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**FROM FOURTH ESTATE TO “FAKE NEWS”: ENGENDERED SOCIAL NORMS AND  
SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NEWSROOM**

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## ABSTRACT

It is a challenging time for broadcast journalists in the U.S. Television news viewership is at an all-time low and more people are getting their news from non-traditional sources, especially social media. Research indicates trust in the news media is rapidly declining while the popularity of the phrase “fake news” is increasing. The present investigation explores the mechanisms through which journalists are trying to meet these challenges. Qualitative interviews with 20 broadcast journalists in top 10 markets were conducted. A subsequent discourse analysis on the journalists’ Twitter accounts was also conducted. Findings suggest that broadcasters are increasingly using social media platforms to employ self-branding strategies to connect with audiences. However, unique obstacles, including gendered social norms and the “fake news” phenomenon, are impacting journalists’ relationships with audiences. Findings of the discourse analysis show the ways in which these gendered injustices are reified on social media. Previous research shows no gendered differences in the social media strategies of male and female journalists and so this study offers unique theoretical contributions to the current literature. Additionally, media professionals can use the practical implications of this study to better inform their newsroom practices.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“When democracy falters, journalism falters, and when journalism goes awry, democracy goes awry” (Carey, 2007, p. 13). The relationship between democracy and journalism has been discussed since the formation of the United States and the adoption of the First Amendment. Politicians dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century understood the critical role of the press in maintaining a free society, and they took monumental steps to protect and preserve the institution of journalism. In this vein, the press earned the moniker, “the Fourth Estate,” an institution as important to the survival of democracy as the three branches of the government.

Journalism’s first loyalty is to its citizens (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). The role of journalism in a democracy is dependent on its relationship with the people. Journalists have an obligation to gather and disseminate information that will allow the public to make informed decisions about their daily lives (Carey, 2007). It is a journalist’s job to make sure every citizen who walks into a polling place has been given access to the accurate information they need to make the best decisions they can in the voting booth.

Today, however, the institution of journalism is not as well regarded as when its significance was enshrined in the Constitution. Trust in the U.S. news media is at an all-time low (Gallup/Knight Foundation, 2018). A 2018 Gallup poll concluded that of institutions in American society (i.e. the medical system, the church, the police), journalism ranks second to last in public trust (Saad, 2018). A 2017 study conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism asked people why they don’t trust the news media. 45% of participants used the phrase “fake news” in their response (Newman & Fletcher, 2017).

The phrase “fake news” gained nationwide popularity when it was used by U.S. President Donald Trump in early 2017 to insult CNN reporter Jim Acosta (Wendling, 2018). Since then,



the use of the phrase has become increasingly prevalent in American culture insomuch as scholars are referring to today's media climate as the "post-truth era" (Boyd-Barrett, 2019; Carballo & Lopez-Escobar, 2018). Trump continues to publicly attack the mainstream media, using his Twitter page to call journalists "enemies of the people" and "dangerous and sick" (Trump, 2018). Farkas and Shou (2018) concluded that linking critical journalism to "fake news" is Trump's attempt to delegitimize and undermine the credibility of the institution of journalism.

Not surprisingly, along with audience trust, journalists are also losing audience attention. Young people, especially, are disregarding traditional journalistic outlets, like newspapers and television, in favor of digital platforms and social media (Matsa, 2018). Two-thirds of Americans now use social media to get their news; 74% of all Twitter users say they use the platform for newsgathering purposes (Pew Research Center, 2017). The number of broadcast news viewers are at an all-time low, with less than half of all U.S. adults relying on local television news for their main source of information; only 8% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 get their news from broadcast stations (Matsa, 2018). Meanwhile, social media news consumption is continuing to climb, with two-thirds of Americans getting their news from social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017).

This project explores how the changing media landscape is impacting American broadcast journalists. Access to social media has given journalists more opportunities than ever to connect with audiences and disseminate important information. However, the popularity of social media has also prompted unique challenges for traditional journalism. This project investigates how broadcast journalists are negotiating through these new media structures.

## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Like any industry, the broadcast news industry is characterized by distinctive norms and routines that are sometimes difficult for people outside of the industry to understand (Ekdale et. al, 2015). But now, long-standing processes focused around television are interacting with new media technologies, forcing the field to adapt and reshape (Robinson, 2011). This chapter provides background information as to situate the broadcast industry in its current state.

### 2.1 Self-branding and social media

Nine out of ten U.S journalists use social media platforms in their daily work routines, with Twitter being the most popular (Willnat & Weaver, 2018). However, journalists' perceived utility of Twitter differs depending on the career path of the journalist. Shultz and Sheffer (2012) found that television broadcast journalists were more likely to recognize Twitter as a site for self-promotion and self-branding, while newspaper reporters tended to use Twitter mainly to disseminate information. The authors concluded that because broadcast journalists are in the local public spotlight, they place more emphasis on building a personal brand to connect with audiences.

Majó-Vázquez, Cardenal, and González-Bailón (2017) highlighted the growing number of online news sources and the increased fragmentation of online news audiences. They argued that journalists must use self-branding techniques to attract coveted audience attention and earn audience trust, something that their stature as television journalists formerly did for them. In recent times, skepticism and doubt have replaced “the journalist’s romantic image...of performing against the odds in difficult conditions and bringing the story home” (Cole, 1998, p. 62). In her 2017 book, *Personal Branding for Entrepreneurial Journalists and Creative Professionals*, Sara Kelly offered a toolkit for successful self-branding strategies for journalists.

Kelly (2017) advised journalists to emphasize three elements to bolster their personal brand online: skill sets/specialization, flexibility and open-mindedness, and client/customer-centeredness.

Kelly (2017) described skill sets/specialization as the way in which a journalist should emphasize the unique skills or expertise that set them apart from their competition. Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis (2017) found that a majority of journalists use their beat or specific coverage area as a way to set themselves apart on Twitter. They found that this branding technique indicates a level of expertise to news consumers. In an increasingly competitive industry that continues to tighten budgets and resources, “many journalists feel that their jobs, even their industry as a whole, are in jeopardy, and thus may see branding activities as a way to retain and expand their audiences, thereby justifying themselves to bosses increasingly concerned with generating exposure across multiple platforms” (Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2017, p. 12).

Self-branding extends to many aspects of social media use for journalists. For example, Ottovordemgentschenfelde (2017) found that political journalists include their news organization in their Twitter bios or handles to legitimize themselves. This identification with an already established news organization serves as a cue to social media users that this journalist is indeed credible. Ottovordemgentschenfelde (2017) described the crucial importance of social media branding for journalists in an increasingly digital age by arguing, “it could be most appropriate to think of journalists’ Twitter profiles as digital business cards or digital portfolios designed in such a way that differentiate the journalist and establish competitive superiority” (p. 76).

Kelly’s (2017) second self-branding element, flexibility and open-mindedness, is described as showing willingness to adapt to an evolving media landscape. Journalists should be on the cutting-edge of news technology. Vis (2012) found that the most influential journalists

covering the 2011 United Kingdom riots used Twitter to report breaking news, share exclusive photos, and use hashtags to build a public conversation. As audiences turn towards social media for their preferred news source (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017), journalists who can use the latest media technologies available to brand themselves as adaptive and forward-thinking should have an advantage over those who cannot.

Kelly's (2017) final tool for successful self-branding is client/customer-centeredness. Journalists should show that they are eager to connect and engage with their audience. Holton & Lewis (2011) found that humor was a way in which journalists could connect with audiences on a more personal level. They conducted a content analysis of journalists' tweets and found that the most-followed journalists on Twitter use humor to self-brand as approachable, personable, and likeable. Humor was expressed through sharing personal stories and providing commentary on current events. Unlike most print journalists, broadcast journalists gain limited fame and earn local celebrity status through their presence on local television (Meltzer, 2009). Marwick & Boyd (2011) found that celebrities brand themselves as approachable by providing audience members "backstage access" to their personal lives through social media posts. Findings suggested that this perception of openness and intimacy with audiences helped to brand the celebrity as personable, likeable, and relatable.

While there is a small collection of insightful research on journalists' self-branding techniques, most of the current literature approaches the topic from one angle and one methodology. For example, there are works that explore self-branding strategies from the journalists' perspective. These are done by conducting qualitative interviews or surveys with journalists to better understand their self-branding techniques. Another group of research focuses on the social media content itself, uncovering self-branding strategies through a content analysis

of Twitter pages or tweets. However, there is a gap in the literature for research that connects both sides. This study fills that gap in the literature through a mixed-method research project that includes both qualitative interviews with journalists and a discourse analysis of their Twitter pages. Discourse analysis will examine the content of journalist's tweets, and well as ascertain which twitter strategies result in the most audience interactions, such as replies, likes and retweets. Additionally, this dissertation focuses on the way gender norms impact self-branding strategies among journalists.

## **2.2 Gender in the newsroom**

Foundational studies on the role of gender in the broadcast news industry date back to the 1970s. Sanders and Pritchett (1971) mailed out surveys to audience members to gauge their perceptions of local broadcast journalists. Findings indicated that audiences significantly preferred clean-cut white men to deliver the news. Not surprisingly, the stations with the highest ratings employed all-male news teams comprised of clean-cut, well-dressed, and Caucasian broadcast journalists. While female broadcasters have made strides since these foundational studies (Jurkowitz, 2014), more recent research highlights the gendered inequalities still facing female broadcasters today.

Men still dominate the news industry in the U.S. (Women's Media Center, 2017). A 2017 study by the Women's Media Center showed that the majority of news reports across all mediums were produced by men, with the broadcast industry having the highest gender disparity. Additionally, the study showed that male journalists are typically assigned "hard" topics like politics and crime, while female journalists usually report on feature topics like lifestyle and health. The salaries of broadcast journalists are also subject to gender discrimination. According

to a 2017 report by Glassdoor, the media industry holds the number five position for highest pay gap between genders in U.S. labor industries (Chamberlain, 2017).

Despite many efforts to achieve gender equity, recent studies indicate gender inequality still lingers in the newsroom. Howell and Singer (2017) suggested that there is still a gendered etiquette in the broadcast news industry. The researchers conducted a survey of broadcast journalists and found that female broadcasters were less confident in their abilities to appear as experts on their beats because they did not want to appear self-promoting or pushy. These women acknowledged a social etiquette that was expected of them that differed from their male counterparts; male broadcasters were allowed to be aggressive and egotistical, but female broadcasters were supposed to be humble and polite. Consequently, this study found that men were four times as likely as women to appear as an “expert” on the local news (Howell & Singer, 2017).

Audience opinion helps to shape the newsroom and on-air culture of broadcast television news stations. As local news audiences continue to shrink, news managers must accommodate viewers’ wants and needs in any way possible (Tandoc & Thomas, 2014). Unfortunately, gender inequalities tend to play into these strategic plans. A study by Grabe and Samson (2010) found that male audience members enjoyed watching sexualized female broadcasters more than they enjoyed watching non-sexualized female broadcasters or male broadcasters. However, men perceived these sexualized broadcasters as unworthy of reporting on hard news topics like politics and war. They also remembered less news information reported by the sexualized news anchors because they were more focused on visual sex cues than content. There were no significant differences, however, among female audience members when exposed to the same groups of newscasters (Grabe & Samson, 2010).

Finneman and Jenkins (2018) conducted a survey of broadcast journalists and found that social media reinforce the unrealistic beauty expectations placed on female broadcasters. The authors argued that social media allow audiences “to publicly correct gender performance and maintain the status quo” through Twitter interaction and comments (Finneman & Jenkins, 2018, p. 490). Twitter allows audiences to publicly judge female broadcasters’ appearance and even offer unwanted sexual advances. Findings showed that many female journalists take these comments to heart and use them to influence their own personal appearance. The survey also indicated that female broadcasters felt they did not receive the proper support from their news organizations in handling potentially damaging remarks.

These gendered injustices can sometimes escalate into the verbal, sexual, or physical harassment of female broadcasters. While all types of harassment should be taken seriously, there are different threat levels that are possible. Fitzgerald (1990) created a scale outlining five types of sexual threat levels facing women. This scale was created pertaining to a physical environment, but the scale has been adapted for this study to pertain to an online environment. According to the interviews for this study, most of the harassment experienced by female journalists occurred online.

According to Fitzgerald’s (1990) scale, the lowest threat level is gender harassment, including offensive jokes and suggestive comments. The next threat level is seductive behavior, including unwanted commentary on a person’s sex life or an unwanted attempt to begin a sexually-charged conversation. The third threat level is sexual bribery, where a person promises to reward someone if they engage in some kind of sexual behavior. The fourth threat level is sexual coercion, where a person is threatened if they don’t engage in sexual behavior. The

highest and most dangerous threat level, according to Fitzgerald (1990), is sexual imposition, including unwanted physical touching, grabbing, or kissing.

As the above research suggests, gender still plays a critical role in the television newsroom. Female broadcasters face more pressure than male broadcasters to look and act in certain ways. These pressures are reified through the gendered perceptions of audiences. This project intends to examine and understand how the gender of newscasters, and their respective behavioral and physical expectations, play into the self-branding of broadcast journalists.



## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The following section outlines the theoretical framework within the context of this study. Impression management theory is the main guiding theory for this study. Additionally, research exploring the taxonomy of self-presentation and source characteristics provide further background and insight.

### **3.1 Impression management theory**

Impression management theory understands everyday social interactions as part of an elaborate performance. Individuals perform different aspects of their personality at different times, and fluidly move into and out of different social roles. Individuals do this to maintain a socially-acceptable and appropriate image in the community. In short, impression management theory is the art of portraying one's best self (Goffman, 1959).

In a social performance, every individual has their role, and people's perceptions are highly influenced by these social roles (Schlenker, 1980). Each actor and audience member is expected to conform to the requirements of these roles; however, this is not always the case. When these roles are disrupted, or the social rules of the performance are not followed, it is especially critical for the individuals involved to employ impression management strategies to restore balance to the interaction. "We find that performers, audience, and outsiders all utilize techniques for saving the show, whether by avoiding likely disruptions or by correcting for unvoiced ones, or by making it possible for others to do so" (Goffman, 1959, p. 152).

Disruptions in the social performance, otherwise known as predicaments, force the actors to make quick decisions to maintain the cohesiveness of their self-presentation techniques (Schlenker, 1980). According to Schlenker (1980), actors in predicaments will behave in strategic ways to maximize the reduction of negative consequences. These consequences can

have an adverse effect on the actor's relationship with the audience. According to Schlenker (1980), there are ways in which one can remedy a predicament, including: retreat, excuses, and justification. The two that are most relevant to this study are retreat and excuses.

It is difficult for most people to confront a predicament head on and so some people will use retreat tactics as a remedy for tense situations (Schlenker, 1980). Retreat tactics can include physically removing oneself from the situation, such as walking away or averting one's eyes. Retreat can also include mentally removing oneself from the situation. This is done by simply ignoring or refusing to acknowledge the predicament in the first place (Schlenker, 1980).

Making excuses is another remedial tactic that can be used in response to a predicament. Schlenker (1980) argued that excuses lessen the perceived responsibility of the actor, thus also lessening the actor's potential for suffering negative consequences. He also argued that few excuses will remove the actor's blame for the predicament completely, but most common excuses will at least work in downplaying the harmful impacts of the social misstep.

Goffman's (1959) impression management theory is built on the dramaturgical framework of the frontstage and the backstage. The frontstage is where the performance happens and where socially-acceptable interactions occur. "The performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards" (p.67). These standards, however, do not apply to the backstage. The backstage allows for a more "authentic" performance of self. "Here (the backstage) the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character" (p. 70). Unlike traditional media outlets like newspapers and television, social media platforms allow the journalist to perform on the front stage while also giving audiences backstage access (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Journalists can use social media to share both professional and

personal aspects of their lives with audience members in a socially-acceptable way (Brems et. al, 2016).

