

Putting Broadcast News in Context: An Analysis of U.S. Television Journalists' Role Conceptions and Contextual Values

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Abstract

Contextual journalism calls for depth of news reporting rather than “just the facts.” A national survey of local television (TV) journalists indicated the increasing popularity of this more comprehensive reporting form. Although news sociologists contend that local TV routines facilitate the production of quick, less substantive stories, TV respondents in the present study highly valued comprehensive, contextual news styles—even more than newspaper journalists. Building on the work of Weaver and colleagues’ “American Journalist” project, TV news workers in this survey preferred contextual roles, such as alerting the public of potential threats and acting in a socially responsible way, but also valued traditional broadcasting roles, such as getting information to the public quickly. TV news roles were compared to those of newspaper journalists to analyze how professionals in different media view their work identities.

Keywords

television news, contextual journalism, journalistic role, survey, quantitative

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Contextual news stories look at issues from a societal perspective, focusing on the “big picture” rather than “just the facts” (Fink & Schudson, 2014, p. 10). This type of reporting reflects the principles of the Hutchins Commission, which recommended that journalists consider not just what will sell, but what will best serve society (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). Contextual news has gained momentum in the last 50 years (Fink & Schudson, 2014), and newspaper journalists strongly favor its approach (McIntyre, Dahmen, & Abdenour, 2016). Despite its growing popularity, there is a lack of professional and academic understanding of contextual reporting (Fink & Schudson, 2014), and researchers have not studied contextual journalism in America’s most popular news medium, local television (TV). Local TV has long been criticized for favoring sensational and visual stories over in-depth public affairs reporting (see, e.g., Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013; Zaller, 1999). Yet the high profitability of local television news (Papper, 2016c) means stations have the financial wherewithal to support the production of in-depth and resource-intensive contextual reporting.

The present study addresses these issues by surveying TV journalists about their work approach and their attitudes toward and experiences with contextual reporting. These views are then compared to those of newspaper journalists, with the goal of interpreting how the different groups of news workers view their roles. Asking journalists how they approach their craft can provide information about their professional values (see, e.g., Beam, Weaver, & Brownlee, 2009; Cassidy, 2005). Moreover, the roles that news workers see for themselves can affect the journalism they produce (Reese, 2001; van Zoonen, 1998).

Contextual Journalism

Fink and Schudson (2014) argue that the increased prevalence of contextual journalism is the most important change in reporting during the past half century. The contextual news style provides a broad perspective not seen in conventional reporting methods, with journalists taking a more holistic approach to reporting for the presumed betterment of society. A contextualist does not passively distribute information; instead, he or she focuses on how a story impacts society, answering the “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where,” but also the “why,” “how,” and “what’s possible” (Bro, 2008). Still, contextual reporting is consistent with journalism’s core values, which include an obligation to the truth and comprehensive coverage (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

Three contextual journalistic practices are gaining momentum: constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative. Constructive journalism applies positive psychology and other behavioral sciences to news work in an effort to produce stories that improve individual and societal well-being (McIntyre, 2015). Constructive journalists aim for productive and forward-looking stories, highlighting growth and hope just as often as disaster and conflict (Gyldensted, 2015). Meanwhile, solutions journalism provides rigorous and fact-driven stories about credible solutions

to societal problems (Benesch, 1998; McIntyre, 2015). Reporters in these stories do not offer solutions but instead detail the attempts of others to respond to social issues. According to Thier (2016), solutions journalism seeks to “engage readers, offer a blueprint for change, and alter the tone of public discourse” (p. 330). Finally, restorative narrative focuses on recovery, restoration, and resilience in the aftermath, or in the midst, of difficult times (Tenore, 2014). It calls for journalists to cover tragic events long after their immediate impact to capture the redevelopment process and help individuals and communities move forward (Dahmen, 2016).

