

# NEWS ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP REPORT

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For the News Engagement Workshop, the Engaging News Project brought together a group of digital news thought leaders. From left: Jonathan Keegan, The Wall Street Journal; Sara Carothers, The Washington Post; Kelly Born, Hewlett Foundation; Ashley Muddiman, Engaging News Project; Rodney Gibbs, The Texas Tribune; Mike Dyer, The Daily Beast; Natalie Stroud, Engaging News Project; Donna Krache, CNN; and Alex Curry, Engaging News Project.

## INTRODUCTION

**THE BRAINSTORM:** What happens when digital news innovators gather to visit about opportunities and challenges facing the industry?

In February, the Engaging News Project hosted its first News Engagement Workshop, bringing together digital news thought leaders from across the country to discuss current practices and future possibilities. During the two-day workshop, participants shared their ideas and experiences with digital innovation in their news organizations.

This report summarizes participants' discussions on these topics:

- What constitutes success in digital news innovation?
- What role should news audiences have?
- Are fragmentation and personalization problems or opportunities?
- What opportunities and challenges are there in today's digital news environment?

## THE BRAINSTORM: What is “success” in the online newsroom?

Participants recognized that defining “success” in the online newsroom is difficult because of the structure and organization of newsrooms, the number of possible metrics, and the data generated by the metrics.



From left: Charles Mahtesian, NPR; Mark Francescutti, The Dallas Morning News; Tom Negrete, The Sacramento Bee; and Alex Curry, Engaging News Project.

### 1. Structure and Organization of Newsrooms

Participants expressed a variety of perspectives on how the structure and organization of newsrooms affect how success is defined.

- There are legacy issues. The structure of traditional outlets must be reorganized so that producers have specialties in how to “amp up” a story with online packaging, story structure, and engagement. (Mahtesian)
- There is a push-and-pull between modes of thinking. A staffer may design a stand-alone infographic. Copy editors may wish to hold the infographic to run alongside a news story. That is print thinking. We are getting better at realizing that graphics can go up on the site at any time. (Keegan)

- Online news personnel assist with how a traditional news story is packaged online. There is some pushback because not all legacy journalists want to change. Packaging changes the way the story is told and can change how traffic comes to a website. (Francescutti)
- There is a vast business side that looks at the numbers and metrics differently than the newsroom. (Koren)
- Daily Beast staff meet monthly to discuss the overall metrics on their stories. Since instituting the practice three months ago, monthly averages for referrals have increased by about 30 percent. (Dyer)

### 2. The Number of Metrics

Online newsrooms are often overwhelmed with the number of metrics that could be used to define success.

- It is difficult to tell which metrics matter. Advertisers like impressions. Journalists like to report what is important, but metrics may not follow. Mobile numbers are often a reverse of website metrics. Is there a magic statistic? Time on page? Engagement? (Francescutti)
- There is little sophistication in how metrics are examined. Unique visitors and page views matter. Comparisons are made between the current month and the previous month. (Gibbs)

- The focus is often on time on site and repeat visits. Newsrooms and journalists have an obligation to measure comprehension, however. In other words, can an individual understand what was just read in a news story? (Negrete)
- Relying on a subscription model, The Arizona Republic tailors content in 16 community editions based on demographic metrics. Each demographic (Boomers, Millennials, Hispanics) gets a specific news product. (Nothhaft)
- The Daily Beast uses a Value-per-Visitor metric (VPV). This metric allows organizations to ask how they can take action and gets all staff members speaking the same language. The VPV looks at how site visitors do seven things: read, comment, tweet, share, email, click a link, and click an app. There is an economic and journalistic value to each of these actions. (Dyer)

#### Data Metric Platforms Mentioned

- Chartbeat
- Parse.ly
- Omniture
- Visual Revenue
- Hootsuite
- Facebook

### 3. Metrics Data

Numerous newsroom metrics lead to an abundance of data. The data, however, are difficult to comprehend without newsroom personnel trained in analysis.

#### Metrics Discussed

- Page Views (most commonly used)
- Time on Page
- Repeat Visits
- Local Uniques
- Impressions
- Engagement
- Value per Visitor
- Click through Rate
- Traffic
- Video Completion Rate
- Subscriptions

Seven represented outlets reported that they use data dashboards in the newsroom.