Impression management theory has guided useful research on self-branding and social media. Mainstream celebrities like A-list actors and rock stars depend on impression management for their survival (Zhou & Whitla, 2013). They have teams of public relations professionals, media consultants, and stylists to make sure their public persona is perfectly crafted and consistent. Celebrities can use social media sties like Twitter to maintain their celebrity status in unique ways. Marwick and Boyd (2011) conducted a content analysis of major celebrity profiles on Twitter. Using impression management theory as a guide, they found that celebrities intensify their (perceived) relationships with fans by giving them “backstage access” into their lives. Celebrities in this study used Twitter to show and tell fans details about their lives that are typically kept private. The perception of backstage access creates a sense of intimacy for the fan, even if the backstage performance is also staged. This self-branding strategy bolstered audience following for the celebrities in this study (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Marwick and Boyd (2011) argued that impression management strategies for major celebrities are similar to those practiced by bloggers, models, and social media influencers. The researchers called these people “micro-celebrities.” Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) performed a content analysis on independent news bloggers with micro-celebrity status. The authors claimed that these blogs had readership that rivaled small mainstream media outlets. Findings showed that the most successful bloggers revealed a substantial amount about their personal lives and daily routines, more so than other bloggers. Using impression management theory as a guide, Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) concluded that by allowing audience members “backstage access” to their lives, the bloggers created more intense and personal

relationships with their audience. Additionally, the authors found that women bloggers tended to self-disclose more to audiences than men. Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) proposed that men were “information seekers” while women were “communicators” (p. 978).

The realm of micro-celebrity also includes niche athletes like tennis players. Lebel and Danylchuck (2012) conducted a content analysis of the Twitter accounts of professional tennis players. They found that the players used a combination of frontstage performance and backstage access to create their personal brand. Findings showed that during frontstage performances, the tennis players took on the roles of: the publicist, the superintendent, the fan aficionado, and the brand manager. In these roles, the tennis players tweeted out information regarding upcoming matches, endorsements, and formal acknowledgements like remembering victims of 9/11. They also had some fan interaction. Lebel and Danylchuck (2012) argued that these roles were “expected” of a celebrity persona. The backstage access, however, was quite different, with the tennis players taking on the roles of: the conversationalist, the sports insider, the super fan, and the behind-the-scenes reporter. In these roles, the tennis players would give personal information about their lives, give exclusive information about tennis matches, and interact with family, close friends, and other athletes. Lebel and Danylchuck (2012) concluded that backstage access made the tennis players seem more “real” and relatable to audiences.

Meltzer (2009) argued that broadcast journalists are micro-celebrities because they gain limited fame from television. As noted above, impression management theory has been successfully used to analyze the self-branding strategies of micro-celebrities like bloggers and niche athletes. Using impression management theory to guide this project on broadcast journalists will allow for a better understanding of the self-branding strategies that are being

used. As micro-celebrities, broadcasters, too, perform their celebrity via frontstage performances and backstage access. This is discussed further in the findings of Chapter 5.

### **3.2 Taxonomy of self-presentation strategies**

Jones and Pittman (1982) built upon Goffman's (1959) impression management theory by developing a fundamental taxonomy of self-presentation strategies. They argued that self-branding strategies are based on one of five motivators. These motivators are: ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification, and supplication.

Ingratiation takes place when a presenter is motivated by the acceptance of others. In other words, a person who is motivated by ingratiation wants to be liked by others. Their self-branding strategies are influenced by other's positive perceptions of them. Many times, the presenter hides their motive of ingratiation to maintain their presentation as sincere and genuine. People who use ingratiation as a self-presentation technique must place themselves in dependent or subordinate roles as to please the perceiver. In this regard, the ingratiator will give compliments or do favors to earn favorability in the eyes of the perceiver.

Intimidation is the opposite of ingratiation. Intimidators use fear and manipulation in their self-presentation strategies. People who use intimidation must be perceived as credible and powerful for their self-presentation strategies to be successful. Unlike the ingratiators, intimidators are in positions of power of one kind or another. Others' positive perceptions of the intimidator, then, are based on fear or guilt rather than genuine feelings of care or respect.

Self-promotion is a branding technique based on perceived respect and competence. These characteristics are more important than likability or attractiveness. Many times, self-promotional techniques are associated with "putting on a show." For example, a TV agent showing up in a custom suit and picking up their potential client in a limousine shows the

prospective client that the TV agent is in fact successful, though this success is based on superficiality. People who practice self-promotion are focused on a few aspects of their brand rather than their entire persona. For example, they want to be perceived as a great athlete or a great businessman, rather than being perceived as great at everything. In order to boost these specific personal attributes, some self-promoters will downplay other attributes in a joking manner. For example, the TV agent may show off his wealth and success to be perceived as a great businessman while joking about how he is a terrible cook.

Like self-promotion, exemplification is also based on respect. However, while the self-promotor wants to be perceived as competent to earn respect, the exemplifier wants to be perceived as morally good and worthy to earn respect. Integrity is key to self-presentation based on exemplification. A successful exemplifier must be perceived as charitable and honest without being self-righteous. Jones and Pittman (1982) used Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Ghandi as examples of successful exemplifiers, as they were perceived as self-sacrificing and morally good without being perceived as having a “holier than thou” attitude.

According to Jones and Pittman (1982), supplication is used as a last resort strategy or perhaps a strategy used by those without the resources to use the other four strategies. Supplication is the exploitation of the presenter’s own weaknesses and dependence. People who use the strategy of supplication hope that their perceivers will act according to social norms and show mercy and pity upon them. In this sense, supplication ensures protection and care, but only through the perceiver’s guilt of adhering to social norms. Supplication is a risky self-presentation strategy and so is only generally used by those with no other options.

Leary et. al (1994) built upon Jones’ and Pittman’s (1982) taxonomy of self-presentation strategies by factoring in the impact of gender. The researchers conducted an experiment to

investigate if gender played a role in the self-presentation strategies of college students. Findings showed that gender did play a significant role in the use of these strategies. Specifically, students placed more thought and effort into their self-presentation strategies when interacting with someone of the opposite sex. Additionally, women primarily used ingratiation when interacting with male students in an attempt to be perceived as more attractive. Male students, however, did not use this technique when interacting with female students. Perception of competence was the least important in female-to-female interaction among any other interaction combination, as women's interactions with each other were based more on interpersonal topics (Leary et. al, 1994).

Research on face-to-face self-presentation strategies provides interesting insight into the complexities of social dynamics, however, there is more recent research mapping Jones' and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy of self-presentation strategies onto online environments. Connolly-Ahern and Broadway (2007) conducted a content analysis of the corporate websites of Fortune 500 companies. Guided by the work of Jones and Pittman (1982), they found that corporate self-presentation strategies consisted mainly of self-promotion and exemplification. That is, companies used their websites to show their clients and potential clients that they were competent and charitable (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007).

While websites are still an important way in which companies and individuals connect with audiences, social media platforms are becoming even more popular. Hong et. al (2012) used Jones and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy as a guide for their study on self-branding on Facebook. Findings of their experiment showed that people want to be perceived as likable at almost any cost. This falls in line with Jones and Pittman's (1982) idea of ingratiation. Ingratiation takes place when a presenter is motivated by the acceptance of others; social media platforms allow for

that acceptance to be public knowledge. Facebook users can “like” a post or comment positive feedback on it to publicly show the self-presenter that they are favorable and accepted. Hong et. al (2012) found that the more likes and comments a Facebook post received, the most favorable other users viewed the profile, and thus the profile’s user.

Social media allow for individuals to build and maintain their own personal online brand. Through text, pictures, and videos, individuals can show off different aspects of their personalities that correspond to the different self-presentation strategies laid out by Jones and Pittman (1982). The source characteristics of the self-presenter influence how the brand is built and how is it perceived by audiences.

### **3.3 Source characteristics**

Source characteristics can serve as important cues in information processing and message reception. Chaiken (1980) found that people were more likely to be persuaded by a message if the source had positive characteristics, regardless of the information being presented. Some news information is controversial in its nature, especially given today’s polarized media climate (Lau et. al, 2017). However, given Chaiken’s (1980) findings, it may be possible for journalists to reach audiences despite this, if they can exhibit characteristics that audiences find positive. In this sense, self-branding is critical in maintaining audience trust and attention, even if the news information does not always match audience opinion.

Authority is a powerful source characteristic for persuasion (Harvey & Hays, 1972). People with perceived authority hold recognized social power. Perloff (2003) argued that we as a society have been socialized to respect and obey authority figures. According to Karlsson (2011), “Journalism is a profession that claims authority in its field and traditionally does a great deal of work within a private or non-public sphere, then delivers the results in public” (p. 280). This



established authority originally led news consumers to trust in and be persuaded by journalists' information.

Raymond (2000) argued that the structure of the live news broadcast perpetuates an authoritative journalistic discourse. Journalists reporting live on the scene demonstrate several levels of authoritative power. Raymond (2000) found that the live conversation between reporter and anchor was a way in which a journalist's authority was maintained. Anchors ask reporters questions about what is happening on the scene. Questioning the reporter signals to the audience that the reporter does in fact know more information than the audience and the anchor. The reporter, in this sense, is the sole provider of exclusive knowledge and holds the authority to share this knowledge with the public (Raymond, 2000). Audiences may be given a visual of the scene through camera work, but the reporter still explains what is going on. This reinforces the notion that the reporter holds knowledge not available to the public.

Online news and social media are changing the role of the authoritative journalist. Journalists are using social media, especially Twitter, to provide the public with live, breaking, and up-to-date information. Usher (2018) suggested that these online breaking news practices serve as ways for journalists to maintain their authority in an ever-changing media landscape. While the internet is an open forum for public discussion, journalists can reinforce their authority by being the first ones to publicly share valuable information online.

Credibility is another important source characteristic for persuasion (Heesacker, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1983). Perloff (2003) argued that credibility is not an inherent characteristic like authority, but instead a quality that must be earned. For example, a journalist may hold authoritative power to deliver information based solely on their unique role as a journalist, but that doesn't mean that journalist is automatically credible (Carr et. al, 2014). Their social

authority may grant them special access to information and a platform upon which to share it, but audiences may still question the integrity of the information. In this regard, it may take years for a journalist to be deemed as credible. According to Perloff (2003), the most important characteristics of a credible person are: trustworthiness, expertise, and goodwill.

Jahng and Littau (2016) argued that social media platforms may influence how audiences make judgements about credibility. That is, audiences may look for different cues from journalists on social media than on other media platforms. The researchers found that journalists who were more interactive on Twitter were perceived as more credible with audiences. Social media are two-way forms of communications, so audiences appreciate journalists who take the time to interact with them. In a traditional news medium, the communication is one-way, and so interactivity is not an important characteristic of credibility like it is online (Jahng & Littau, 2016).

The way in which journalists react to audience comments on social media also has implications for journalistic credibility. Waddell (2017) found that journalists who surveilled and managed user comments on social media were perceived as less credible. When journalists deleted or omitted negative user comments from news stories on Twitter, it reduced their credibility with audience members. Findings showed that Twitter users associated transparency with credibility.

According to Perloff (2003), socially attractive communicators, who are perceived as either likable or physically attractive, are equipped with the tools for successful persuasion. However, social media have complicated the concept of social attractiveness for journalists. Journalists must decide whether to present a professional self, a personable self, or a combination of the two (Sheffer & Schultz, 2010). Some journalists even create two distinct social media

accounts on the same platform: one for professional use and one for personal use (Bossio & Sacco, 2017). However, the ability to skillfully combine the personal and the professional seems to be a key element in self-branding for journalists. Brems et. al (2016) found that journalists who were able to interact with audiences on Twitter, while also providing accurate news information, were the most successful in attracting audiences. Findings showed that journalists who were subtle in their self-branding techniques were viewed as more likable.

Hedman (2017) also found that journalists used a mix of their professional and personal identities to promote their social attractiveness on Twitter. Findings suggested a possible movement towards the ‘de-professionalization of journalism,’ defined by Hedman as when “personal, and even private, attributes are valued more equal to more strictly professional attributes when journalists build their brands and present themselves and their profession to followers and colleagues (Hedman, 2017, p. 15). Bruns (2012) found that audiences were more interested in engaging with individual journalists on Twitter than with the Twitter accounts of news organizations. Through a social network analysis of hashtags, replies, and retweets, the researcher found that individual journalists were able to gain more traction on Twitter than news organizations because network strength was driven by “individual personality, not institutional imprint” (Bruns, 2012, p. 106).

According to Greer and Ferguson (2012), parasocial interaction was an important element of journalists’ success on Twitter. While information-seeking was a major reason why audiences followed journalists on Twitter, the authors argued that social motivations were the priority for audiences when choosing who to follow. Findings suggested that audiences look forward to their favorite journalists’ tweets as if they were getting a note from a friend.

Perceived source characteristics of journalists do impact the perception of the news information they disseminate. This is especially true on social media. Lee (2015) found that if a journalist is viewed in a positive manner by social media users, then their information will also be viewed positively. The same is true for the reverse. In this regard, it is critical for journalists to understand the source characteristics they are displaying through self-branding on social media. If a journalist can use self-branding strategies to convince social media users that they are in fact authoritative, credible, and likeable figures, then their news information is more likely to be consumed, shared, and approved by audience members (Lee, 2015).

The previous literature has provided useful insights into the relationship between impression management, self-branding, and the media. Guided by the theoretical framework outlined above, the parameters for this study were developed and are discussed in the sections ahead.

### **3.4 Study rationale**

This project addresses three main research questions, ordered topically rather than by importance. Each research question's unique contribution to the literature is also included.

Audience share for broadcast news is at an all-time low (Gallup/Knight Foundation, 2018). As audiences move online, broadcast journalists must take advantage of social media platforms to remain relevant (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Because media technologies are constantly changing, new research on its impacts are only just emerging. The declining viewership of broadcast news is a problem that is happening now (Matsa, 2018), and so this study will provide a current and relevant addition to the literature. It will also fill the gap in literature addressing possible future solutions for broadcasters to remain relevant in a digital news landscape. Subsequently, this study asks the follow research question:

*RQ1A: In a changing media landscape, what are broadcast journalists' perceptions of how they are using social media?*

The qualitative interviews conducted during this study investigate broadcast journalists' perceptions of how they are using social media. An additional social media discourse analysis of their Twitter pages gives more insight into the actual self-branding strategies broadcast journalists are using. Subsequently, this study asks the follow research question:

*RQ1B: How are broadcast journalists using social media as part of their overall self-branding strategies?*

Research shows that audiences do pay attention to the source characteristics of journalists on Twitter (Deller, 2011). Gender is arguably the most visible characteristic of any journalist, and has impacts on both newsroom culture and audience perception (Weibel, Wissmath & Groner, 2008). Gendered inequalities are still present in newsroom procedures ranging from story assignment to beauty standards to pay scales (Women's Media Center, 2017; Chamberlain, 2017). Female journalists, especially, are highly aware of these gendered issues and must choose to either play along with them or resist them (North, 2016). This choice may impact their chosen self-branding strategy. While there is previous research on gender and self-branding, there is little specifically focusing on broadcast journalists in top 10 markets. Additionally, there is little research addressing gender in the context of a discourse analysis of social media. Subsequently, the following research question was formulated:

*RQ2: How do the source characteristics of individual broadcasters, including gender, impact their self-branding strategies on social media?*

In 2018 alone, the phrase "fake news" was used over two million times on Twitter (Wendling, 2018). The popularity of the phrase is having major impacts on the state of

journalism in the U.S. today. Van Duyn and Collier (2019) found that elite discourse on “fake news,” specifically, has significant impacts on the general public. Their findings showed that increased exposure to elite discourse about “fake news,” especially when that discourse lacked context, led to overall lower levels of trust in media for the general population (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019). Some would say these elite voices are personified by U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump has labeled the mainstream media “fake news,” and has explicitly told the public that the media are “the enemies of the people” (Trump, 2018). Because the popularity of the phrase “fake news” is a relatively recent phenomenon, literature on its impacts on journalism is still emerging. Additionally, there is little research exploring the impacts of “fake news” directly from a journalist’s perspective. Subsequently, the following research question has been formulated:

*RQ3: How has the increasing popularity of the phrase “fake news” impacted broadcast journalists?*

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was used to address this study's three main research questions. Both qualitative interviews and a discourse analysis of social media were conducted in an effort to efficiently and completely answer the research questions. Qualitative interviews were conducted to discover: the branding strategies used by broadcast journalists, the gendered issues impacting the broadcast industry, and the impacts of the "fake news" stigma on local broadcasters. A discourse analysis was then conducted to explore how audiences engaged with journalists' self-branding strategies on Twitter.