Local TV News

Local TV routines often facilitate the efficient production of quick, short stories (see, e.g., Belt & Just, 2008; McManus, 1994). These routines have the potential to limit a reporter’s ability to conduct original contextual reporting, which often requires a commitment of time and resources. On a typical day, a TV reporter might conduct interviews, shoot and edit video, write stories for newscasts and web media, and drive to a remote location to deliver live reports (Papper, 2016b). These technical and logistical duties can negatively affect news quality and can diminish the time available for long-form journalism activities, such as source development and research (Blankenship, 2016; Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013). Partly because time is limited, local TV reporters generate story ideas from “passive” sources, including police scanners, viewer tips, and other news outlets, more often than newspaper reporters (see, e.g., Coulson and Lacy, 2003; Lewis, 2014). This passive discovery process tends to yield fewer in-depth stories compared to active discovery, during which reporters “dig” for original ideas (McManus, 1994). Additionally, because TV news staffs are often smaller than newspaper staffs, most TV reporters do not have specialized “beats.” Without beats, journalists have less background knowledge and context, limiting their ability to produce complex, substantive stories (see, e.g., Kaniss, 1991; Waldman, 2011). Regarding story selection, TV news managers often favor entertaining and sensational stories that are cheaper to produce, over those that are high quality (see, e.g., Hamilton, 2004; Zaller, 1999). Contextual reports tend to take substantial effort, have high societal relevance, and downplay sensational aspects in favor of a wider-angle approach (Fink & Schudson, 2014; McIntyre, Dahmen, & Abdenour, 2016). Thus, station managers might discourage the production of contextual news. Scholarship indicates that “hard” news, which is socially and politically relevant and takes greater effort to produce (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2012), is becoming less prevalent on local TV (see, e.g., Lacy et al., 2013). Belt and Just (2008) found that 25% of U.S. local TV stories focused on significant political and community issues, but years later, Jurkowitz and colleagues (2013) reported that only 3% of local TV stories covered politics or government and that the average story length had decreased.

However, TV stations have not suffered the financial woes that newspapers have in recent years and therefore might be in a better position to invest in expensive long-form reporting (Malone, 2014). Local TV is the number one journalism source for U.S. adults, 46% of whom watch it “often” to get news (“Local News Interest,” 2015; Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). Partly because of this popularity, overall local TV news revenue has increased; in 2015, nearly 60% of stations said they made a profit from news (Papper, 2016c). Not coincidentally, local TV employment is near an all-time high, and stations are producing more local news than ever before (Papper, 2016a, 2016b). Malone (2014) suggests that many local TV stations have begun pouring their resources into time-intensive investigative reporting to fill the void left by struggling newspapers. Station managers might also be recognizing the value of contextual reporting, which, like investigative journalism, can be time-consuming but can also win awards and benefit democratic society (Hamilton, 2016).

Examples of contextual journalism on local TV include: an award-winning report from KING-TV that puts homelessness in context by telling the story of a nurse who paints portraits of her homeless patients, and a story from WITI-TV that chronicles the transformation of a former leader of the White Power movement (“Judges Pick Winners,” 2013; “Life After Hate,” 2012).

News Professionalism and Journalistic Roles

The roles that journalists see for themselves can contribute to the types of stories they pursue or don’t pursue (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In 1963, Journalist Sydney W. Head told reporters, “Every single thing you do . . . is going to be colored by your orientation” (p. 596). That same year, Cohen (1963) discovered a duality in this orientation: “neutral” journalists simply dispensed information, while “participants” interpreted and challenged information sources. Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman (1972) later found evidence of those two ideological types, or functions, in a survey of more than 1,300 U.S. news professionals. The job roles that journalists most valued were participant items, including investigating government claims and providing analysis of complex problems. In subsequent “American Journalist” studies (see, e.g., Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007), researchers added more roles to the mix and settled on four broad functions: interpretive (similar to the “participant” journalist), disseminator (similar to the “neutral” journalist), adversarial (journalists who see themselves as adversaries of government and business), and populist mobilizer (journalists who embrace community-based activist reporting). Polls in the last decade show that U.S. journalists are placing increased emphasis on in-depth interpretive roles, such as investigating government claims and analyzing problems, and decreased emphasis on disseminator roles, such as getting information to the public quickly and appealing to a wide audience (Beam et al., 2009; Willnat & Weaver, 2014). In a study examining the roles of newspaper journalists, McIntyre, Dahmen, and Abdenour (2016) found evidence of a fifth journalistic function, the “contextualist.” The roles associated with this function (acting in a socially

responsible manner, alerting the public of threats and opportunities, contributing to society's well-being, and accurately portraying the world) were among the most popular in the study, reflecting the recent rise of the contextual approach.

TV journalists frequently view their professional identities differently than other news workers (Deuze, 2008). van Zoonen (1998) argued that reporters working for more audience-oriented outlets, including local TV stations, are allowed more room for subjectivity and personal interests in their reporting compared to those working for less audience-oriented outlets, such as national TV networks or print outlets. However, empirical studies have shown that, compared to other news workers, local TV journalists place higher value on less subjective and less interpretive roles. For instance, Abdenour and Riffe (2016) and Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, and Wilhoit (2007) found that local TV news workers embraced disseminator roles, including appealing to a wide audience, avoiding unverified facts, and getting information to the public quickly, while placing low value on subjective roles such as letting ordinary people express views and developing intellectual and cultural interests.