- The Chartbeat dashboard is easiest to understand immediately and influences people in the newsroom the most. But we need a better metric than page views. The data do not give a sense of value to the quality of journalism in a story. A story about Donald Trump will get more page views than a news article would get. Where is the line for when a journalist is contributing to noise? (Carothers)
- The New York Times has a small newsroom analytics team to assist journalists with examining how stories should be written and packaged to reach certain audiences. (Koren)
- Data are bad for telling you what to write, phenomenal for telling you how to package content. (Dyer)
- Some journalists and newsroom staff at The Texas Tribune are trained on

what the data mean. (Gibbs)

### 4. Useful Metrics

The wealth of available data, while at times overwhelming for newsrooms, nonetheless has led to innovations in how news stories are packaged and released to meet the public's information needs.

- Traffic patterns are analyzed for when to release stories. For The Bee, the release of fresh story content coincides with the workday at the state Capitol. (Negrete)

- Traffic patterns allow a news outlet to float story ideas or even hold stories back if they will not get enough eyes. (Mahtesian)
- CNN's photo blog helps visual learners grasp the news and has had success based on unique views and video completion rates. (Krache)
- At The Wall Street Journal, metrics help to determine where infographics go to maximize views. (Keegan)
- As a story is written, an independent infographic is sometimes made to correspond with the content of the story. Both are released at the same time and we see which format performs better. Infographics do 300 percent better with social sharing across topics. Most newsrooms do not have the resources to produce stories in different ways. (Dyer)

## 5. A/B Testing

The experiences of newsrooms are vastly different when it comes to A/B testing of online news content and features.

- Packaging matters to a story and is just as important as the content. The Dallas Morning News A/B tests 50 percent of headlines to determine which versions have better click through rates and drive more traffic. (Franciscutti)
- The Daily Beast has the ability to A/B test everything, including site design, headlines, decks, images, and the size and color of social buttons. Headlines may be constructed as news headlines or social headlines. Everything is tested to determine what is most effective based on story or site performance indicators. (Dyer)
- A social team and a homepage team are in place to examine the headlines that work. Headlines are designed to have people share them as well as to drive traffic to the site. An in-house platform was built for social sharing. (Carothers)
- The Texas Tribune is in the early stages of using A/B testing to test membership, support, and contribution rates. (Gibbs)

## 6. Ideal Metrics

Workshop participants were divided into groups and asked to create the “ideal” metric for use in the online newsroom. The recommendations were as follows:

- New metrics should be created based on the content of the article to find out if the reader is benefitting from the story.
- Metrics should capture fly-by versus valuable users.
- Newsrooms need to know more about which story model is the most successful – metanarratives, specific, infographic, inverted pyramid, etc.
- Any metric must be concerned with the return on investment (ROI). What resources went into the story and what is the outcome?
- Metrics should be concerned with impact outside the traditional set of indicators (i.e. page views, time on page). Impact could be assessed with participation in town halls or voting.

## THE BRAINSTORM: What role should news audiences have?

Participants were asked several questions related to comment sections, including:

- What are the best practices – the do’s and do not’s – for comment sections?
- Where do we have consensus and where don’t we about best practices?
- If resources were not a constraint, how would we improve comment sections (and maybe “comment section” isn’t even the right term — maybe we need to be talking about something besides a comment section)?

With these questions as discussion prompts, participants responded with ideas that can be grouped into four categories: (1) dealing with uncivil commenters, (2) letting commenters know someone is listening, (3) leaving the comment section for the commenters, and (4) reimagining the comment section and engagement space.

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### 1. Dealing with Uncivil Commenters

Many participants shared how their newsrooms handled uncivil commenters.