Qualitative methods provide unmatched access into the lives of people that simply cannot be obtained using other methods. Qualitative interviews, specifically, use the power of discovery and curiosity to produce new, innovative, and impactful knowledge. McCracken (1988) argued that "the long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing" (McCracken, 1988, p. 2). The long interview allows the researcher to see the world as others see it and experience it as others do (McCracken, 1988). Qualitative interviews can provide rich, in-depth data that can serve as a catalyst to change people's lives for the better. The methodological details of this study, including recruitment, sampling, protocol, and procedure are described further in this chapter.

### 4.1 Semi-structured interviews

The main source of data for this study was obtained through semi-structured interviews with broadcast journalists. Open-ended questions were asked to better understand why and how broadcast journalists use social media and the impact of social media on the broadcast industry. This study was also interested in gendered inequalities as related to social media use. Qualitative

interviews allowed the participants to tell their own stories using their own voices rather than having someone tell their stories for them (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Qualitative researchers also acknowledge that there is no objective truth and that individual experiences do matter (Lindlof & Taylor 2011).

#### **4.2 Sampling and recruitment**

The sampling protocol for qualitative research methods differs greatly from that of quantitative methods. Qualitative researchers are typically interested in deeper, more detailed findings concerning a specific group (McCracken, 1988). Therefore, their sample sizes tend to be smaller and more targeted than those of quantitative researchers. The nature of qualitative research enables the researcher to select a targeted group of participants without regard for generalization to a wider population (Orcher, 2016). Individuals are hand-picked because they meet certain criteria that will allow them to provide exclusive information related to the study's research questions.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued that it is quite difficult to predetermine the appropriate sample size for a qualitative research project. Unlike quantitative sampling, there is no statistical formula to determine the appropriate sample size in a qualitative project. Thus, qualitative researchers must sample to the point of saturation. Saturation, according to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), is “a critical threshold of interpretive confidence...when we cease to be surprised by what we observe” (p. 129). Repetition is key in achieving saturation.

The exact point of saturation, of course, varies from project to project, but after reviewing the sample sizes of similar research projects, and listening for repetition in participant answers, it was determined that 20 participants was a sufficient saturation point for this particular study.



Purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling requires “expert knowledge of the field” to successfully create a sample that is representative of a cross-section of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). As a former broadcast journalist, I used my knowledge of the field, as well as the expertise of former colleagues still in the industry, to collect the sample. Industry contacts were utilized to recruit broadcast journalists as interview participants. In this sense, snowball sampling is not exclusive from purposive sampling. Warren (2002) noted that while many times the researcher and the participants are complete strangers, it is acceptable for the research to be acquaintances with some of the participants in order to start a successful snowball.

Snowball sampling is an appropriate and accepted technique in gathering participants for qualitative research, especially when the participants need to adhere to certain demographics; these participants act as key informants, providing exclusive information (Warren, 2002). To be included in the sample for this study, participants had to currently work in one of the top 10 Designated Market Areas (DMAs) and be active on social media. A detailed discussion of DMA structure follows.

According to Neilson, a DMA is “a group of counties that form an exclusive geographic area in which the home market television stations hold a dominance of total hours viewed” (Neilson, 2013). DMAs are ranked by total population of the geographic area, and so their rankings tend to change slightly on a yearly basis. According to Neilson, the top 10 DMAs for the 2018-2019 television season are: New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas/Fort Worth, Washington, D.C, Houston, San Francisco, Boston, and Atlanta. Broadcasters from Phoenix were also included in the sample. Phoenix is currently ranked 11<sup>th</sup>, but is the second fastest-growing metro area in the nation and is predicted to break into the top 10 (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2018). Both male and female broadcast journalists were included in the sample, in generally even amounts, to help decipher what role, if any, gender plays in self-branding strategies.

### **4.3 Interview protocol and procedure**

Oral consent was obtained before the start of each interview. Each interview was conducted via telephone and audio recorded, and permission to record the interview was obtained from participants. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The protocol consisted of mainly predetermined questions, but the semi-structured nature of in-depth interviews allowed room for flexibility. While the provided protocol, attached in Appendix A, was followed, impromptu changes were made to the questionnaire as the conversations developed and progressed in different ways.

After the interviews were completed, the audio files were transcribed. The audio files were subsequently destroyed. The transcriptions were stored and will be kept secure in a Penn State Box account with controlled access.

### **4.4 Data analysis of interview data**

Lindlof and Taylor (2011) explained qualitative data analysis in three distinct stages: data management, data reduction, and conceptual development (p. 243). The data analysis process began with a thorough reading of all interview transcriptions. The method of data management involved constructing an analysis table in Excel and saving it to a controlled-access Penn State Box account.

Data reduction involves sifting through large amounts of data, in this case words, and extracting gems. These gems are the interesting or unique quotes that, woven together, construct a theme. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) also described data reduction as prioritizing what themes are

more important than others. Strategic decisions concerning the spectrum of importance of these themes needed to be made. The construction of these themes were guided by my years of experience in the broadcast industry and years of experience conducting qualitative interviews.

As themes emerged and their importance was noted, conceptual development occurred. This involved constantly comparing themes among participants, as well as referring to past literature. Because there is no numerical or statistical data in qualitative interviews, recognition and ranking of themes is critically important as conclusions were drawn upon themes alone.

#### **4.5 Participants**

11 women and nine men were interviewed for this study. All participants currently work in a top 10 DMA as a broadcast journalist and are active on social media. Years of experience ranged from four and a half to 30 and all participants worked in multiple DMAs over the course of their broadcast careers.

#### **4.6 Discourse analysis of social media**

As part of this mixed-methodology project, a discourse analysis of social media networks was also conducted. The analysis of social networks is a multidisciplinary methodology that has its roots in ecology, anthropology, and sociology. According to Prell (2012), its goal is to understand the role of social networks, their complexities, and their interdependencies in societal structures. Understanding how these social networks contribute to societal structures can help researchers understand how they can contribute to societal problems and then hopefully find solutions to these problems (Prell, 2012).

Mukerjee, Majó-Vázquez, & González-Bailón (2018) showed the value of analyzing social media networks in their study focused on improving methodology for audience research. They used a combination of statistical tests and a social network analysis to better understand

audience segmentation in digital news consumption. Samuel-Azran & Hayat (2017) also performed a social media network analysis to better understand digital news consumption and audience segmentation. They conducted a social network analysis on the Twitter followers of the now defunct Al-Jazeera Network. Al-Jazeera Network was one of the first major non-Western television networks to try to build a mainstream U.S. audience. Through analyzing social networks, Samuel-Azran and Hayat (2017) found that the majority of those who followed Al-Jazeera on Twitter did not follow any other mainstream news media outlet. Their findings suggested that the Al-Jazeera Network was only engaging with a niche minority audience and not with mainstream U.S. news consumers, providing insight as to why the network failed in the U.S.

Brummette, DiStaso, Vafeiadis, & Messner (2018) conducted a social media network analysis to better understand the use of the phrase “fake news on Twitter. They found a cluster effect, whereas usage of the phrase “fake news” was grouped by political beliefs, with very few “fake news” tweets having a neutral tone. Findings also showed that the hashtags #Trump and #MAGA (Make American Great Again) were closely associated with use of the phrase “fake news,” in both liberal and conservative clusters. These research projects show the benefits of using a social media network analysis to study digital news engagement, and this current study will add to that field of literature.

For this study, Penn State Library’s Social Feed Manager software was used to collect tweets from all 20 of the broadcasters who participated in the semi-structured interviews. The last 3,500 tweets (or less if there were not 3,500 in total) from each broadcaster were collected, resulting in  $N=63,096$  tweets. All the tweets collected were public, as to abide by Twitter’s privacy policies.

After the tweets were collected using the Social Feed Manager, they were loaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Each tweet had a unique identification number with the following information included: Twitter username, tweet URL, text of the tweet, link to associated media (i.e. photo or video), favorite count, and retweet count. The Excel dataset was kept secure in a Penn State Box account with limited access.

Nvivo software was used to analyze the dataset. Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis software program. A discourse analysis was conducted to comb the dataset for consistent themes and trends. The Nvivo data set was kept secure in a Penn State Box account with limited access.

A discourse analysis of social media networks was conducted as a way to better situate the data collected through the semi-structured interviews. The discourse analysis allowed for a more concrete way to understand how the self-branding strategies of broadcast journalists are carried out and how effective these strategies are with audiences. The results of the discourse analysis are discussed in Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW FINDINGS

This chapter addresses the three main research questions of this study: how broadcast journalists are using social media, how source characteristics of individual journalist's impact social media branding strategies, and how the popularity of the "fake news" slogan is impacting broadcast journalists. To answer these questions, a mixed method approach was used. Both semi-structured interviews and a discourse analysis of social media were conducted. The research protocol was designed to address the research questions directly. Important themes emerged as a result of open coding. The theoretical and practical significance of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 7.

### 5.1 Social media use

Research Question 1A asked, "In a changing media landscape, what are broadcast journalists' perceptions of how they are using social media?" During the 20 semi-structured interviews, three themes emerged related to this question. These themes are identified as: relevance; newsroom rules and metrics; and potential dangers.

#### 5.1.1. *Relevance*

Broadcast journalists are hyper-aware of declining ratings and lowering trust scores among journalists and are embracing social media to remain relevant to audiences. Andy said:

Television news is the old man in the room and they think they're cool. Think of like, once TV news gets a hold of any dance or anything, it's dead...so I would love to get my follower count up [to know that] people care about what I'm saying.

Broadcast journalists recognize that there is still an audience that is interested in news consumption, but they are looking for their news outside of the traditional news mediums.

Digital platforms are overtaking traditional news outlets at a rapid pace. Josh said:

That's where our viewers are at right now. In many ways, what we're doing on social media is the information people are getting. I don't think they have to tune into 4, 5, 6, or 11 [o'clock newscasts] to get their news, especially if it's like a breaking news story.

Broadcast journalists understand that they are situated in a unique moment in time for news distribution and consumption, with social media opening doors and creating more opportunities than ever before. Greg said, "I think the future is social media. I think social media has changed the game for news. I think people by and large tend to consume their news in 140 characters or less." Broadcast journalists realize the power of social media and are working to use these platforms to their advantage now and in the future. Peter said:

Social media is a game changer. It always will be. It allows us to do so much more as journalists, reach so many more people, both with our stories and in order to get stories, that any journalist before us has ever done, that any generation of journalists before us has ever got. History is just changing so quickly and it's really hard to keep up. But I think there's also room for a lot of innovation ...so it's really exciting. And I know that a lot of young journalists are really excited about the potential of where we could go with social media.

Social media has become one of the most, if not the most, important aspect of a broadcast journalist's day-to-day routine. In addition to finding stories, conducting interviews, and writing scripts, broadcasters now must add an extensive social media regime to their daily routines. Due to the mobility of social media platforms, broadcasters are expected to use social media on and off the clock. Nicole said, "I feel like I am on social media all day. I feel like it's turned every journalist into a multimedia journalist." In fact, many broadcast journalists rank their social media use above all other news duties. Tiffany said:

Obviously social media is the biggest thing out there right now. And so it matters for us, especially in the station, to get as many likes and retweets as much as possible and to put that story out there. And so that's number one.

Social media use is so important to the survival of broadcast news that journalists use the platforms constantly. They are always plugged in and connected to their digital identities. Kara said, “Twitter is the first thing I check when I wake up in the morning. It’s wild because it is the first thing you check, not just to find out like the pulse of what's going on, but also to find out official information.” Amy agreed:

I'm one of those people that like social media is first. That's just my method. I mean I think it's like one of the pillars of journalism. Honestly these days like it is a part of my job in every sense of the word, from when I wake up to when I go to sleep at night.

### *5.1.2. Rules and metrics*

Because social media expertise is perceived to be so critical for the survival of the broadcast news industry, many television stations and networks are implementing rules and regulations regarding individual broadcaster’s social media use. Additionally, many top stations are also using metric software to gauge and even rank the social media engagement of each and every broadcaster.

In just the last year or so, newsroom management’s outlook on social media has completely changed. Previously, individual broadcasters had control over their social media accounts, and for the most part, station management stayed out of it. However, now most management teams in top markets are working to control and measure their news team’s social media content. Jim said:



[My station] has a serious guide, a 54-page manual, to news coverage and delivery.

Before we break something really serious on social, we've got to run up the chain and make sure that it's not something that we should be breaking on their big platforms and or on TV.

Scott added:

Social media is the subject of probably half the emails I get from my managers. They spend, they spend an inordinate amount of time focusing on social media and if we're not posting stuff on there we get, we get reminded throughout the day.

Most stations are taking this control one step further and actually ranking broadcasters based on their weekly or even daily social media performance. According to the broadcasters interviewed, this is a very new phenomena, only occurring within the last year or so. Tiffany said:

We're not only looking at like TV ratings now, but we're also looking at social media ratings as well, you know, how did I do compare to the other reporters in the station?

How did Fox do compared to ABC or CBS? It's like checked every single day. We have like a ranking system. So we have kind of like how we did for the month and all reporters are in there.

Broadcasters say that their social media rankings are just as important, or more important, than any other aspect of their job. It is no longer enough to produce a good on-air story for television, now broadcasters are expected to master social media content as well. Liz said:

We have to use social media. You know they look at the engagements, they're looking at, you know, what you're kind of ...how you're ranking, you know, its analytical data that's showing where you are in the charts. So it's part of the job. So you have to do it. You

know, it shows your reach. It shows how many people are following you, it shows, you know, that people are interested in what you're doing.

Some stations have strict and specific rules as to how much broadcasters need to use social media each day. These rules are even specific to each social media platform. Sarah said, “Facebook is like twice today and Twitter is six times a day so there is definitely like a hard rule and it is definitely highly encouraged.”

For some stations, the number of required daily social media posts is in the double digits. Josh said:

We're tracked every day on the amount of engagement. So we have literally, we have people tracking how many times a day we're tweeting. For our station, it is a minimum of 15 tweets a day, a minimum of two Facebook posts a day, and then they want us to use Instagram as a platform, but really to engage viewers in a different way as like, as people, is really the best way to put it.

### *5.1.3. Potential dangers*

Higher audience engagement and connectivity is a positive characteristic of the relationship between social media and broadcast journalists. Social media also allow broadcasters to find and disseminate important information effectively and efficiently. However, there are drawbacks to a social media-centric news industry and almost all of the broadcasters interviewed brought up those negatives during the interviews.

