellishing stories – id's be one thing if you're talking about a story in your personal like that happened – he was talking about news stories and saying I saw this... and this is what happened... but, listen, when I heard it the first thing I thought of was "oh my god, you violated the trust' and then I thought you know, lets see, lets, wait, don't pass judgment because it could happen to any of us, so don't pass judgment and then when more stories came out I thought, how is he going to recover from this? But people honestly, their memories are so short, the only thing is with him, and I think its interesting, he never really came out with an apology and said – I lied – because his wording also hurt him "I mis-remembered, instead of just coming out and saying "I screwed up, I got carried away and I lied," because people are more forgiving in that way, o its been 6 months it will be interesting to see what the end up doing.

CJ: Social media?

2: I am terrible with social media, I'm really bad at being consistent with it. I will say that with social media you do have a more one-on-one connection because they can feel like they can talk to you directly, they can say what they feel right away, they can get onto Facebook

and they show immediate reaction. It's so differently, because when I started, emails – very few. But then all of a sudden people could directly email you and social media has taken it to a whole nether level. And I think, I could use social media to engage a wider audience and get people to know me a little more personally, because I think that's what they want to know. I look at it as... here's a great story we are doing and I think you should check it out, this is what's going on tonight, where I think more and more people talk about their personal life, even though I'm married to my co-anchor, so really throw my personal life out there – but that's what people want, they feel like they know you and they want to know more.

Supplement 5
Interview No. 3
June 13, 2015

CJ: Relationship with audience?

3: It's a hard one to describe because... it's not like being on a stage in that you can get instant feedback from your audience and actually talk to them interact with them see their facial expressions, have them ask you questions like we have at the state fair. We're staring into a piece of glass every night so it's a different kind of relationship that you have. And ultimately its one you hope is built on trust. The trust that you're providing them accurate information that's timely that's valuable that's important that meaningful that has it's own value proposition to them, and I like to say that the most sacred things that we do every day in the newsroom is No. 1. – at least in a television newsroom – our sacred covenant is No. 1. Tell the trust and No. 2 make slot and I proceed to assume that if you're telling the truth and there's a form of sincerity going in there and competence that the audience will respond to you and I guess what I mean by respond is keep coming back, because god knows that there's so many choices, more so than they ever had before, they don't even have to come to us anymore, they can come to Jon Stewart for crying out loud, and get their news, or consume it from Twitter every day, which I would argue is democracy is not in a very safe place as that's increasingly where our citizens are getting all of their information from in 140 characters. I still kind of believe at the end of the day that people want to see what happened in their world around them and they want to see it being told by people who are knowledgeable and don't have a certain ax to grind or point of view, but they just want to see the straight stuff.

Q: How important is that trust?

3: It's out stock and trade. It's absolutely the reason people come to us every night. And yes, because it's television there's a certain – dare I say it – entertainment value in it, there's - I think part of a newscast, there's an entertainment feature to it because ... people don't want to be bored by the stuff that's going on, but they want to be informed. But that trust factor is crucial, because if you don't have that trust factor you don't have anything. And they're not going to come back to you and if they don't come back to you, you're bosses aren't going to be able to sell spots, and if you're bosses aren't able to sell spots somebody's not getting paid and ultimately that's us. So I think it's critical to what we do everyday.

Q: How do you build that trust?

No. 3: I think it's about being truthful, about being honest, I think its about – this is going to sound bizarre – but not faking it – you can tell talent who are mailing it in everyday, you can tell the talent who – like a TL who are just on top of their game, and you can tell the ones who are mailing it in, and you can tell the ones who are just reading a script and you can tell them ones who are not engaged, its brutally painfully obvious when you turn on the TV set, and I think the people who are most trustworthy or the people the viewers keep coming back to are the ones they perceive who are not only engaging but also knowledgeable on top of it and informative.

Q: Trust violated?