Because TV journalists have routines and identities unique to their medium, and often approach their jobs differently than workers in other media, it is worth examining the role conceptions of local TV news professionals and how they differ from the role conceptions of other news professionals.

Absent directional hypotheses, the following research questions are proposed:

Research Question 1a: What are local TV journalists' experiences with and attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting (constructive journalism, solutions journalism, and restorative narrative)?

Research Question 1b: How do local TV journalists' experiences and attitudes toward contextual reporting compare to those of newspaper journalists?

Research Question 2a: Which professional roles do local TV journalists most value?

Research Question 2b: How do local TV journalists' role valuations compare to those of newspaper journalists?

Research Question 3a: Are contextual journalism roles important to local TV journalists?

Research Question 3b: How do local TV journalists' assessments of contextualist roles compare to those of newspaper journalists?

Method

TV and newspaper respondent data were collected in 2016 using multiple-contact surveys, as recommended by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009): A questionnaire

was emailed, followed by two reminder emails, each sent 1 week apart. To include larger staffs with more full-time journalists, only the largest 50% of markets were included: daily newspapers with circulations over 10,000 and TV stations in markets ranked 1–105 (Editor & Publisher, 2015; Molyneux, 2014; TVJobs.com, 2016). This produced 580 TV stations and 637 newspapers with active newsrooms. Researchers visited these outlets' websites and identified working journalists, defined as those likely to be involved in newsgathering: anchors, reporters, producers, writers, news managers, and photography/video staff, who then became targets of the survey. General managers, production managers, publishers, copy editors/page designers, sales staff, and web developers were excluded from both samples. Sports and traffic reporters were also excluded because they typically operate in an insulated area of coverage.

Most websites provided the names, titles, and email addresses of staff; however, some did not, particularly stations and newspapers in the largest markets. From the websites, 4,532 TV and 9,024 newspaper respondents with valid email addresses were identified and contacted. After eliminating respondents who did not answer a substantial amount of questions, researchers received valid responses from 281 TV and 1,318 newspaper journalists.

Measures

The TV and newspaper survey questionnaires contained items measuring respondents' agreement level (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) with 20 journalistic role conceptions: Weaver et al.'s (2007) 15 roles, plus 5 contextual roles (Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre, Dahmen, & Abdenour, 2016). Role item descriptions are included in Table 1. Five-point scales (e.g., 1 = *completely unfamiliar* to 5 = *very familiar*) measured respondents' perceptions of and experiences with contextual journalism forms. Respondents also indicated their attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting (constructive journalism, restorative narrative, and solutions journalism) by rating each from 1 to 5 on a series of six semantic differential scales (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989): "bad" to "good," "ineffective" to "effective," "worthless" to "worthwhile," "unwise" to "wise," "harmful" to "beneficial," and "biased" to "unbiased." The questionnaires also asked about respondents' work routines and demographic information.

Findings

TV journalists were evenly divided by gender (49.6% male, 50.4% female) and were highly educated—96.3% had a bachelor's or graduate degree. Regarding racial background, most were White (76.7%), followed by Black (11.7%) and Latino/a (7.5%), and ranged in age from 21 to 67 ($M = 37.64$, $SD = 12.31$). TV respondents reported an average of 15.7 years in the news business. The bulk of the sample was made up of reporters (56.4%) and anchors (30.4%). Regarding beats, half of the TV respondents (49.1%) were general assignment reporters, and the next two most common beats

Table 1. Percentage of Local Television and Newspaper Respondents Who Strongly Agree Role Items Are Core Functions of Journalism.

	Television (N = 281)	Newspaper (N = 1,318)
Alert the public of potential threats***	75.4	62.3
Act in a socially responsible way	66.5	62.3
Accurately portray the world	65.8	70.4
Investigate government claims	63.7	68.6
Get information to the public quickly***	60.5	50.3
Provide analysis of complex problems***	50.5	64.6
Contribute to society's well-being	50.2	49.1
Avoid stories with unverified content***	49.5	60.4
Alert the public of potential opportunities	40.6	40.0
Let ordinary people express views	35.2	32.6
Point to possible solutions	27.0	22.6
Discuss national policy	27.0	30.5
Motivate ordinary people to get involved	23.1	24.8
Discuss international policy**	18.9	24.4
Develop intellectual/cultural interests***	14.6	24.8
Concentrate on the widest audience***	13.9	7.3
Provide entertainment***	5.3	14.3
Serve as an adversary of government	5.3	5.8
Serve as an adversary of business	2.8	2.7
Set the political agenda*	1.8	3.4

Note. Newspaper data are from McIntyre, Dahmen, and Abdenour (2016).