The intense focus on social media recently implemented in the broadcast industry has presented a unique set of challenges for broadcast journalists. All of the broadcasters interviewed acknowledged the dangers of this new highly social media landscape. Greg said, “Not to sound corny but like Spiderman said, with great power comes great responsibility.”

Accountability was a key word continually brought up by the participants in this study. Social media presence can sometimes call for swift action with information being shared at lightning speed. While this allows citizens to be abreast of events as they are happening, it also calls for an increase in information accuracy on the part of journalists. Greg said, “If we can't hold ourselves accountable, how are we supposed to hold government officials that we report on accountable?” Greg continued with an example of a time he saw social media's speed work against journalism. Greg said:

They [the news organization] tweeted out that day that the [Boston Marathon] bomber had been caught, the bomber had been arrested. This was a day or two before anyone was ever arrested so it turned out to be fake. A reporter starts tweeting that, then the network starts retweeting, and other stations are retweeting that and then all of a sudden there's all of this misinformation and we lose our credibility.

Broadcasters are blamed for tweeting out news information too hastily, but they are also blamed for tweeting out the wrong kind of information. Social media accounts allow broadcasters to share various aspects of their lives, not just their journalist personas. Nicole said, “Yeah I think we have to be really cautious about social media. I think that lines often can get blurred between personal and professional.”

Broadcasters are encouraged to use social media to disseminate news, but they are also encouraged to show off their personalities. Some broadcasters, however, use social media to share personal opinions, which, according to the participants in this study, is still taboo in the industry. There is still an industry standard that journalists should remain unbiased, and that includes in their social media feeds. Kara said:

I don't think people necessarily intend to do it, but they post a little bit of opinion because I think you're kind of pressured to have a personality on social media. But then to balance that with being kind of strictly unbiased and kind of just reporting the facts, people start posting kind of how they feel about something ,and I feel like that can get people in a tricky position.

Some television stations have morality clauses included in their broadcasters' contracts. These clauses state that the broadcaster is a representative of the station at all times, even if they are not at work, and so should act appropriately. This sentiment is now also extending to actions on social media. Brian said:

The other problem is you see a lot of journalists inserting their opinions in social media because they feel like technically or legally it's a personal page, but you don't stop being a journalist just because it's your personal page. You're still a representation of your news organization.

Social media mishaps have even cost some very successful broadcasters their jobs. Erica said, "The last company that I worked for...had to let someone go because of things they had just said on their own personal social media. So it's definitely something that can be used against journalists."

While broadcasters can create their own social media troubles by tweeting out the wrong kinds of information, audience members can also create problems for broadcasters using social media. Social media give audience members unprecedented access to journalists, and sometimes this access can do more harm than good. Andy said:

I don't like the fact that social media has basically created a real time version of your kitchen window being open and everyone being allowed to scream into it. You know,

social media has created a place for all of these really dangerous people to get together and gang up and all this other stuff.

Peter told the story of a misunderstanding he had with audience members on social media. He tweeted out a quote that was said by someone he interviewed, however, the audience members thought it was his direct quote. Audience members got angry and used social media to harass Peter. Peter said, “Everyone was like fuck this guy you’re a piece of shit. Just obliterating me, you know, and I was like no that was a quote, that was a quote!”

Despite its drawbacks, social media platforms are powerful tools that can aid in the success of broadcast journalists. Broadcasters can use social media to promote their stories, their stations, and especially themselves. Self-promotional strategies on social media are becoming more and more important for broadcasters in their efforts to advance their careers.

## **5.2 Individual characteristics and social media strategies**

Research question 2 asked, “How do the source characteristics of individual broadcasters, including gender, impact their self-branding strategies on social media?” Three themes emerged that provided insight into this phenomenon. These themes are: awareness, audience perceptions, and engendered performances.

### *5.2.1 Awareness*

Broadcast journalists are hyper-aware of the source characteristics they employ on social media and critically think about how to best use those source characteristics to enhance their self-branding strategies. Self-branding techniques have become a priority for journalists using social media to advance their careers. Scott said:

I think my bosses see it [social media] more as a vehicle to push our personal brand. Um, so I, I've tried to use social media to, you know, kind of brand myself as you know, a

niche political authority, but I think our bosses would really like us to connect with people on more of a personality level.

Broadcasters consult with their bosses about their self-branding strategies, but most also think about self-branding outside of the influence of their news organization. Broadcasters understand that being able to build a strong personal brand using their own source characteristics can help to propel their careers. Amy said:

I think branding it's just like, it's something I think about a lot. So right now the image that I try to project is professionalism, trustworthiness, and youthfulness. I think there's a really big emphasis right now on connecting with the younger audience because those are the people that are not watching, but are online...and that's a big part of my restructuring of my brand. Like I'm really trying to figure out how to connect with people my age, my gender, my interests, without alienating anyone.

Allen said:

Your social media can become a place where you can sort of exploit that and really solidly brand yourself as a certain type of personality reporter, anchor, newsman, et cetera, and that's where I think the balance of the charity events that I do, what I posted about, or the clips that I posted from that, all of that begins to create my brand that will exist long after I've left [my station.]

As discussed in the previous literature, source characteristics are important factors in self-branding strategies. The source characteristics previously discussed included: authority, credibility, and social likability. It was surprising to find that most journalists were more concerned with their social likability traits than being perceived as authoritative or credible. Broadcasters believed that successful self-branding included a mix of professional and personal

aspects of themselves, with the personal aspects holding higher priority. Josh said, “I just want to be relatable to our viewers over here. A dad, having a family, a husband, a journalist...probably in that order.” Mark said, “I want people to see me as someone who can laugh, make a joke, but also report on news that matters, and handle high profile stories.” Sarah said, “So the three words that come instantly to mind would be friendly, authoritative, and likable.”

Being community-oriented was another source characteristic that many journalists incorporated into their personal brands. Because the broadcasters all work in local news, they find it important to be perceived as someone who not only reports on the community, but lives in it. Carolyn said:

So I think that one of the words that I would like to say to describe me would be engaged. Like engaged in the community. I use my Instagram, Twitter, I use it to just show people that like ‘Hey I’m not from Massachusetts, but I’m really enjoying you know everything that your state has to offer and this is really cool.’

Journalists use social media to show they are involved in their communities, but they also use social media to engage with community members directly. Journalists use social media to interact with their audience members online, just as they would interact with neighbors or friends in a coffee shop. Jessica said, “It’s not serious all the time and they see me as their next door neighbor and they want to show me their pictures and tell me about their day. I enjoy it because that’s kind of why we’re in the business.”

Nicole added:

I’m always looking for opportunities to like start a conversation or just comment on things that everybody can relate to. And I mean for me that’s one of the things that I think

I have...like one of my strengths as a journalist is that I am approachable and relatable so I try to convey that.

Authenticity was the most important source characteristic for all of the journalists in their self-branding strategies. Journalists found it critically important to be perceived as “real” to their audiences in order to maintain a good rapport with them. Andy said:

I want the audience to know that the same guy you see on TV is the same guy you’ll see out at the bar, I’ve always said that throughout my whole career. I hate when I meet somebody else in this business who is like a caricature of what they think a news reporter should be. You know, like I’ve met plenty of people like that. So I’ve, I’ve always tried to avoid that.

Liz said she spends a lot of time working on her personal brand. She said she’s gotten opportunities outside of news because she’s developed a strong personal connection with many members of the community. Liz said:

You try to form your brand and show a little more of your personality, show that you're a real person that people can know, you know, outside of the news stories that you show. I try to be motivating, compassionate, and adventurous. So I make sure I’m kind of like not posting like outside my brand.

Journalists acknowledge that it takes time to build the confidence to be your authentic self online. Allen said, “I’m not putting on a show. I’m just trying to just be me being me. And over time I moved closer to being more of who I am.”

### *5.2.2 Audience perceptions*

The source characteristics of each individual broadcast journalist had impacts on their interactions with audience members via social media. Gender was found to be the most



influential source characteristic. Audience interactions were fairly consistent among male journalists and among female journalists, but audience interactions comparing the two genders differed greatly.

Male broadcasters said their audience interaction on social media was fairly minimal.

When they did interact with audiences, it was positive or neutral. Greg said:

I don't really have like too many interactions. Nothing other than like 'Hey how are you? Fine. How are you?' 'Oh the weather like it's going to be cold.' You know it's not terribly exciting. On Facebook I definitely get a lot more out of it like 'Hey can you explain this or why did you say this when I heard this on another station?' 'What is this?' And I try to I try to sort out all the facts for people as fast as I can.

Male broadcasters do acknowledge the importance of audience interaction to maintain their relatable brand, but they said their interactions are few in number. Allen said:

I think we've all found that just to endear yourself to people beyond being a source of information that you have to strike a balance between sharing personal information or work situations about yourself. Um, so that they identify with you as a person. But that's an interesting balance in terms of interacting with audiences.

Still, most interactions male journalists are having with audiences are directly related to news. Josh said:

People interact, interact, with you about 'How do you know this?' 'How did the police uncover it?' Yada yada, yada. So interacting with them about the facts of the story or for severe weather or breaking news, uh, they're wanting to know what's going on.

Male broadcasters' interactions with audiences on social media were fairly tame and

neutral, with most of the conversations centered on news. However, this was certainly not the case for female broadcasters. Frankly, most female broadcasters' interactions with audiences were alarming. Amy said, "I mean my inbox and my messages are flooded with weirdos."

Female broadcasters said they are more vulnerable to negative audience interactions on social media than their male counterparts. Most of these interactions have nothing to do with the news, but rather focus on the physical appearance or sexuality of the broadcaster. All of these interactions are unprompted and unwelcome. Kara said:

Something tells me that guys don't get them as often as girls do, just from my conversations. So I do think women...I think women get asked on dates, I think women get you know, get criticized. I think women are much more vulnerable to a whole range of comments when they post something, regardless of how benign what their posting is.

Female broadcasters routinely receive public commentary on how they look or dress, and for most female broadcasters, it is a frustrating part of their job. Nicole said:

I'll get messages all the time just people commenting on my appearance whether it's good or bad. I know that our appearance is a part of what we do as a broadcaster, but it's definitely not the most important part of what I do.

Erica added:

Sometimes the comments on a story won't be like, 'Oh, that was a great story, oh, like great interview' or anything like that. It'll be like 'Oh, like you look so pretty today, or oh that's such a lovely dress or lovely color' and you know. Um, and certainly there's people who want to bash your image or don't like what you're wearing and you're just, as a woman, you're constantly just reminded about how you look.

Some of these commentaries can last for weeks, even though the female broadcasters never respond. Victoria said:

I had this guy, he started following me probably like three weeks ago, and like almost every other day, both on Facebook and Twitter, he comments that he liked an outfit that I wore like three weeks ago. I haven't worn it since and he's constantly posting. 'I really like that red shirt with the leather skirt' like every other day. I'm like, 'Okay, do you think this guy likes that outfit?' You know, like those are the types of comments.

Not responding or even blocking certain social media users is a common strategy for female broadcasters to reduce unwanted audience interaction. Jessica said, "I turned comments and messages off. I just don't like... I sit here and instead of people trying to send me hateful messages or anything terrible, I can cut it off and we won't even have to go there.

Victoria said:

I guess I've never responded to him because I don't want to like encourage him. Some people I'll respond to if it's a legitimate question or comment and if women write to me, I always write back to them because I want to encourage them to keep writing.

Some of these negative interactions online have even transitioned into the physical world. Some of the female broadcasters interviewed said they have had their safety threatened after social media interactions with male audience members went awry. Kara said, "I mean I had to get the cops involved a couple of times. I mean that's really weird."

Sarah said she is constantly concerned that her negative social media interactions will become dangerous for her. She always takes precautions when posting online. Sarah said:

One piece of advice that someone gave me was to always post where you were and not where you are. That way, you can avoid people trying to come up to you or you just don't know what people's intentions are sometimes.

Based on these 20 interviews, differences in audience interactions on social media fell strictly along gender lines, with all of the females interviewed acknowledging these negative interactions. None of the male broadcasters interviewed admitted to having these issues. Additionally, the audience members who were posting these negative comments were mostly male. There were no instances of women posting dangerous or unwanted messages to either female or male broadcasters. These audience interactions directly influence the self-branding strategies of female broadcasters, with women considering these interactions when posting online.

### *5.2.3 Engendered performances*

Audience interaction on social media differed greatly between male and female broadcasters, with female broadcasters reporting more instances of negative and even dangerous interactions. These interactions influence the self-branding strategies of female broadcasters in ways that don't translate to male broadcasters.

All of the female broadcasters interviewed for this study work in top markets, indicating they have already had a certain amount of success in the industry. They use their previous experiences and expert knowledge to anticipate the kind of audience interaction they will have. Female broadcasters consciously post, and refrain from posting, certain things on social media due to this anticipation. They make avoiding negative interactions a priority. Carolyn said:

I notice that it's like 75 percent men, 25 percent women that follow me. And the men are kind of gross, right? I mean let's be real. If I am on a vacation that's like a beach or

whatever I like I wouldn't necessarily post me in a bikini because like you know, I do know who my audience is. I don't want them to think that I am whatever.

Sarah added:

Unfortunately, I would say at least once a week maybe even more than that, there are comments that have nothing to do with my skill, what I was saying, it was strictly about how I looked or how I talked, so that definitely influences some of the things that I post. I watch out about certain pictures. It definitely is unfortunate but it's always in the back of your mind it's like who's going to be a creep today?

Tiffany said she wants her audience to view her as more than just a pretty face. She said she worked really hard to get where she is in the industry and does not want negative audience commentary to affect her reputation. Tiffany said:

I don't want people to look at me, look at me as like a, like a, I guess like a piece of meat really. I try to stay away from like anything, like if I'm out in the beach, I'm not going to really post like a bathing suit picture or anything like that just because I know what kind of comments I will be getting, you know, I tried to stay away from certain types of posts that will get that kind of attention.

While some female broadcasters fine tune what they decide to post, others limit or refrain from posting at all in an effort to squelch possible negative audience interactions. Kara said:

The one reason I don't put much on Facebook is because if I do, regardless of what it is, I will get people commenting on how I look. Like it could be a post about the World Series, like the Red Sox won, yay...it'll be oh anything from 'When are you coming back to [my previous market]? To 'Look at that smile.'

Amy said:

I deliberately try not to interact with my audience too much, which is like not what you're supposed to do. But I feel like if I engage too much with audience members who are mostly male and you know older maybe, I'll, just spur a conversation, and so I really try not to engage in that.

While all of the women interviewed acknowledged the gendered challenges in today's digital news world, one male broadcaster was quick to bring up that point as well. Allen is a 25-year news veteran and has witnessed the gendered disparities first hand. Allen said:

If you [a female broadcaster] haven't landed the big job that's going to define your career by the time you're 40, then it's not going to happen. It's completely different for men. Like people tell me as I near 50, 'Oh, you're just getting started. You could still, you can still end up back in New York as a main guy.'

It is clear that men and women face different challenges in the news industry, especially regarding social media and self-branding. Newsroom culture is still male-dominated and male audience members are more vocal towards female broadcasters in their public interactions. However, some challenges impact all broadcasters regardless of gender. In today's culture, "fake news" is an extremely popular buzzword that is impacting broadcasters of both genders.

### **5.3 The impact of "fake news"**

Research question 3 asked, "How has the increasing popularity of the phrase 'fake news' impacted broadcast journalists? Two major themes emerged related to this question. These themes are: "fake news" is a popular, but non-impactful buzzword for people who disagree with news information; and there is a local/national divide on the impacts of "fake news."