- We had discussions internally and with our users explaining that this is not your house, this is our house, and if you’re going to come in and start breaking windows and throwing over tables, we are going to ask you to leave and you can’t come back until you behave. And people got angry. But our editorial guy has been very diligent in following up with people, online and with phone calls, and explaining this to them. Some commenters have been welcomed back into the fold; he’s renewed their accounts and unblocked them. It’s been great. First, he’s been keeping a lid on the hostility, and second, he’s been bringing more people out of the woodwork to comment and share their thoughts. (Gibbs)
- One technique that I’ve heard about is something referred to as “bozo” mode, where if you have particular commenters who are clearly not adding much to the conversation, you can enable their comments to make it look like they are being posted, but they’re actually not.<sup>1</sup> (Keegan)
- We use active moderation. Although it is vastly resource intensive, having a human make a space where readers are encouraged to contribute meaningful comments makes the comments more readable for other people. (Koren)
- Do you want people to discuss controversial topics on your site? Is there any hope to have a great, positive, intelligent conversation about these topics, or do we just throw those types of topics completely out? (Francescutti)

### 2. Letting Commenters Know Someone is Listening

Not unrelated to the theme of dealing with uncivil comments was the idea that comments improved when commenters knew someone in the newsroom was listening.

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<sup>1</sup>The general consensus among participants, even among those representing news organizations that use “bozo” mode, was that it is not a good solution to dealing with poor commenting.

- What I've noticed is that if the very first thing you do is take the time to thank viewers for giving you feedback, it disarms them if they are combative and it takes the conversation to a civil level. (Krache)
- What if you covered your comment section as a distinct beat? What better way to show the value of commenters than if you built a beat around them? (Mahtesian)
- We had editors going through and pointing out the “comment of the day,” and that got a lot of really good response. (Negrete)
- When we actually talk to commenters about their bad behavior, they usually apologize or calm down. The veil of leaving a comment digitally makes people a little freer to be extreme. There needs to be some way of mediating that – it seems that personal interaction works really well. (Koren)
- We need to remind people that they are talking to other human beings instead of something out there in the ether. Someone will write a very angry thing to the newsroom, and when someone in the newsroom actually responds, they become really nice because they didn't realize that a person would actually respond to it. (Carothers)
- When there is live interaction, it can really diffuse incivility, but it is super labor intensive. (Gibbs)

#### Reading List

- Jonah Berger - [Contagious](#)

#### Websites

- [Kinja](#)
- [Living Room Conversations](#)
- [Medium](#) (cited in the Brainstorm as a great example of in-line commenting on desktop and mobile)
- [Politix](#)
- [Quartz](#)

### 3. Leaving the Comment Section for the Commenters

Several participants suggested that comment sections are not always places where reporters are welcome or should participate.

- I would tell reporters not to engage with commenters at all because you could never win. The vast majority of comments had very little to do with what had been written about, and it was very discouraging, as a reporter, to read the comments. (Mahtesian)
- We experimented a little bit with columnists going in and responding to comments, and the commenters didn't like it. They said, “You have a column, you've had your say already, this is our space. Get out of here.” (Negrete)
- I think whether a reporter engages or not depends on the subject matter. I could definitely see why in a heated political conversation in an election year, engaging may not help. It may just lead to more vitriol. But there are plenty of places where a reporter's involvement in some way is really beneficial to the report, as well as to how the comment streams are going. (Koren)

### 4. Reimagining the Comment Section and Engagement Space

Respondents shared their ideas about how to improve comment sections, while some wondered if comment sections were even the ideal space to foster engagement with and among site visitors. Some of the improvement ideas included: Using an “agree to disagree” and similar buttons instead of the “like” button; giving the keys of forum moderation to “super-users”; requiring engagement with the article (for example, a short knowledge quiz) before allowing commenting; and curating a community around topics and content. Other ideas that generated

interest and discussion are highlighted in the quotations below.

- We are moving to in-line commenting because, in talking to publishers that already have in-line commenting, one of the things they've found is that when the conversation and commenting was grounded in a much more specific context than "whatever it is you think this article is about," that is, when the commenting is pegged more to a particular paragraph or this particular quote, it really cuts down on the vitriol, because most of the vitriol tends to be non-specific. From our looking around, it seems like in-line commenting works. (Dyer)
- We've built this thing that we call "spectrum commenting," which is actually a special feature, not something that is at the bottom of the page. It is for specific news topics, and it's an interactive feature that is based on comments. You ask a specific question... and once we asked the people a specific question, they gave really good responses. It was also moderated, and only the good comments went in. We, as a news organization, learned a lot of things from the responses. But it takes a lot of time to produce that. It's not something that can happen on every article page. (Carothers)
- Maybe there's a way to give people a reward for their good commenting behavior that will help them be more inspired to participate. (Nothaft)
- One thing that might help is if you go to the comment section and instead of this long legalese disclosure, what if it was a video with the human faces of the editors who will actually be interacting with the comments? I wonder if that will affect commenting, having a human saying, look we actually read your comments and we will respond to them and here's our policy for how we ingest your feedback. (Keegan)
- I'm not remotely convinced that commenting is the right way to get people to interact. I'm willing to say that the majority of us would say that the majority of comments on stories have no civic value, and commenting overall has no business value. So the question is, what do you replace it with? (Dyer)
- From a civic standpoint, we ultimately don't care if people interact on our site, so long as they appropriate these things in their lives. Commenting is not the same as actually being involved in your community; it's just commenting. The fundamental goal of what we're doing is to get people to appropriate the information into their lives and take some sort of pro-social action. (Dyer)