*Difference between groups significant at $p < .05$. **Difference between groups significant at $p < .01$.

***Difference between groups significant at $p < .001$.

were breaking news (15.5%) and investigative journalism (12.5%). Most TV journalists (43%) said they worked for a station ranked between 51 and 100 in market size, 33% said their station ranked between 21 and 50, and 19% worked in the top 20 markets. The remaining 5% said their stations were outside the top 100 rankings.

Individuals in the newspaper sample were largely White (89.4%), male (60%), middle aged ($M = 43.74$ years, $SD = 14.25$), and educated (more than 90% had a bachelor's or graduate degree). They were more experienced than the broadcast sample, having worked in the news business for an average of 20.4 years. About half the newspaper respondents (49.9%) were reporters or writers, and 27.7% were editors. Another 14.5% were photographers or videographers. The most frequently reported newspaper beat was economy/business (30.2%), followed by investigative journalism (11.1%) and health (8%). Roughly half (51%) of newspaper respondents reported working at organizations with circulations between 10,000 and 50,000, 19% reported between 50,000 and 100,000, and 25% reported circulations greater than 100,000. The remaining 6% either estimated their circulations to be below 10,000 or said they weren't sure of their circulation figures.

Table 2. Mean Comparisons of Local Television and Newspaper Respondents' Perceptions of Solutions Journalism (SJ), Constructive Journalism (CJ), and Restorative Narrative (RN).

	Television (N = 281)	Newspaper (N = 1,318)
Familiarity w/SJ	3.22 (1.18)	3.16 (1.14)
Familiarity w/CJ	2.82 (1.13)	2.69 (1.07)
Familiarity w/RN	2.68 (1.12)	2.65 (1.08)
Have practiced SJ***	4.13 (0.90)	3.75 (0.98)
Have practiced CJ***	4.07 (0.86)	3.69 (0.96)
Have practiced RN***	4.18 (0.87)	3.81 (0.95)
Would practice SJ***	4.37 (0.77)	4.09 (0.91)
Would practice CJ***	4.28 (0.80)	3.99 (0.95)
Would practice RN***	4.31 (0.81)	4.06 (0.84)
Favorable attitude toward SJ*	4.06 (0.77)	3.94 (0.79)
Favorable attitude toward CJ**	3.95 (0.78)	3.77 (0.82)
Favorable attitude toward RN***	4.21 (0.75)	3.99 (0.74)

Note. Newspaper data are from McIntyre, Dahmen, and Abdenour (2016). Means are derived from 1 to 5 Likert-type scales, with standard deviations in parentheses.

*Difference between groups significant at $p < .05$. **Difference between groups significant at $p < .01$.

***Difference between groups significant at $p < .001$.

Research Question 1a asked about U.S. local TV journalists' experience with and attitudes toward three genres of contextual reporting. Data revealed that TV journalists were fairly unfamiliar with the three terms (Table 2), but a paired samples t test revealed that respondents were significantly more familiar with solutions journalism ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.18$) than constructive journalism, $M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.13$; $t(257) = 6.79$, $p < .001$, and significantly more familiar with constructive journalism than restorative narrative, $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.12$; $t(256) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. After being provided with a definition of the three terms, journalists were asked whether they *currently* practiced any of these genres in their work and whether they *would* implement any of these genres. They reported having used restorative narrative the most ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.87$), followed by solutions journalism ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 0.90$) and constructive journalism ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.86$), but the differences were not statistically significant. All means increased when respondents were asked if they would now implement these practices. TV journalists said they would be significantly more likely to use solutions journalism ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.77$) than constructive journalism, $M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.80$; $t(244) = 2.4$, $p < .05$. There were no significant differences between restorative narrative ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.81$) and the other two genres.