3: Everyone of us – you’re always going to find people who will drop you an email or be angry enough to make a phone call and say ‘you blanket blank so in so, you did not tell both sides of the story, or you only told one side of the story last night or XXX you got it completely wrong or you why didn’t you say this or why didn’t you include this in the story?’ We tend to get that lot – especially in this market, because this market is so highly educated. And we’ve got very sharp viewers and they don’t put up with us not giving it our best every day and they will let us know about it. I’ve always through the best policy, in some circumstances, it’s a lot like relationships you have with your wife or your husband or your bf or gf and I think sometimes you just have to say you’re sorry a lot. So when people always write to kick me in the pants, I always try to respond and my first sentence is “I’m sorry I disappointed you, here’s why I did they way I did or why I reported the why I did last night or tonight’ and if there’s something I left out I apologize to you and I will do my best to get it right next time. Or in a follow-up story tomorrow. And I always try to take an honest look at what I did wrong, what they’re accusing me of messing up and trying to make an honest attempt to respond to them or correct it in the future.

Q: Brian Williams and NBC?

3: You know, trust is our stock and trade and in today’s viral social media climate that blew up overnight and his stock, his trust just imploded literally within a 24-hour period. I think there was, the network I think was appropriate in pulling him out of that situation, I think a lot could be argued about is 6 months too long? I couldn’t help but think if it was more like a week’s suspension or a 2 week suspension, enough to send a message out to the viewers that we take this seriously, I think the message would have gotten through to the viewers and I think it would have gotten through to Mr. Williams as well. There’s just, in more cases, allegedly, were turned up of embellishments in addition to the one where he was in the helicopter with the troops, it’s a tough spot for Brian to be in right now and I think all of us as journalists, it causes all of us to take pause and that we’re only one slip up away from losing credibility and the lesson in all of that is you can spend an entire career trying to establish a brand of credibility and it can all get destroyed in one incident in a matter of hours.

Q: In a situation to return?

3: I think he can. I think he ca. I like to think that the audience ahs already moved on, NBC is very fortunate that they have a stable full of very competent journalists there, god bless Lester Holt, he’s been doing a fabulous job and I’ve always been a huge Lester Holt fan and there half of me that is cheering for Lester because I really admire his work and I admire him as a journalist – I think he’s doing a really great job. It will be interesting to see what happens with Brian – to see if they bring him back.

...

Comcast was trying to, this all happened as Comcast was trying to merge the cable industry and this was a huge embarrassment to the CEO of Comcast and while we may never be able to prove it, but I cant help but think a major reason why he was even a 6 month suspension was because the CEO was absolutely furious tht this brought negative light to NBC/Comcast right in the middle of a multi-billion dollar business venture he was trying to promote. And so I think, my suspension is, my gut tells me that there was a lot of that, internal politics as play.

Q: Social media and role in trust?

3: I think it's critical today. I think any person who is on the air who is not establishing some kind of rapport with their audience on social media – and it's different, and this is something I harp on all the time – there's too many television stations and too many talent who are using social media as just another channel to promote their product. No, that's not what it's about. People want to come to you, they want to follow you on social media because they are giving you a value or something they are not going to be able to get somewhere else. And maybe there's just trying to get insights – my research showed, I talked to viewers about it, they wanted to hear about the stuff that you're going on throughout the day that's not going to get on the air that night. ... That little insight out on the field, people what that little fly on the wall, kind of information. ... Twitter is a very unique type of channel because you can get out little blasts of information that is happening throughout the day. ... That's a real value proposition that you can create with an audience out there, and that you're more than just that guy on the other side of the glass reading you the news. ... So I think social media, it's a new game. And I think we have people here at this company who struggle very much with the whole social media realm right now, and some people are clearly better at it than others and I've kind of found that those people who are really good at it, it's kind of like an extension of their own personality and those who are afraid of it tend to be – dare I say – more introverted and some are just not as used to doing it as some of the more successful people are.

Q: Loyal viewer?

3: I loyal viewer is – seriously – a loyal view is when the stuff hits the fan, they're going to turn to you before they turn to anyone else, that's my definition of a loyalty. They're going to keep coming back to you. Even when there's nothing going on, they're going to turn on to Fox 9 to watch our show, that's a loyal viewer – but especially when the stuff hits the fan, you don't want them going to our competitors. It's a real trust factor, a real honor factor to have them come to us and it's a huge responsibility too because you don't want to let them down. You absolutely do not want to let them down. Some of the most, and I can say professionally disturbing emails I get are the ones that occasionally come in and say "XXX, you blew it tonight, or I just wasn't happy with the way you did that story, or you should have sought that other angle out or why didn't you include this voice, so, and I take those seriously, no one should be exempt from criticism and they keep us on our toes, they really do.