#### *5.3.1 Buzzword*

The phrase “fake news” has two main meanings in today’s U.S. culture (Tandoc, Lim, Ling, 2018). First, it is used point out demonstrably false information, especially false information online. Many websites are publishing incorrect information to push personal agendas or just as click bait to drive engagement. In this sense, “fake news” is exactly as it says: false information. For example, gossip websites may post a false headline about the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge getting a divorce to entice audiences to go on their site. Click bait can be defined as “a hook that, unlike the informative headline, calls upon the reader’s curiosity, whether appealing to humor, emotion or the classic bait like sex” (Palau-Sampio, 2015).

The other social meaning of “fake news” stems from usage associated with U.S. President Donald Trump. Trump used the phrase in the early weeks of his presidency to stigmatize news information that he did not personally agreed with, even though the information came from reputable mainstream media outlets (Wendling, 2018). The broadcast journalists interviewed for this study, regardless of gender, age, or market, all associated the “fake news” phrase with President Trump. Tiffany said:

When I hear “fake news,” obviously I think of Trump. I'm not gonna lie, he's the one that kinda just kind of like spurred all of that up and it's obviously disappointing because we, we, we put out the, you know, so I'll speak for my station, like we work hard to, to put the facts out there and being that obviously, Trump kinda like spurt all that up.

Many journalists view the “fake news” label as a direct attack and as a way for Trump to delegitimize the news industry. Peter said, “It’s a reflection of the deteriorating relationship between President Trump and the news media, he uses that to insult journalists.”

Kara added:

I mean our president coined the phrase [sic]. So it's trickled down to everyone who is a journalist reporting on you know literally something that's going on. There's nothing fake about it snowing outside and you're talking about snow affecting a city or town or whatever. So someone is yelling "fake news" and you're like "No well it's snowing so it's not really fake." I would say that's the effect that I've seen.

Some broadcast journalists thought Trump's "fake news" label has encouraged people to demonize the media. They said having the most powerful man in the world attack journalism has opened the flood gates for others to do so as well. For example, a "campaign of abuse" targeting Georgetown professor Rosa Brooks was ignited online after she wrote that military members could disobey Trump's commands (Berdshidky, 2018). According to Buckels, Trapnell, and Paulhus (2014), the people who attack others online for no apparent purpose are called trolls. "Trolls operate as agents of chaos on the Internet, exploiting hot-button issues" (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014, p. 97). Brooke has seen the impact of trolls first hand and said:

I think that the current political climate has unfortunately also impacted how we do our jobs, because it's like you can't win, no matter what you say. I have, and I think unfortunately, you know, the elected leader of our country has given these people (trolls) more of a voice.

The increasing animosity towards journalists is a new trend and poses a challenge to journalists that they have never had to face before. Amy said, "So that is something that I really have never experienced until this climate...until this presidency. And I think that's kind of where a lot of the hate is stemming from and that's where I see a lot of misconceptions. Hopefully this like negative, like dark cloud over journalism doesn't settle because that could get in the way of your expansion and our connectivity with viewers."



Victoria said:

When I hear “fake news” it makes me really worried for our country and our society because I think it's a very scary time when people stop trusting the media because, you know, we're kind of the truth seekers. And if people stopped believing the truth, then that's a very scary thing to me.

While all of the broadcasters acknowledged the negative connotation of the “fake news” label, most said that the phrase is nothing more than that...a phrase. Most journalists said that the phrase “fake news” is just a buzzword for people who don't like something they hear on the news and it hasn't had a major impact on their careers, at least at the local level. Nicole said, “I don't know that it's had a huge impact on my career. Certainly people have shouted ‘fake news!’ at me. I don't think that affects how I do my job.”

Most of the journalists recalled at least one time where they were called “fake news,” but in most cases, they said it was just a joke or a minor inconvenience. Josh said:

It was Election Day and we were at a grocery store to pick up stuff for lunch and the guy just yelling “fake news!” to us while we're out there just hanging out. And that's the worst that I've got to be honest with you.

Tiffany said:

Because it's like now you have people, just anybody, even kids, like people in college, like we're doing a college story at [the local university], like kids, they want to like be on your live shot and yell out “fake news.”

Most of the journalists said they believe people yell “fake news” to express disagreement, not necessarily to express distrust: it's a trendy way for people to show they disagree. Erica said, “Someone will say that it's ‘fake news’ because they don't like what's being reported or they

didn't get their complete side regardless if you know the story is 100 percent factual.” Scott said, “I don't take it really personally when people throw around that ‘fake news’ catchphrase. And to me that's all it is, man. It's just a catchphrase.”

Andy said:

I think people use it just to use it because they think it's cool. So here's the thing, I don't have a lot of patience. I have no patience for that. “Fake news” is not funny anymore. It was funny for a second like with people with bullshit buzzwords like a ‘fiscal cliff.’

People just use these buzzwords and they don't know what they're saying.

### *5.3.2 Local/national divide*

All of the broadcasters interviewed for this project work in top 10 markets, but are still considered local journalists. They serve their local communities, though most work in very large cities. While the local broadcasters said that the “fake news” label has little impact on their own careers, they do acknowledge that the phrase has had negative impacts on national and network news organizations.

The participants said the gap between local news organizations and national news networks is growing. According to the broadcasters in this study, local news organizations are committed to serving their local communities with accurate and fair news information. Local journalists are tasked with providing the public information they need to make important decisions about their lives and their communities. On the other hand, national news networks do not serve one specific community, but serve the entire nation. In this vein, the participants felt that national reporters are held less accountable than local journalists and so sometimes do not feel the need to be as accurate or credible. Brian said, “You know so we're very conscious of

those things because while MSNBC is preaching to the left and Fox is preaching to the right, we have to get both halves there, otherwise we're going to be out of business.”

Tiffany added:

Let's just say if Trump says something, we're not just going to go out there and say [our opinions on it], we're not a lot of commentators, a lot of the hosts and Fox News, they're very known to kind of give their opinion and we don't really do that.

Local broadcast journalists take their accountability to their local communities very seriously. Because they are actively engaged in their communities, they feel it is harder for them to disseminate false information without getting called out on it. In that sense, they feel that while the national media can get away with producing biased/opinionated information or “fake news,” and ironically even indicate that they believe the label themselves when it comes to national news organizations, local news cannot.

Liz said:

I feel like local news is a lot more focused on local stories in communities whereas national news is kind of a cycle of political news. So people [watching national news] think that there is an agenda that some things are made up, whereas if you're watching local stations like we're still community-driven.

Greg said:

I think there is somewhat of an understanding that the local people, the local media, the local reporters, are the ones that are in your community, or your town, or your city, all day, at your commissioner's meetings... I think there is a trust built in with that.

Local broadcast journalists get to know the people in their communities and have intimate relationships with them. If a national news correspondent produces false or biased

information about someone, it may be difficult for that person to comment. However, if a local journalist produces false information about someone, that person lives in the same community so the local journalists are more accessible. Jim said:

Locally, we really don't have the benefit of coloring or changing up the details of a story because I guarantee you the captain of police for whatever district I'm reporting on or the district attorney for the county is going to call me up and say "What the fuck?! That's totally wrong and we're not doing business with you anymore." So there is a critical incentive that you don't become "fake news."

Because of this accountability to audiences, local broadcasters feel like they put more time and effort into stories to get the facts straight, whereas sometimes national news outlets take the easy way out. Erica said:

I think sometimes national news tries to put so much information into one story that maybe you know, they're, they're just not right. Like the fires [in California], for example, right now happening, you know, the national media is putting, trying to lump two completely different fires together into one story where we cover each fire separately because it affects different parts of our viewing area.

Allen discussed a new effort in his market to make news reporters more accountable. His station started a new show geared towards showing audience members first-hand how the information is gathered, who is interviewed, and how the story is put together. Allen said:

So they go, they sort of take a "fake news" story or they take something that's perceived as reality when it's really not or something that's easily construed as fake or that can't be true. We go out and verify for them to know this is really true. We've taken someone

down to the [U.S/Mexico] border and we've showed that, you know, where these, where these border crossings are, and why they're so hard to maintain.

As discussed previously, local broadcast journalists try to brand themselves as relatable and community-oriented. They try to connect with their audiences on personal levels, so it makes sense that they would feel more accountable for their news stories than national media figures. Audiences for local news are already at an all-time low, so it is more important now than ever for local journalists to fight against the “fake news” stigma.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FINDINGS

Research Question 1B asked, “How are broadcast journalists using social media as part of their overall self-branding strategies?” A discourse analysis was conducted on the public Twitter accounts of the 20 broadcasters who participated in the semi-structured interviews. The maximum number of tweets, as allowed by the Social Feed Manager software, was collected, resulting in a total of  $N=63,096$ . The analysis was specifically interested in exploring audience reaction to the self-branding strategies of the journalists. Audience engagement was measured by analyzing journalists’ “most favorited” and “most retweeted” tweets as well as audience commentary. 20 of the best performing and worst performing tweets in each of the two categories were analyzed, resulting in a discourse analysis of  $N=800$  tweets, along with their associated responses and attributes.

A “favorite” on Twitter is similar to a “like” on Facebook. A user “favorites” a tweet by clicking on the heart icon below the tweet. The journalist receives notification of the “favorite,” and the site displays the number of likes, but the action is not reflected on the audience member’s Twitter page. A “retweet” happens when a Twitter user shares a journalist’s tweet on his or her own Twitter feed. The action is public and the retweet of a journalist’s tweet will appear on the user’s Twitter page. The tweet can either be retweeted as it is or can be accompanied by a comment from the retweeter. The journalist and the public can see how many times tweets have been favorited and retweeted.

The data obtained through the semi-structured interviews with journalists revealed their ideal self-branding strategies on Twitter. Journalists said they want to be perceived as authentic, credible, and professional members of the community. They also want to use their Twitter accounts to spark conversations with audience members and give audiences direct access to them

via questions and comments. Therefore, according to the journalists' interviews, an ideal tweet would be one that 1) shares information about 2) an important newsworthy event that 3) has impacts on the community, while at the same time 4) igniting constructive audience engagement through interactive questions and comments about the story, allowing the journalist to 5) serve as an expert source of information.

Data from the semi-structured interviews also revealed the impact of gender on the self-branding strategies of broadcast journalists. Both male and female journalists said they wanted to use Twitter to engage with news consumers; however, the gender of the journalists impacted the type of engagement. Male journalists said their audience feedback mostly consisted of comments about the news story or questions directed at the journalist pertaining to the news story. Female journalists, however, said most of their audience interaction was not focused on the news story, but rather on the journalist herself. Many audience comments pertained to the physical appearance of the female broadcaster and even included unwanted sexual advances.

Using the journalists' interview responses and the previous literature as a guide, a focal coding schema was created for the social media discourse analysis. The coding schema is detailed in Table 1. Audience comments were open-coded to uncover patterns in the kinds of responses each type of tweet elicited. Fitzgerald's (1990) scale was also used as a guide to gauge the potential threat levels of audience commentary, especially as related to female journalists.

<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Gender of journalist	Male/Female
Media type	Video/Photo/ Text
Tweet subject	Self/Other person/Object
Type of news	Hard/Soft
Self-branding strategy	Credibility/Authority/Social Likeability

*Table 1: Discourse Analysis Coding Schema*

### **6.1. Characteristics of most retweeted tweets**

The most retweeted tweets and the least retweeted tweets from each of the 20 broadcast journalists were analyzed according to the focal coding schema. Regardless of the gender of the journalist, the most retweeted tweets contained either a video or a photo. This is consistent with the recent findings of Bonsón, Perea & Bednárová (2019). The researchers conducted a content analysis of local governmental organizations' Twitter pages and found that tweets with photos or videos elicited the highest citizen engagement (Bonsón, Perea & Bednárová, 2019).

Tweets sharing news stories about others or objects were the most retweeted among broadcast journalists regardless of gender. Tweets about the journalists themselves were not highly retweeted. It's beneficial to connect this finding back to Jones' and Pittman's (1982) taxonomy of self-presentation. Audience members, too, practice self-branding strategies on social media, and the types of tweets they retweet explicate the tactics through which they do so.

The most retweeted topics were: breaking news, mugshots, and charitable news. Audiences retweet breaking news stories in order to be perceived as competent themselves. Perceived competence is a major factor in Jones' and Pittman's (1982) definition of self-promotion. Many times, self-promoters use shallow means to show their competence. A simple



retweet takes no real effort or knowledge, but signifies that the Twitter user is aware of current events and important news, even if they aren't really that invested. It's a surface-level way of showing competence in knowledge of worldly events.

Retweeting mugshots and charitable news is a signifier of exemplification. Twitter users retweet criminal mugshots to publicly shame people while promoting their own virtues. They are making a public display of their disgust with these criminals in order to boost their own perceived righteousness. Retweeting charitable news also adds to exemplification strategies. Some of the most retweeted journalists' posts were about a missing child or lost pet or asking people to donate to a good cause. By publicly sharing this information, the Twitter user is perceived as someone who cares about others. Users retweet these posts to show they are compassionate and giving.

The gender of the journalist did impact the types of news stories that were among the most retweeted. The most successful tweets by male journalists were about "hard" news topics like crime, politics, and extreme weather. One of the most successful male tweets was "Sorority sex scandal: The university employee at the center of a FBI investigation has resigned" and included a mugshot of the alleged perpetrator. Another top male tweet was "Cocaine, crack, and an AR-15 found in the home of a preschool teacher, who police say was running a big time drug operation" and included mugshots of the alleged criminals. An additional successful male tweet said "#BREAKING [criminal] pleads GUILTY to misdemeanor charges related to false rape case on first day of jury selection. Will spend 1 year in prison plus probation" with a photo of the criminal in court.

In these three examples, and across the most retweeted male tweets in general, the male journalists used the self-branding strategies of credibility and authority (Jones & Pittman, 1982).

The male journalists displayed credibility by including a photo or video of the hard news story. This visualization gives audiences another reason to believe that the story is indeed true. The mugshots show audiences that police have made arrests in the cases. These visualizations make it difficult for audiences to doubt the credibility of the journalist and of the news information.

Male journalists also formulated these tweets to show their authority. All of the information and photos in these tweets were exclusive information that is not openly available to the public. While each state has its own laws on public information, police reports and mugshots are typically not easily accessible to the general public. Journalists, however, have the expert knowledge and professional designation to gain access to this type of content. In this regard, sharing mugshots and information found in police reports reifies the authority of the male journalist.

Conversely, the most retweeted tweets by female journalists focused on “soft” news topics like charity, lifestyle, and feel-good stories. One of the most successful female tweets was “The unveiling of Selena's star!” and included a video showing the unveiling of a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for deceased pop star Selina Quintanilla. Another successful female tweet was “Teddy is high-fiving the players as they make their way onto the court” and included a video of a little boy giving high-fives to an NBA team as they entered the game. An additional top female tweet simply said “This” with a heart eyes emoji. It included a photo of a pregnant NFL fan naming her son after the team’s quarterback. In these three examples, and most of the other most retweeted female tweets, the female journalists used the self-branding strategy of social likability (Jones & Pittman, 1982). These tweets showed audiences that the female journalists care about people in their community.

The least retweeted, or worst performing tweets, by both genders were ones that included hyperlinks. These included: hyperlinks to the news station's main page, hyperlinks to other Twitter accounts, or hyperlinks to the journalists' other social media accounts, like Instagram or Facebook. Interestingly, the content of the worst performing tweets varied across the board. The type of media, not the content, was the most significant factor in determining the least retweeted tweets.

## **6.2 Characteristics of most favorited tweets**

The most favorited tweets and the least favorited tweets from each of the 20 broadcast journalists were also analyzed according to the focal coding schema. Regardless of the gender of the journalist, the most favorited tweets contained either a video or a photo. Again, this is consistent with previous findings that highlight the success of multimedia vs. text-only tweets (Bonsón, Perea & Bednárová, 2019). While the most retweeted tweets across all journalists tended to focus on other people or objects, gender impacted this coding category for the most favorited tweets.