Research Question 1b asked how TV workers' perceptions of contextual journalism compared to newspaper journalists' perceptions. Both broadcast and newspaper workers reported being somewhat unfamiliar with the three contextual forms (Table 2). However, according to independent sample t tests, broadcast journalists were significantly more likely than print journalists to have practiced all three of the genres: solutions journalism, $t(365.93) = 5.93$, $p < .001$; constructive journalism,

$t(368.66) = 6.16, p < .001$; and restorative narrative, $t(368.9) = 5.99, p < .001$. Similarly, broadcast journalists reported being significantly more likely than print journalists to practice all three in the future: solutions journalism, $t(393.73) = 5.05, p < .001$; constructive journalism, $t(393.27) = 5.02, p < .001$; and restorative narrative, $t(356.11) = 4.39, p < .001$. And lastly, broadcast journalists reported significantly more favorable attitudes than print journalists toward all three: solutions journalism, $t(324.55) = -2.15, p < .05$; constructive journalism, $t(319.05) = -3.14, p < .01$; and restorative narrative, $t(312.44) = -4.05, p < .001$.

Research Question 2a asked which professional roles TV journalists held in highest regard. The most valued role was alerting the public of potential threats: 75.4% of respondents strongly agreed this role is a core function of journalism (Table 1). Respondents also highly valued acting in a socially responsible way (66.5% strong agreement), accurately portraying the world (65.8%), investigating government claims (63.7%), and getting information to the public quickly (60.5%).

Research Question 2b asked how TV role conceptions compared to those of newspaper journalists. TV and newspaper journalists agreed on four of their top five most valued roles but prioritized them differently (Table 1). Alerting the public of potential threats was the most valued role among TV respondents (75.4% strong agreement) but was the fourth most valued role among newspaper journalists (62.3%), a significant difference in proportion ($z = -4.52, p < .001$). Newspaper journalists' most valued role was accurately portraying the world (70.4% strong agreement); this role was third most valued among TV respondents (65.8%). TV journalists were significantly ($z = -3.16, p < .001$) more in favor of getting information to the public quickly (60.5% strong agreement) compared to their newspaper counterparts (50.3%), while newspaper journalists placed significantly higher value on analyzing complex problems (64.6% strong agreement vs. 50.5%; $z = 4.32, p < .001$) and avoiding stories with unverified content (60.4% strong agreement vs. 49.5%; $z = 3.33, p < .001$). Newspaper respondents also placed comparatively greater value on discussing international policy (24.4% strong agreement vs. 18.9%; $z = 2.1, p < .01$), developing intellectual and cultural interests (24.8% vs. 14.6%; $z = 4.21, p < .001$), providing entertainment (14.3% vs. 5.3%; $z = 5.46, p < .001$), and setting the political agenda (3.4% vs. 1.8%; $z = 1.71, p < .05$). TV journalists placed comparatively greater value on appealing to the widest audience (13.9% strong agreement vs. 7.3%; $z = -3.02, p < .001$).

Research Question 3a asked if U.S. TV journalists valued the roles inherent in contextual journalism. Data showed that broadcast respondents' top three professional roles (of the 20) were those exemplifying contextual journalism: alerting the public of potential threats, acting in a socially responsible manner, and accurately portraying the world (Table 1). The other two contextual roles, contributing to society's well-being and alerting the public of potential opportunities, ranked seventh and ninth among TV professionals, putting all five of the contextual roles within their top nine.

Research Question 3b asked how broadcasters' evaluations of contextual roles compared to newspaper journalists'. Both groups indicated that these roles were of

high value; the five contextual items ranked in the top 10 for both newspaper and TV respondents, although in slightly different order of importance (Table 1). Both groups placed the highest importance on a contextual role—newspaper journalists strongly valued accurately portraying the world, while TV journalists strongly valued alerting the public of potential threats. The only contextual role on which the two groups significantly differed was alerting the public of potential threats, which TV journalists more strongly supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study empirically analyzed the professional values of U.S. TV journalists and compared them to newspaper workers' professional values. Findings showed that TV journalists strongly supported contextual approaches. Perhaps the most notable result of the study was that broadcast journalists indicated greater overall support for contextual reporting than newspaper journalists. Specifically, TV respondents reported more favorable attitudes toward the three contextual genres analyzed in the study: constructive journalism, restorative narrative, and solutions journalism. TV journalists indicated they were more likely to have practiced these reporting forms and were more likely to practice them in the future, compared to newspaper employees. Additionally, broadcast workers' four most valued journalistic roles reflected a commitment to contextual and interpretive journalism: alerting the public of threats, acting in a socially responsible manner, accurately portraying the world, and investigating government claims. This is particularly interesting, given that local TV routines traditionally limit the production of in-depth, high-effort stories (see, e.g., Belt & Just, 2008). A possible explanation for this finding is a reported increase in investigative news on local TV (Malone, 2014). Investigative work is similar to contextual journalism because of its depth and originality. Thus, a renewed interest in its production might create greater interest in contextual reporting as well. A worthwhile direction for further study would be an inquiry into whether TV journalists' strong support for contextual reporting matches the actual content produced. However, TV and newspaper respondents in the present study were moderately unfamiliar with contextual reporting genres, lending credence to Fink and Schudson's (2014) idea that contextual journalism is misunderstood and should be studied further. To that end, perhaps future research could investigate the contextual news values of international journalists or of news consumers.