# SEGMENTATION AND PERSONALIZATION

## THE BRAINSTORM: How do personalization and segmentation work now? How could they work in the future?

There was great variability in how news organizations think about personalizing and segmenting news content. We identified seven different approaches, as described below.

### 1. By Topic

- About two years ago, we realized that across the McClatchy papers, people were no longer going directly to the home page, but were going to topic pages. We've been using semantic analysis to develop our topic pages, which do pretty well in generating traffic. We're also moving toward personalization because advertisers are demanding it, but it is challenging to do across all of the McClatchy newspapers because they have different systems. (Negrete)
- In focus groups, people said that they wanted international coverage, but then when unobtrusively watching them browse afterward, they didn't look at the international coverage. It's becoming more important to look at the return on investment (ROI) for different beats. We have to ask whether we're going to be the best at seven things, or just OK at 25 things. (Francescutti)
- We are changing the style of the content by the categories on the navigation bar – entertainment news, for instance, is more visual. In the politics section, we have more blogs. (Krache)
- The Texas Tribune does have some content segmentation. We partnered with an academic institution to produce a newsletter on water, TribPlus Water. We now are working with academic partners to publish twice-a-month newsletters for five additional topics. (Gibbs)



Natalie Stroud, director of the Engaging News Project, with workshop participants Donna Krache, CNN, and Keira Nothaff, The Arizona Republic.

### 2. By Demographics

The Arizona Republic has become focused on audience segmentation. The print version is targeted toward Boomers. AZCentral is aimed at a Gen-X audience (30-49). We have been doing research on better reaching a Hispanic audience. We are working on building a new site all about firsts (car, mortgage, etc.) for Millennials. We are thinking about how much content needs to be changed for these different audiences. For example, Boomers are interested in watchdog reporting, but less interested in education.

In our research, we learned that Millennials are more interested in education and that this group is interested in political fact-checks, so we do these frequently online. (Nothaft)

- One question is whether general news organizations need to change their content depending on demographic groups. (Francescutti)
- The Wall Street Journal has been building out our foreign bureaus recently and so there's an interest in translating our interactives into other languages. (Keegan)

### 3. By Past Site Behavior

- We've been building a recommendation system called Trove that provides a list of recommendations based on previous visits. We are interested in tailoring the product depending on past behavior – if someone hasn't read an article on Syria, we can feature the explainer more prominently than for someone who has read lots of stories about Syria. (Carothers)
- The New York Times has put a recommendation engine into place and will be developing it further based on site data. The problem is figuring out how to get people deeper into the site and develop some sort of loyalty, instead of having them read one article and then leave. The drawback is if this gives people what is of interest at the expense of a more general report, in the traditional sense, of the news of the day, which has been the central mission of the news media. (Koren)
- For us, anyone who comes on the site five or more times a month is our core audience; two to four is our halo audience. We track how these numbers are moving over time. (Dyer)

#### Segmentation Strategies Mentioned

- Demographics (age, race, language)
- Platform (mobile, tablet, desktop)
- Location (local, national, international)
- Past site behavior (articles accessed previously, frequency of accessing site)
- Topics / Content areas
- How people come to the site (social, news aggregator)

### 4. By How People Come to the Site

- We use passive personalization. We don't invest in a lot of tools that require authentication for personalization. We can tailor the experience depending on how you come to the site (e.g. Facebook versus Drudge Report). (Dyer)