For male journalists, the most favorited tweets were about other people or objects. These tweets, once again, focused on hard news topics. One of the most favorited male tweets was “BREAKING: [rapper] sentenced to 2-4 years in state prison for probation violations” and included a video of the rapper walking out of court. Another successful male tweet was “HAPPENING NOW: [governor] is voting right now. Heavy crowd here in spite of pouring rain” and included a video of the governor at a polling place. Another popular male tweet was “Awakened by what has to be a sizable #earthquake. 15th floor of high rise building in [city] shaking for 10 seconds.”

For female journalists, however, the most favorited tweets were about the journalist herself. One of the most favorited female tweets was “It rips at your heartstrings, reminds us we're all in the thing called #life together and we can ALL be friends. Only the best for this show. I give [the play] #FiveStars” and included a photo of the female journalist and her boyfriend at a professional stage show. Another popular female tweet was “Ringing in the #NewYear engaged! Couldn't be happier to be marrying my best friend” with a photo of the female journalist, her engagement ring, and her new fiancé. Another most favorited female tweet was “[football team] takes the win! So happy I was able to come out to enjoy the game with family!” and included a video of the female broadcaster at a football game.

The least favorited, or worst performing, tweets from both genders were tweets that contained only text, with no multi-media content. Additionally, tweets of anticipation did not do well. For example, some of the least favorited tweets included: “Waiting on 2 pm presser in [city]” and “Awaiting news conference on signing the new budget. Watch it LIVE when it happens.”

The discourse analysis of the most favorited tweets once again highlights the gendered differences in the self-branding strategies of broadcast journalists. The most favorited male tweets emphasized the credibility and authority of the male journalist. The “breaking” and “happening now” signifiers communicate to audiences that the reporters are on the scene and getting a first-hand look at what is occurring.

The most favorited tweets by female journalists reinforce the notion that audiences care more about the personal lives of female broadcasters than their professional lives. The most successful female tweets had nothing to do with sharing news information, but instead were focused on personal details, i.e. physical appearance, relationships, and travel. As further

discussed in Chapter 7, the results of the discourse analysis compliment the previous research and confirm that female broadcasters are more successful with audiences when they play up their personal lives and downplay their professional lives. The findings from the discourse analysis show this is not true for male journalists.

### **6.3 Audience commentary**

Audience commentary on the journalists' Twitter pages was also studied as part of the social media discourse analysis. These comments were open-coded, rather than directed by a focal coding schema. Audience comments on the most retweeted and most favorited tweets of the 20 broadcasters interviewed were analyzed, resulting in an analysis of  $N=3,589$ . While the worst performing tweets were coded during the discourse analysis, the worst performing tweets did not elicit audience commentary and so were not included in this part of the analysis.

The male journalists interviewed for this study said they did not receive much audience feedback on their Twitter pages. They said the feedback they did receive tended to be of a neutral tone with the most common responses being questions about the news story or general comments about the topic at hand. The discourse analysis of audience commentary on the most successful male tweets found this to be true.

One of the most successful male tweets was "Cocaine, crack, and an AR-15 found in the home of a preschool teacher, who police say was running a big time drug operation" and included mugshots. Most audience commentary on this tweet expressed disgust with the alleged criminals. Audience comments included: "Bad guys don't play by the rules; they'll get guns with or without anyone's permission" and "SMH" (shaking my head). Audiences also used the tweet as an opportunity to ask the male journalists questions. Audience questions included: "Was she a good teacher? Did she harm students?" and "Are crack and cocaine the same thing?"

Another successful male tweet was “LIGHTNING strike on [name] Tower in downtown [city] during this afternoon’s thunderstorm, captured from [TV station] camera on its broadcast tower.” Audience comments on this post were also neutral and focused on the story at hand. Audience feedback included: “Hoping no one was inside at the time” and “Wow that is something.” Audience members also asked the male journalist questions, including: “Is anyone hurt?” and “What happens inside a building during a lightning strike?”

Another one of the most retweeted male tweets was “Off-duty #NYPD officer stops mugging in progress.” Once again, the audience commentary was focused on the news story itself. Comments included: “Is a police officer ever off duty? No, it’s what they’re made of, it’s what they do. That officer said, it’s something I had to do. Why? It’s who they are, it’s what they are. They are 24/7 by choice. They are the good guys” and “Our #Heroes have our back 24/7.”

In general, audience reactions to the most retweeted male tweets added to the overall conversation regarding the news story. Audience members showed concern for victims in their local areas, appreciation for police officers, and condemnation of criminals negatively impacting their communities. Audiences also asked thoughtful questions about the news story to gather more important information. In this regard, audience commentary could be considered constructive and even beneficial for other news consumers. Male tweets evoking credibility and authority through hard news coverage facilitated the most productive audience commentary.

The most retweeted female tweets elicited very different audience reactions. As mentioned previously, the most retweeted female tweets were about soft news. One of the most popular female tweets was “HERO PUPPY: This golden retriever stepped in harm’s way to stop his owner from getting bitten by a rattle snake during a walk...& he was bitten instead. Let’s wish Todd speedy recovery! He’s only 6 months old!” The tweet included a photo of the puppy.

Audience comments on this tweet included: “Only a dog can look this cute with a swollen face!!! What a good boy! We don’t deserve dogs,” “THE GOODEST BOI,” and “I just want to give him a hug.” Another successful female tweet was “Just before wheels up on the last @AmericanAir flight of the day from [city] to [city]. #Go [football team].” The tweet included a video on the flight. Audience commentary on this tweet included: “Go [football team] Go!!” “eff em up [city]” and “Man, that must have been one CRAZY flight! Go Green.”

While the most retweeted female tweets shared soft news, there were a few that were highly retweeted that covered hard news. Interestingly, the audience comments on the female hard news tweets differed greatly from the audience comments on the soft news tweets. One of the most successful hard news tweets by a female journalist was “Republican gubernatorial candidate visiting with [city] Sikh leaders over tea.” The tweet included a video of the meeting. Audience reaction to this tweet was hostile, even to the point of mockery. Audience comments included: “Your dad wears a turban,” “Pass the samoseh” (a Middle Eastern dish), and “I’m hungry.” Though the tweet covered hard news, the audience commentary differed greatly from the audience commentary elicited by male hard news tweets. This finding suggests that audience members are not taking the hard news coverage of female journalists seriously.

The audience commentary for the most retweeted female tweets was not ideal. According to the qualitative interviews, journalists of both genders wanted to tweet out important information that would prompt meaningful audience interaction and questions. The most successful male tweets achieved this goal, but the most successful female tweets did not. Interestingly, female tweets in general gathered more audience commentary than male tweets did, but the engagement was not ideal. Women have the quantity of engagement, while the men have the quality.

For male broadcasters, there were few differences between the most retweeted tweets and the most favorited tweets. Both sets of tweets were focused on hard news stories about other people or objects and displayed the self-branding strategies of credibility and authority. However, there were pronounced differences in the most retweeted tweets and most favorited tweets for female journalists. The most retweeted female tweets focused on soft news about others or objects, while the most favorited tweets focused on the journalist herself. The audience commentary on these sets of female tweets also differed greatly.

During the interviews, most of the female journalists expressed their uneasiness with many of their audience interactions. The women received commentary on their beauty, physical appearance, and lifestyles. They also reported receiving unwanted sexual advances through Twitter interactions. Some women even admitted to getting the police involved because their interactions were so disturbing. The results of the discourse analysis provide greater insight into these gendered interactions.

One of the most favorited female tweets was “(a boy band) fever is taking over the newsroom...the #BTSArmy inspired me to wear purple today!” and included a photo of the female broadcaster and a male co-anchor wearing purple. Audience comments included: “My lady you look like a goddess,” “You look stunning with that purple dress,” and “I love you.” Another successful female tweet was “It's #UglySweaterDay! [Pet cat's name] and I are wishing you a "Meowy Christmas!" and included a photo of the female broadcaster and her cat. Audience comments on this post included: “Does [pet cat's name] need a Daddy? 'Cause I'm Game! hahaha! Merry Xmas Luv!” “Love it! Should get matching sweater for kitty,” and a comment containing only heart eyes emoji's.



Another successful female tweet was “The recent weather definitely calls for pants. Can’t do 50 degrees anymore!” and included a video of the female anchor dancing with pants on. Audience comments included: “Well hello” with a heart eyes emoji, “Is it Merengue or Bachata?” alluding to the broadcaster’s Hispanic heritage, and “Come swim with me” with a video of a man’s pool in his backyard.

During the interviews, the female broadcasters said they all wanted to be viewed as authentic, credible, and professional journalists. They mentioned being wary of posting personal information or photos on Twitter in anticipation of the unwanted male attention they may receive. However, the best performing female tweets included details about the personal lives of the female broadcasters. Top female tweets included: a photo with girlfriends at a bachelorette party, a photo with female co-workers at an NFL game, and a selfie with a new puppy. The discourse analysis reveals a disconnect between what female broadcasters say are their ideal tweets and the tweets that are actual the most successful with audiences. Further discussion of this disconnect is detailed in Chapter 7.

#### **6.4 Threat levels**

The female broadcasters interviewed said they have all had problems with unwanted audience interactions, especially from middle-aged male audience members. According to the women, most of the unwanted interactions were sexually-charged. In most cases, the women either ignored or deleted these comments, though some women blocked users from their social media entirely. In extreme cases, some female broadcasters had to call the police out of fear for their personal safety.

The discourse analysis of audience commentary on female broadcasters’ Twitter pages reveals several of Fitzgerald’s (1990) threat levels. The majority of the harassing comments fell

under the two lowest threat levels, gender harassment and seductive behavior. Audience comments engaging in gender harassment included: “Very healthy and beautiful looking ladies. Don't mean to sound like a dirty old man.,” “Never noticed those sexy blue eyes,” and “Too bad you got Lasik. You looked so hot with glasses.” The next threat level, seductive behavior, was achieved through audience comments including: “Those are the Most Kissable Lips I’ve Seen,” “Does [her pet cat] need a Daddy? 'Cause I'm Game! hahaha! Merry Xmas Luv!” and “Let's go Humping then.”

There was only one tweet analyzed that prompted the third threat level, sexual bribery. A female broadcaster tweeted about a cold snap and a male audience member posted a video of his swimming pool in the sunshine with the words “Come swim with me.” The male audience member is bribing the female broadcaster with the prospect of sunshine, warmer weather, and a pool, but only if she joins him in the water.

Fitzgerald’s (1990) highest two threat levels, sexual coercion and sexual imposition, were not present in the tweets analyzed. Sexual imposition is restricted to physical touch, so it is not present in online environments like social media. Sexual coercion is possible online, but was not detected in the discourse analysis. But this is not to say that those types of threats do not happen in the Twitter environment. It is important to note that the female broadcasters admitted to deleting certain tweets and blocking certain users all together. Additionally, the female broadcasters said the most disturbing messages they received were communicated via private messaging on their social media accounts. These tweets would not have been part of the sample analyzed for the discourse analysis. It is possible, then, that higher threat levels were present. Future research on this topic could focus on the private messages and deleted tweets between

audience members and female broadcasters. Female broadcasters, however, would have to be willing to share that private information with researchers.

## **6.5 Summary**

Overall, the discourse analysis of journalists' Twitter pages revealed gendered issues still present in the news industry. First, the ideal tweet, as discussed during the qualitative interviews, was only attained by male journalists in this study. Men were able to tweet out hard news topics and receive constructive audience feedback and high audience engagement. Hard news tweets by female broadcasters did not perform well. The few hard news female tweets that did perform well numerically elicited audience commentary that included hostility and mockery. Instead, the most successful female tweets focused on soft news or the personal life of the broadcaster herself. While these tweets did prompt high audience engagement, they were far from the ideal tweet as described by both male and female journalists during the qualitative interviews.

Audience commentary was perhaps the most problematic finding of the social media discourse analysis. Audience commentary on male tweets were of neutral tone and pertained almost exclusively to the news story. Some commentary was even constructive, including questions asking for more detailed information on the story being discussed. During the qualitative interviews, journalists of both genders said this type of audience commentary was ideal. Once again, however, the ideal commentary was only attained by male journalists.

Audience commentary on female journalists' most successful tweets was not ideal. Audiences commented on the female broadcaster's beauty, appearance, and sexuality. Unwanted sexual advances were also common. Threat levels of this commentary remained relatively low, but the discourse analysis could not take into account comments that were deleted or sent privately. It would not be out of the question to hypothesize that deleted comments or private

messages contained more explicit content that reached higher threat levels. This is an area of future research that would be beneficial to the media scholars and media practitioners alike.

## CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

The present investigation explores the impact of social media on the work life of broadcast journalists in top 10 markets. This study is especially concerned with the self-branding strategies successful broadcasters are using to combat a variety of challenges, including: declining television news viewership, gendered inequalities, and the “fake news” label. In Chapters 5 and 6, key themes were discussed. In this chapter, the major findings of this study are applied to the previous literature and theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. In doing so, the unique contributions of this study are identified.

Research suggests that journalists do realize the importance of self-branding strategies and thoughtfully create and execute these strategies (Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2017). Broadcast journalists are especially aware of the great potential of social media for self-branding purposes and use social media for self-branding more than other types of journalists, i.e. print and radio (Shultz and Sheffer, 2012). Research is still emerging on the influence of social media on these self-promotional techniques. There is no known research that has focused specifically on the self-branding strategies of broadcasters in top 10 markets, and so the exclusivity of the sample gathered is one of the unique contributions of this project.

### **7.1 Significance of social media use**

Research Question 1A asked, “What are broadcast journalists’ perceptions of how they are using social media?” Semi-structured interviews with 20 broadcast journalists in top 10 markets were conducted to uncover three distinct themes. These themes are: broadcast journalists are using social media to remain relevant, newsroom rules and metrics are being created to gauge broadcaster’s social media presence, and broadcasters are noticing the potential dangers of a social media-driven news industry.

Broadcast journalists are using social media to remain relevant in a digitally-focused news environment. The number of broadcast news viewers is at an all-time low, with less than half of all U.S. adults relying on local television news for their main source of information (Matsa, 2018). Meanwhile, social media news consumption is continuing to climb, with two-thirds of Americans getting their news from social networks (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). All of the journalists interviewed were hyper-aware of declining television viewership, and that decline was one of the main reasons as to why social media use has become so paramount for the success of modern journalists.

Expertise on social media was noted as one of the most important aspects in a 21<sup>st</sup> century broadcast journalist's career. Every broadcaster interviewed acknowledged the critical nature of engaging on social media, both to disseminate news information and as a way to connect with audiences. This qualitative finding is consistent with Willnat and Weaver's (2018) survey data indicating that nine out of ten U.S. journalists use social media platforms in their daily work routines. However, it deepens that finding by revealing information on the changing industry norms that surround social media use.

An important finding of this study is that social media use is so critical in the current news industry that most top news organizations are now regulating and measuring the social media metrics for the station and for individual broadcasters. According to the participants, this is a very recent change, dating back no farther than 2017. Participants mentioned that social media guidelines and online behavior regulations are now being added to contracts and newsroom policies. One participant told a story of a co-worker who was fired over his behavior on social media.