TV and newspaper journalists were matched on four of their five most valued journalistic roles, but the relative emphasis the two groups placed on each of the four roles was different, consistent with Deuze's (2008) idea that journalists share common values but apply them to their jobs in a variety of ways. The two groups differed significantly on several roles: TV journalists more strongly valued their duty to distribute information to the public quickly, while newspaper journalists more strongly valued their duty to analyze complex problems. Additionally, TV respondents did not feel as strongly as newspaper reporters about avoiding unverified content; about half

of TV reporters strongly agreed that this is a core function of journalism, compared to roughly 61% of print reporters.

There are several possible reasons for role discrepancies between the two groups of journalists. Because of the ever-quickening news cycle facilitated by the internet, broadcasters might feel increased pressure to keep up by distributing news quickly. If “breaking” news cannot be verified, TV workers might air the information anyway, knowing that details can be confirmed later (Broersma & Graham, 2013; Bruno, 2011). But more traditional forces may also be at play. As Singer (2004) and others have shown, the work “culture” of a specific news industry can exert a powerful influence. Despite the strong affinity local TV news workers showed for contextual journalism’s broad perspective in the present survey, the environment in which they work emphasizes the production of short, quick stories. All journalists now have the power to distribute information quickly through the internet, but broadcasters have been doling out live information to audiences for nearly 100 years, so this job duty is more likely to be in their “DNA.” Therefore, TV journalists’ proclivity toward contextual journalism might be limited by their sense of “duty” to distribute shorter stories quickly, with or without careful verification. Contextual news could further be limited by veteran local TV managers steeped in the tradition of favoring “breaking” stories over in-depth pieces. Conversely, the comparatively vast physical space on the newspaper page traditionally given to print writers has likely instilled in them a duty to help the public tackle complex problems, despite this study’s finding that newspaper journalists value contextual journalism less than TV journalists. Unlike local TV work, the socialized routines of newspaper work may stimulate in-depth, contextual reporting. Thus, a newspaper journalist might feel encouraged to investigate complex issues from a broad, contextual perspective, even if he or she is not particularly inclined to do so. This “competition” between individual priorities and organizational constraints in the news production process is a rich area of study (see, e.g., Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) and should continue to be analyzed.

Despite its contributions, the present study has potential limitations. Journalists chose whether to participate, and there is possible measurement error in self-reported survey items. Compared to other studies, the current TV sample was slightly skewed toward younger, female, and White journalists (Papper, 2016d; Willnat & Weaver, 2014). Additionally, a low number of TV respondents might limit the project’s representativeness. However, it should be noted that low response rates are common for web surveys of journalists (see, e.g., Molyneux, 2014; Nah, Yamamoto, Chung, & Zuercher, 2015). Further, both surveys met Wimmer and Dominick’s (2013) recommended minimum response rate (5%) for internet surveys (p. 219). Finally, although these journalists’ primary concerns are producing newspaper and TV stories, both groups likely incorporate online work into their routines.

Overall, TV news workers in this study showed strong support for contextual role items, providing further evidence that the majority of U.S. journalists feel a duty to serve society’s best interests by being socially responsible, just as the Hutchins Commission hoped for 70 years ago. Such support for these time-honored journalistic

functions confirms Fink and Schudson's (2014) notion that the contextual news approach is gaining momentum.

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Nicole Smith Dahmen is an associate professor at the School of Journalism and Communication, University of Oregon. Her research focuses on ethics and technology in visual communication with an emphasis on photojournalism in the digital age. She also has a special interest in contextual reporting, specifically studying restorative narrative and solutions journalism. She has been asked to speak about restorative narrative to professional organizations, such as Poynter, NPPA, and MediaShift.