### 5. By Platform

- We're also dealing with technological segmentation – the experience on mobile is different from tablet and desktop, for instance. (Keegan)
- The Arizona Republic has been looking at segmentation by platforms such as mobile. (Nothaft)

### 6. By Location

- The first time people navigate to CNN.com, they are asked which country version should be set. (Krache)

- At the Post, we use geolocation and if you're coming from DC, there are more local news stories. (Carothers)

## **7. No Segmentation**

- I don't worry about segmentation. My main concern is how to translate the story for our audience. (Mahtesian)
- We don't worry a lot about segmentation because our potential audience is anyone on the Internet. For us, people chose a headline on social media and then arrived on the website. (Dyer)

# POLARIZATION

## THE BRAINSTORM: If resources were not an issue, what could your organization do to address political polarization?

Participants were given five minutes to brainstorm, then share their ideas. We've categorized the ideas generated into five categories: (1) represent and humanize the other side, (2) explore different ways of presenting the news to encourage exposure to diverse views, (3) publicize efforts at bringing in diverse viewpoints, (4) create new games and tools, and (5) improve media and civic literacy. The group also had important insights about what the media can, and should, do to address polarization.

We first discussed the state of polarization, using the following chart as an example.

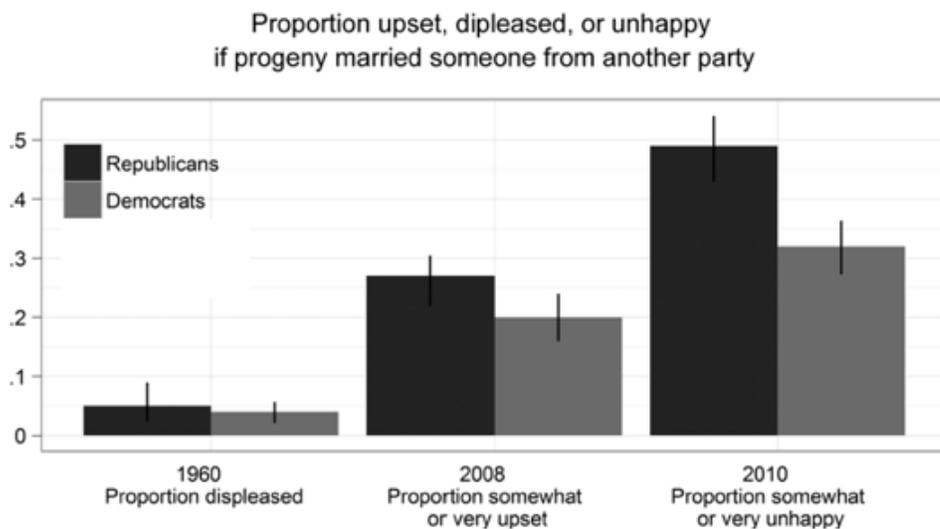


Chart (edited) from Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Representing and Humanizing the Other Side

One of the clearest themes across participants was finding ways to humanize representations of different political viewpoints in the news.

- Some televised presentations, like the camera angle used, can amplify polarization.<sup>3</sup> Getting people who are politically opposed on the same stage, in front of a live audience, can diffuse polarization. There might be a way to use video or Google Chat to humanize people with different perspectives. (Gibbs)

<sup>2</sup>Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405–431.

<sup>3</sup>Research supports that camera angles can amplify polarization. See, for example, Scheufele, D. A., Kim, E., & Brossard, D. (2007). My friend's enemy: How split-screen debate coverage influences evaluation of presidential candidates. *Communication Research*, 34(1), 3–24.

- Local issues can bring people together, even when national issues are more divisive. Also, explaining why people hold certain views can humanize people with different perspectives. Events that bring people who hold different views, but who are open to other perspectives, together, face-to-face, may affect polarization. (Negrete)
- We try to flag diverse views in the comment section. It also would be possible to use outreach to bring in other views if they aren't represented. (Koren)
- Reporting also can be used to humanize other views. (Koren)
- We could have an explanatory series about the price of polarization – how it affects us in our daily lives. It could include Bill Bishop's book and examine whether popular culture, law making, and where we live are different now than they were historically. (Mahtesian)

## 2. Changing News Presentation

Several workshop participants suggested that news formats could be changed to encourage people to look at other political viewpoints.