The importance of social media metrics for individual broadcasters was a surprising find of this study. Broadcasts were ranked weekly on their social media engagement and compared against their co-workers. News managers are using metrics software to gauge and then rank the social media influence of each of their journalists. Social media metrics have been measured in the public relations field for some time. A study dating back to 2011 conducted interviews with top public relations executives, finding in the early stages of widespread social media use, social media metrics were being measured in the field of public relations to gauge success of campaigns (DiStaso, McCorkindale, & Wright, 2011). However, according to the participants, this is a new phenomenon for the broadcast news industry, and the lack of literature on this topic reifies that. This finding could only be uncovered by speaking directly with top broadcasters currently working in the industry, and so the findings of this study provide a unique contribution to the literature.

While all of the participants emphasized the importance of social media use, they also spoke of the potential drawbacks, and even dangers, of a social media-centric news industry. According to a recent Gallup/Knight Foundation poll, most Americans report having lost trust in the news media in recent years. Bias was one of the most important factors leading to this decline in trust (Gallup/Knight Foundation, 2018). Broadcasters are aware of this trend and say that social media use can add to the negative perception of news media bias. Participants said they fear that some of their colleagues do not distinguish fact from opinion on their personal social media pages, adding to audience confusion.

Previous research showed that most journalists maintained separate professional and personal social media accounts (Rogstad, 2014; Gulyas, 2013; Bossio & Sacco, 2017). However, the participants in this study have gotten away from that practice. They want to brand themselves

as relatable and approachable, so they share a mix of work-related and non-work-related posts. While the blurring of personal and professional has become more socially acceptable, this conflation can lead to the appearance of bias for audiences who have difficulty separating news information from personal opinions.

The real-time characteristic of social media also poses a danger to broadcast journalists. Journalists are expected to get the news out as soon as it happens, but sometimes this means sacrificing accuracy for speed. In fact, the timely dissemination of timely information is such an important principle that the Supreme Court has found erroneous speech may be protected by the First Amendment, as long as it is later corrected (*New York Times vs. Sullivan*, 1964). Misinformation or “fake news” in the internet environment can be a problem for journalists today. One of the participants recalled a colleague who tweeted out misinformation about the Boston Marathon bombings in order to be the first. The misinformation was retweeted by the journalist’s station, then by the network, then gained national attention. Participants say this kind of snowball effect hurts because it associates professional journalists with “fake news.” A similar occurrence happened at a station in Philadelphia during the Penn State scandal in 2011. A broadcaster tweeted out that Penn State football coach Joe Paterno had died, when in reality, he did not pass away until a few days later. That journalist was fired (Gross, 2011).

Participants were concerned that a society entrenched in social media culture could lead to hate mongering. Research shows, unfortunately, this is indeed the case (Mondal et. al, 2018; Ross, 2018; Chetty & Alathur, 2018). One participant described social media culture as an “open kitchen window” that can never be closed. You are constantly hearing people shout into your window whether you want to hear it or not. A positive aspect of social media is it can give voice to marginalized groups and can give public platforms to groups who never had access to



them before (Holt, 2018). However, this open access also allows hate speech to thrive and be shared.

Participants noted the polarizing political climate under the Trump administration as fuel for this type of hate speech. Hateful opinions that used to be constrained to the minority are now allowed to grow and be spread via social media. Ben-David and Matamoros-Fernandez (2016) found that hate speech on Facebook was allowed to grow and spread because of Facebook's vast social networks. They performed a content analysis of the Facebook pages of Spanish extreme-right political figures and found that while the hate speech stemmed from a few specific sources, the users in those sources' networks contributed to the fast and widespread growth of the hate speech.

Overall, there are benefits and pitfalls for journalists working in a social media-centric, 21<sup>st</sup> century news industry. However, all participants agreed that social media engagement is the top priority in their day-to-day work routines. Broadcast journalists realize the great opportunities social media platforms have given them and they understand they are able to share important information in groundbreaking ways that generations of journalists have never done before. The unmatched power of social media for broadcast journalists is undeniable.

Research Question 1B asked, "How are broadcast journalists using social media as part of their overall self-branding strategies? To answer this question, a social network discourse analysis was conducted on the Twitter accounts of the 20 broadcast journalists interviewed for this study. The discourse analysis highlights the congruities and disconnects between what journalists perceived as their social media use (RQ 1A) and their actual social media use (RQ 1B). The most problematic findings of the discourse analysis relate to gendered inequalities and are further discussed in the following section.

## 7.2 Significance of individual characteristics and social media strategies

Research question 2 asked, “How do the source characteristics of individual broadcasters, including gender identity, impact their self-branding strategies on social media?” Three themes emerged as responses to these questions: broadcasters are cognizant of the source characteristics they portray on social media; the source characteristics of broadcasters, especially gender, have a substantial impact on how they are perceived by audiences; and the gender of the broadcaster greatly impacts their social media strategies, with men and women taking different approaches. The results of the social network discourse analysis provide further insight into the data collected during the interviews.

The source characteristics of each individual broadcaster influence their social media self-branding strategies (Perloff, 2003). According to the qualitative interviews, broadcast journalists want to be perceived as credible and authoritative, but also relatable and likeable. Authenticity is the most important source characteristic for journalists in their self-branding strategies. The interview data showed that, ideally, broadcast journalists of both genders want to use Twitter to share important hard news information while also facilitating constructive audience interaction. However, the social media discourse analysis showed that only males were able to successfully achieve the ideal tweet.

The discourse analysis showed that male tweets displaying their credibility performed the best. The most successful male tweets were hard news stories with a photo or video attached. This finding is consistent with previous research on visual news credibility. According to Raymond (2000), being live on the scene of news events reifies the credibility and authority of the journalist. It shows the journalist’s exclusive access. This is access that is not openly

available to the public at large. Usher (2018) suggested that these type of online breaking news practices serve as ways for journalists to maintain their credibility.

The discourse analysis found that female tweets showing their credibility did not perform well. This finding compliments previous research that suggests that male journalists are perceived as more credible than female journalists. Foundational studies on gender and television news showed that audiences preferred white males to deliver the news because they were perceived as the most credible and competent (Sanders & Pritchett, 1971). More recent studies still show the gendered disparity of the perceived credibility of newscasters. Bran and Himes (2010) found that audiences viewed male broadcasters as more credible, competent, and composed than female broadcasters. It is of no surprise then, that the most successful male tweets in the discourse analysis are those in which the male broadcaster's credibility is displayed, while similar tweets from females did not perform well.

Findings of the discourse analysis show the gendered gap in perceived authority among broadcasters. Male tweets displaying authority performed well with audiences; female tweets did not. This is consistent with the findings of Cann and Mohr (2001). The researchers conducted a content analysis of television news stories and found that male broadcast journalists were perceived as having more source authority than female broadcast journalists (Cann & Mohr, 2001). More recent research shows that this gendered disparity is still present among audiences today. Mottram (2016) studied the perceived authority of vocal pitch. She found that female journalists are forced to adapt to a gendered standard of vocal authority because audiences perceived deep, resonating voices as the most authoritative. According to Mottram (2016), "There are key physiological differences between men and women that impact the pitch and

resonance of their voices...that may make it harder for women's voices to fit into the low, deep sound of authority" (Mottram, 2016, p. 56).

According to the discourse analysis, the types of news stories that were successful with audiences also fell along gender lines. The most retweeted female tweets focused on soft news topics. This is consistent with the findings of a recent study by the Women's Media Center that found that male journalists are typically assigned "hard" news topics while female journalists usually report on feature topics (Women's Media Center, 2017). Additionally, through qualitative interviews with journalists of both genders, Rodny-Gumede (2015) found that female journalists are perceived as being the most impactful when covering soft news stories about marginalized groups like women and children (Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Examples of the most retweeted female tweets in the present study included: a child high-fiving during an NBA game, a female celebrity's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and a pregnant NFL fan.

The most favorited female tweets in the discourse analysis were about the female broadcaster herself. The focus was on the broadcaster's beauty, body, or sexuality. This is consistent with an experiment by Grabe and Samson (2010) that found that male audience members preferred to watch sexualized females report the news, as long as it was also a soft news topic. They also found that news consumers paid more attention to the physical appearance of the female broadcaster than the story she was presenting. Cummins, Ortiz, Rankine (2018) extended these findings by conducting an eye-tracking experiment on broadcast news consumers. They found that news consumers spent a significantly greater amount of time viewing female reporters' bodies relative to male reporters. Additionally, Larsorsa (2012) conducted a content analysis of the Twitter accounts of male and female journalists. He found that women were much more likely to post about their personal lives than male journalists.

The worst performing tweets across both genders were text-only or included hyperlinks rather than photos or videos. There is conflicting research regarding the use of hyperlinks in tweets, with some studies finding that hyperlinks are useful for audiences (Wang, 2016), while others found that tweets with hyperlinks prompted the least amount of audience engagement (Lee, 2016). Future research on this topic will provide clearer insights into the effectiveness of hyperlinks on Twitter.

Some of the worst performing tweets were text previewing an upcoming event rather than actual news coverage. This finding is consistent with previous research. Tandoc and Johnson (2016) conducted a survey of Twitter news consumers and found that many news consumers go to Twitter first for their breaking news. The researchers highlighted the real-time characteristic of Twitter that drew people to use the social media platform. It makes sense then that tweets previewing information, and not sharing it in real-time, would perform poorly with audiences.

Audience interaction via social media was vastly different for male and female broadcasters in this study, though fairly consistent within each group. During the qualitative interviews, male broadcasters said they typically had little interaction with audiences on their social media platforms. The limited interaction they did have was of a neutral tone and included questions or comments on news stories. This was a consistent theme across the male participants interviewed. The discourse analysis confirmed the responses of the male participants.

Female broadcasters, on the other hand, had very different experiences with online audience interaction. Most female broadcasters indicated during the interviews that the majority of their followers were middle-aged males, though none of the female participants interviewed were older than 40 years old. The women interviewed repeatedly referred to their social media followers as “creeps” and “weirdos.” The discourse analysis showed that most of the feedback

that the female broadcasters received on their social media pages had nothing to do with their jobs or the news, but rather focused on their physical appearance or sexuality. These findings are consistent with the work of Finneman and Jenkins (2018) who found that social media acts as another avenue from which audiences can comment on female journalists' beauty and physical appearance. During the interviews, many of the female participants said they were asked on dates or received unwanted sexual advances. This was confirmed during the discourse analysis. These findings are consistent with the findings of Chen et. al (2018); they interviewed female journalists from around the world and found that no matter the country, female journalists face online gendered harassment.

In some instances, online gendered harassment posed threats to the female broadcasters in the physical world. One participant said she had to get the police involved after being harassed by a viewer online and in person. Another participant said she never posts where she is, only where she was, in fear of someone trying to follow her. Current research suggests that gendered harassment is common across the majority of women in the media industry. Harris, Mosdell and Griffiths (2016) conducted a survey of journalists and found that most journalists agreed that it is more dangerous to be a woman than a man in the news industry. According to the female journalists in that study, sexual harassment was one of the most prominent potential dangers, with 68% of women respondents saying that they had been sexually harassed while doing their job (Harris, Mosdell & Griffiths, 2016). According to a 2014 study conducted by the International Women's Media Foundation, an NGO serving female journalists, nearly two-thirds of women in the media industry have suffered workplace harassment by men.

During the interviews, female journalists acknowledged their awareness of these gendered risks and said being female absolutely influenced their self-branding strategies on

social media. The female broadcasters in this study were highly aware of the demographics of their social media following, and they all had dealt with unwanted comments and messages from followers. They used this knowledge to anticipate the kinds of feedback they would receive before posting each piece of content.

For example, several of the female broadcasters said they would never post vacation photos or beauty shots, even though that is common for other social media users, because they do not want audience members to see them in a bikini and comment on their bodies. They said they anticipate the sexualization they face and so just avoid those types of photos all together. Female broadcasters also acknowledged that branding themselves as approachable and relatable is important, but they still pull back on engaging with audience members. They fear that if they engage with certain users, they will be harassed.

The discourse analysis, however, showed that female broadcasters in this study did post selfies, beauty shots, and photos of their outfits. In fact, these posts were the ones that received the most audience engagement. These types of posts were the ones that audiences “favorited” the most and were also the ones that received the most user comments. The disconnect between what female broadcasters want to post and what they actually post is an important point for future research. It would be interesting to better understand what is motivating female broadcasters to post content that they know could potentially harm their credibility, their careers, and even their physical selves.

There is a growing field of research on journalists’ self-branding techniques. However, most are done by conducting surveys or content analysis on journalists’ Twitter pages (Olausson, 2018; Hanusch & Bruns, 2016; Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2017). Confirming that this is a deliberate process through feedback from 20 top 10 broadcasters via semi-structured interviews

is a significant contribution of this study. Additionally, the interview structure of this project allowed for sensitive and intimate conversations to happen (Dickson-Swift et. al, 2009). The most repeated sensitive issue brought up by participants was gender inequality in the news industry. Gendered inequalities have been present in newsrooms since the foundational studies on gender and the news in the 1970s (Sanders and Pritchett, 1971), however, these topics are still taboo in modern newsroom culture. Jenkins & Finneman (2016) called for more research that specifically interviewed female broadcast journalists about gendered inequalities in newsroom culture. In that regard, this study addresses the want and need for more research in this area.

### **6.3 Significance of the impact of “fake news”**

Research question 3 asked, “How has the increasing popularity of the phrase ‘fake news’ impacted broadcast journalists?” Two themes emerged as responses to these questions. These themes are: “fake news” is a popular, but non-impactful buzzword for journalists and there is a local/national divide on the impacts of “fake news.”

Most of the participants have had “fake news” yelled at them before. They’ve heard the phrase during live shots, while conducting interviews, or even just on lunch breaks. Some participants have seen “fake news” as a comment on their social media pages. However, the broadcasters said that they feel the “fake news” label is just a buzzword and does not have any real impact on their careers. Most local broadcasters think the term is just silly jargon that will eventually fade away.

All of the participants mentioned President Trump when prompted about “fake news.” They felt that Trump uses the phrase as an attack on journalism as a whole, especially when he disagrees with news media information. Some participants did acknowledge that the phrase, and Trump’s disdain towards the media, have polarized local news audiences. Some journalists said



they noticed an increase in politically-charged trolls on their social media accounts. However, the overarching theme was that these trolls were in the minority and the popularity of “fake news” had little impact on their careers.

This acknowledgement, but minimization of the impact of “fake news” on journalism was an important finding. Recent studies and polls show that the “fake news” discourse in popular culture is in fact having major impacts on news consumers and their relationship with the media. In 2016, *The Oxford English Dictionary* chose “post-truth” as its word of the year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016). *The Oxford English Dictionary* said they chose post-truth as word of the year because they’ve seen a massive increase in its use, specifically in the context of media coverage of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. A 2016 Pew Research Study found that 64% of U.S. adults felt that “fake news” was causing confusion about current events (Mitchell, Barthel, & Holcomb, 2016). A 2019 Pew Research Study found that 58% of U.S. adults felt that the news media doesn’t understand people like them; 73% of Republicans felt that way (Gottfried & Grieco, 2019).

Given these findings, it is evident that the term “fake news” impacts journalism, yet journalists themselves still don’t seem to think so, at least on the local level. The broadcast journalists in this study all work in top 10 markets. While these markets are major U.S. cities, these journalists are still considered “local journalists.” They cover one metro area and are engaged in that specific community. Local broadcasters did note a divide between local and national journalists with regard to the “fake news” stigma. They felt that national journalists, those who work for national media outlets like CNN and MSNBC, are impacted by the “fake

news” label much more than local journalists are. In fact, local journalists seem to think of themselves as the protectors of old-school, fact-based journalism. They associate “fake news,” rightly or wrongly, with the opinion-laden programming of the cable networks.

Local broadcasters agreed that national news media outlets do produce more misinformation than local media outlets do. They felt that due to the 24-hour news cycle, national media outlets do not use as much care and consideration when producing their news stories. One participant who works in California said the national news media lumped together several wildfires into one story, when in reality each fire had its own major impacts on separate communities across the state. These kinds of examples were mentioned by several of the participants, all of whom acknowledged a local/national media divide.

It is evident that there is a disconnect between the realm of local journalism and their audiences. Boydston & Van Aelst (2018) conducted interviews with journalists covering the 2016 U.S. presidential election and found that most of the journalists were out of touch with their audiences. Findings showed the journalists lived in big cities and had elitist jobs, and so it was hard for them to see the bigger picture and connect with Middle America. “It is still true that most of the major and most influential and powerful press is based in a couple of coastal cities. [It is important] to spend more time out in the field, out in the country talking to people” (Boydston & Van Aelst, 2018, p. 686). Zelizer (2018) argued that the media normalizes Trump and “turns to tools that they had used in the past to mute outrage” rather than addressing the outrage (Zelizer, 2018, p. 147). Skewes (2018) called for the media to step up and take action against the “fake news” stigma, rather than being passive and neutral.

Several scholars have connected Trump’s communications with Nazi and Fascist propaganda from the 1930s and 1940s. Boyd-Barrett (2019) argued that “fake news” is

synonymous with propaganda, and Trump uses it as a way to distract the American people and the media from what's really going on in the country. Original propaganda research from foundational scholars like Laswell, Schramm, and Ellul is being resurfaced to analyze the current political climate. Fuchs (2018) drew upon work of the Frankfurt School to make connections between Trump's presidency and the dictatorships of Hitler and Mussolini. Boyd-Barrett (2019) argued that technologies and methodologies of propaganda have become more advanced over time, and Fitzgerald (2019) specifically spoke of Trump's use of social media to disseminate propaganda. "Donald Trump and his supporting movement use Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and other platforms to disseminate protofascistic slogans, incongruent and factually flawed arguments and statements, and bizarre near-conspiracy theory accusations or reconstructions of history" (Fitzgerald, 2019, p. 73).

Journalists have been criticized by media scholars being too passive in addressing Trump's propaganda (Zelizer, 2018; Skewes, 2018). Participants in this study exemplify this passivity by not acknowledging the "fake news" problem. It's useful to connect this back to Schlenker's (1980) remedial actions. Schlenker (1980) argued that when social actors face a predicament, the actors will use remedial actions to solve the discrepancies in self-presentation. The journalists in this study noted the importance of being perceived as authentic and credible, but the "fake news" stigma is a direct attack against that. Therefore, journalists must engage in remedial actions to resolve the inconsistency. Schlenker (1980) described two remedial actions that are particularly relevant to this study: retreat and excuses.

It is beneficial to relate these findings back to Davidson's (1983) third-person effect in communication theory. Davidson (1983) conducted experiments and found that individuals perceive the media's effects on other people as more intense than they perceive the effect on

themselves. He also noted the connection between the third-person effect and the fear of propaganda and the fear of dissent by political leaders. The third-person effect could contribute to the ignorance of local broadcast journalists to the impact of “fake news” on their careers. Local journalists in this study felt as if national journalists were impacted by “fake news,” but they were not. They also all connected “fake news” to President Trump. Fear of Trump’s dissent could also be a factor in local journalists’ attitudes towards the “fake news” propaganda.

It is also beneficial to connect the “fake news” findings back to the work of Schlenker (1980). According to Schlenker (1980), It is difficult for most people to confront a predicament head on and so some people will use retreat tactics as a remedy for tense situations. Retreat tactics can include ignoring or refusing to acknowledge the predicament in the first place (Schlenker, 1980). It seems that this is exactly what local journalists are doing in response to their new “fake news” label. Instead of acknowledging the impacts of the “fake news” stigma, the participants in this study deemed it a meaningless buzzword and a passing fad. Local journalists refuse to acknowledge the statistically-proven impact that “fake news” is having on their careers.

Making excuses is another remedial tactic that can be used in response to a predicament. Schlenker (1980) argued that excuses lessen the perceived responsibility of the actor, thus also lessening the actor’s potential for suffering negative consequences. The participants in this study all placed the “fake news” blame on the national media. They said that national media outlets are more careless with their information and don’t always get the story right. Local journalists are rejecting responsibility for the “fake news” stigma and instead placing it with national media outlets.

Research on the impacts of “fake news” is still emerging, as this phenomenon is still unfolding. Most of the research so far has explored “fake news” from a historical or theoretical perspective. Empirical studies on fake tend to be focused on audience news consumption. There is little to no research addressing “fake news” from a journalist’s standpoint. This study adds to the gap in the literature and offers a new and unique perspective on the disconnect between local journalism and the impacts of “fake news.” During the interviews, the broadcast journalists acknowledged that they’ve been called “fake news” in person or have had audience members troll them online. The discourse analysis did not reveal “fake news” as major audience commentary for the most successful tweets. Future research should focus on which types of tweets elicit the “fake news” response.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The institution of journalism was originally regarded as an important pillar in the success of democracy. However, in recent times, journalism has suffered a loss of reputation. Traditional news organizations are rapidly losing audience trust and attention, and the institution of journalism is under attack by the “fake news” stigma.

The results of this dissertation indicate that gendered inequalities still present in newsroom culture continue to negatively impact how female journalists connect with audiences. Female broadcasters’ reputations, self-esteem, and even safety are sometimes compromised due to these gendered injustices. The findings of this study can provide awareness and solidarity to female broadcasters dealing with these issues and serve to ignite much needed conversations among female journalists and between female journalists and news managers.

Additionally, the “fake news” stigma is providing its own set of unique challenges for journalists, as trust in the media is faltering. However, journalists must address these issues head on rather than ignoring them or placing the blame elsewhere. They must continue to use their self-branding strategies to show audiences they are in fact trustworthy and credible gatekeepers of important public information.

### **8.1 Practical implications**

The findings of this study have practical implications for the broadcast news industry. First, the discourse analysis of social media provided insight into how audience’s engage with broadcast journalists’ Twitter pages. The findings revealed which kind of tweets audiences favorite the most, which kind of tweets audiences retweet the most, and the role of gender in audience engagement. These findings can provide practical insight to broadcast journalists who are employing self-branding strategies on Twitter.

The findings of this study also shed light on the gendered inequalities still present in newsroom culture. Parsons and Priola (2012) conducted interviews with female academics about the gendered inequalities they faced in universities. Findings showed that women felt talking about gendered issues with co-workers and administrators would be the best way to raise awareness to these issues and thus prompt positive change. Female broadcasters can use the findings of the current study to know that they are not alone in facing gendered inequalities in the newsroom, as women in all of the top 10 markets expressed similar concerns. They can use these findings as a jumping off point to have conversations about gendered inequalities with each other, their male co-workers, and managers, to raise awareness and hopefully ignite positive change towards a more egalitarian broadcast news industry. One of these positive changes could be the creation of a handbook of gender equality for newsrooms.

The findings of this study can also provide useful information to news managers. The qualitative interviews revealed that news managers are using audience engagement to rank journalists' social media success. These rankings have consequences for journalist's newsroom status. However, the findings of the discourse analysis show why this is problematic. The most successful male tweets were hard news topics and elicited constructive audience engagement. The most successful female tweets were either soft news or personal tweets that elicited disturbing audience comments. The qualitative interviews found that female journalists are wary of these kinds of tweets, but the discourse analysis showed that they are tweeting them out anyway. Pressure from news managers for a blanket metric of "audience engagement" may put additional pressure on female journalists to tweet what they know will get audience attention rather than what they feel is their ideal tweet. News managers should take this gendered issue into consideration when creating their audience engagement metrics.

Awareness is also a key component in the battle against the “fake news” stigma journalists are currently facing. Findings of this study showed a disconnect between journalists’ perceived impact of “fake news” and its actual impacts. These findings can show journalists that “fake news” is an issue they should be dealing with head on, rather than ignoring it or blaming it on the national news media. Journalists can use the findings of this study to better understand the overall impact “fake news” is having on the news industry. Having accurate information on the impacts of “fake news” will allow journalists to execute more effective strategies to battle back against it.

## **8.2 Future research**

Social media are so unique because they are constantly and rapidly changing. Even within a matter of months, new media technologies emerge while others lose popularity. Future research should continue to examine the latest media technologies and their impacts on the broadcast news industry as to keep the gap between theory and practice as small as possible.

The mixed-method approach uncovered the need for future research in the pressures facing female journalists in a news industry that measures success by social media metrics. The female participants interviewed said they anticipate unwanted male attention and sexual harassment and so carefully choose which content to post. They said they try to avoid posts that would elicit sexually-charged comments. However, the social network discourse analysis showed that female journalists do post selfies and beauty shots and those posts perform the best with audiences. This discrepancy should be researched further to better understand the pressures female journalists are facing and the decisions they are making because of them. Future research on this topic could serve as a point of resistance for female broadcasters to minimize gendered inequalities in the newsroom.



Future research into threat levels of audience interaction would also be beneficial for media scholars and practitioners. The discourse analysis revealed low threat levels for female broadcasters; however, only public comments were analyzed. During the qualitative interviews, female journalists said they delete disturbing comments or receive them via private message. Analyzing these comments may reveal an even higher threat level for female journalists that should be considered.

### **8.3 Study limitations**

Although considerable thought was invested in the planning and execution of this study, there are limitations that should be noted. While these limitations should be discussed, they do not invalidate the findings of this study. Rather, they should be used to better understand the findings and inform future studies.

There were methodological limitations in the recruitment of the participants. I've worked as a broadcast journalist for almost a decade and so I used my industry contacts to start the snowball sample. Because of this, all of the participants are indirectly linked socially and professionally. Perhaps, their opinions and outlooks are also connected. I originally tried to gather the sample using a "cold calling" technique. I e-mailed random broadcasters found through the websites of television stations in top 10 markets. However, the response rate was extremely low. Perhaps having a more random sample would have prompted different results.

Phone interviews are subject to some limitations. They do not allow researchers to pay attention to the entire person and their communication style, including: gaps in discussion, omissions, body language, tone, and facial expressions (DeVault and Gross, 2012). Conducting face-to-face interviews may have provided a more complete account of my participant interviews.

#### **8.4 Theoretical contributions**

The findings of this study offer unique theoretical contributions to the current field of literature on social media, self-branding, and the broadcast news industry. Recent quantitative studies on journalists' self-branding do not address gender as a factor (Ottovordemgentschenfelde, 2017; Molyneux, Holton, & Lewis, 2017) or find gender differences in the self-branding strategies of journalists (Hedman, 2017; Hanusch & Bruns, 2016). The in-depth qualitative nature of this study allowed for new findings on the impacts of gender on the self-branding strategies of broadcast journalists to emerge.

This study also found a unique relationship between broadcast journalists' perceptions of the impacts of "fake news" and the third-person effect. Davidson (1983) conducted experiments and found that individuals perceive the media's effects on other people as more intense than they perceive the effect on themselves. Local journalists in this study felt as if national journalists were impacted by "fake news," but they were not. They also all connected "fake news" to President Trump. Fear of Trump's dissent could also be a factor in local journalists' attitudes towards the "fake news" propaganda. This finding offers a unique contribution to the emerging literature on the recent "fake news" phenomenon from the journalists' perspective.

This study's mixed-method approach provided unique findings that will contribute to the literature on women in broadcast news. Participant interviews uncovered that female journalists anticipate the unwanted sexual advances of men and so work to avoid it. The discourse analysis, however, found that female journalists are most successful on social media when they post sexualized content. Each method on its own only provides part of the story. Looking at the methods together provides a unique insight into the pressures female journalists are facing and

how they are handling these pressures. These findings offer a unique perspective and allude to possibilities for needed future research.

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## APPENDIX A: PROTOCOL

1. First, tell me a little bit about yourself:
  - a. How long have you been a broadcast journalist?
  - b. Which markets have you worked in?
2. Walk me through a typical day at work, from the time you get into the newsroom until you go home.
  - a. How has your daily routine changed since your first day in a newsroom?
3. (If social media is mentioned) Talk to me a little bit more about your social media use during the day. (If social media is not mentioned) Do you use social media at work?
4. What role do social media play in a journalist's career?
  - a. What role does it play in your career?
  - b. Which social media platforms do you use?
5. What are some of the best ways you've seen social media used?
  - a. What are some of the worst ways you've seen social media used?
7. If you could choose three words to describe your image, what would they be?
8. If you could use three words to describe how the audience views you, what would they be?
9. What are some common misperceptions people have about journalists?
10. Does being a woman (man) impact your role in the newsroom?
  - a. If so, how?
  - b. How does it affect your role on social media?
11. Do you consider your market when you use social media?
  - a. Why?
  - b. How?
12. Tell me about a time when social media use had a positive impact on a journalist's career.
  - a. Tell me about a time when social media use had a negative impact a journalist's career.
13. Are there any broadcasters that you really look up to?
  - a. Who?
  - b. Why?

14. Do you follow them on social media?
  - a. Why?
  - b. What do you notice about their social media accounts?
15. What comes to mind when I say “fake news”?
  - a. How has “fake news” impacted you and your work?
16. Is there anything else I missed that you'd like to add?

## APPENDIX B: STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

It is important for any researcher, especially feminist researchers, to practice reflexivity. This statement of positionality serves as a way to situate myself within this research project in a transparent way. I have nine years of experience in the broadcast news industry as a television news reporter and as a broadcast meteorologist. It is important to disclose my own experiences as a broadcaster in order to promptly address any potential concerns in an upfront manner. My unique experiences in the broadcast industry served as one of the inspirations for this study, and I used former industry contacts as jumping off points for my snowball sampling. However, I also understand the importance of remaining as unbiased as possible in conducting social science research, and so I put forth my best effort to separate my experiences from the experiences of the participants in this study.

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### EDUCATION

#### **The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA**

Doctor of Philosophy, Mass Communications, 2019

Master of Arts, Media Studies, 2014

Bachelor of Arts, Broadcast Journalism, 2009

### SELECT PUBLICATIONS

Davis, S. (July, 2018). Objectification, Sexualization, and Misrepresentation: Social Media and the College Experience. *Social Media & Society*.

Waddell, T. F., Bailey, E. J., & **Davis, S. E.** (May, 2017). Does Elevation Reduce Viewers' Enjoyment of Media Violence? Testing the Intervention Potential of Inspiring Media Journal of Media Psychology. *Journal of Media Psychology*.

Davis, S. (Nov, 2017). Review of Ahmet Bayraktar and Can Uslay (Eds.), Global Place Branding Campaigns across Cities, Regions, and Nations, in *International Journal of Communications*.

### SELECT CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Davis, S. (Aug, 2018). *Racialized Reporting: Newspaper Coverage of Hurricane Harvey vs. Hurricane Maria*. Paper presented in the Minorities and Communication Division of the Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)

Davis, S. (March, 2018). *Objectification, Sexualization, & Misrepresentation: Social Media and the College Experience*. Paper Presented in the Gender and Sexuality Division of the Annual Conference of the Broadcast Education Association (BEA)

Davis, S. (March, 2018). *Wife, mom, journalist: How Gender Roles Impact Journalist's Self-Branding on Instagram*. Paper Presented in the Gender and Sexuality Division of the Annual Conference of the Broadcast Education Association (BEA)

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Marlowe Froke Graduate Scholarship in Education and Public Affairs in Public Broadcasting, Penn State Bellisario College of Communications, 2018

Second Place Paper, Gender and Sexuality Division, BEA 2018

Dr. Carolyn Stroman Award for Debut Graduate Student Paper, Minorities & Communication Division, AEJMC 2018

Top Three Student Paper, Minorities & Communication Division, AEJMC 2018

Top Three Student Paper, Political Communication Interest Group, AEJMC 2017