Ashley Muddiman, research associate with the Engaging News Project, brainstorms with workshop participants.

- What if we created a political style sheet? If we knew people's political viewpoints, we could tailor the news product. Photos, headlines, interactives, and where items appear on a page could be tailored to include information challenging one's point of view. (Keegan)

- There are several cases where prominent political figures have friendships with people from another political party. The media could showcase cooperation and friendships across the political aisle. (Krache)

- It may be possible to engage people via humor, such as what Jon Stewart and Colbert do. Humor may be a route to

discourage political polarization. (Nothaft)<sup>4</sup>

- Another idea would be to create infographics showing views on multiple sides of an issue. (Koren)

<sup>4</sup>At the Engaging News Project, we had a similar idea – that humor may be a way to discourage polarization. We created a serious version and a humorous version of a news website and had people browse one of the sites in an experiment. Those browsing the humorous site were less tolerant of views unlike their own and were not more likely to look at counter-attitudinal views compared to those browsing the serious site. We looked at a satirical form of humor that was very one-sided (either favoring a right or a left political view), however. More research should evaluate whether different forms of humor may affect polarization. See Stroud, N. J., & Muddiman, A. (2013). Selective exposure, tolerance, and comedic news. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(3), 271-290.

- Right now, intellectual political talk takes place primarily on Sunday morning. It would be great if it took place during another time, and with other formats, like documentaries and discussion groups. (Krache)

### 3. Publicizing the News

Insightful comments about how the news media market themselves led to another way in which organizations could address polarization.

- Media aren't marketing themselves well because they aren't combatting presumptions about partisanship. They should be showcasing cross-ideological views, such as how many columnists with different viewpoints they have. (Francescutti)
- Are journalists sticking to reporting principles when they are on social media? Some out their political leanings – this may increase polarization. (Francescutti)
- News organizations could be more transparent about their politics. If they are more liberal, then they could say that they have to work harder. (Negrete)

### 4. Creating New Games and Tools

Games and tools also came up as a way to reduce polarization – although some made suggestions in the hopes that they could be improved upon.

- Do people with extreme views know that they are outliers? If they knew, would it matter? Perhaps there's a way to develop a tool that gives people information about the extremity of their views. (Mahtesian)
- We could develop a tool showing what people “like you” and “not like you” are reading. (Mahtesian)
- These are not good ideas, but perhaps they'll spark some new thinking. Gamification may be one way to address polarization. First, one could create a “Capture the Flag Pull Quotes” system where the first commenter gets a featured pull quote. If not enough people share the comment, then a different political perspective could be featured. Second, you could have a “Polarization Paywall.” If you read seven one-sided stories, you don't get more content until you read a story from the other side. (Dyer)

### 5. Media and Civic Literacy

Several participants echoed that people, youth in particular, need more training in media and civic literacy.

- We should teach youth that you can focus on issues without being adversarial and can have civil discourse. They need to know that it's acceptable to “agree to disagree.” (Krache)
- People need to know what propaganda is and how fact-checking works. (Nothoft)

#### Reading List

- Bill Bishop – [The Big Sort](#)
- Alain De Botton - [The News: A User's Manual](#)

#### Websites

- Mike Monteiro - [How Designers Destroyed the World](#)
- [National Institute for Civic Discourse](#)
- [Pew Typology Quiz](#)
- [Politifact](#)

- People need to know the basic facts and how their understanding of the facts is sometimes imbalanced. (Koren)

### **What Can, and Should, the Media Do?**

A robust discussion asked what role the media play, and should play, with respect to polarization. Opportunities do exist. Although research shows that people are drawn to like-minded media, which can increase polarization, mainstream news outlets still attract significant audiences.<sup>5</sup>

At the workshop, some participants emphasized that the media have incentives to cultivate polarization and feature polarizing voices. Others noted that the media don't always recognize that they affect polarization. Further, it isn't always clear what practices increase polarization.

- How do news organizations amplify polarization? We need to better understand what contributes to polarization. It is possible that article content and online polls, for instance, affect polarization. Journalists aren't routinely engaged with these issues, but maybe they should be. Careless practices can have real-world effects. (Carothers)
- The first step is acknowledging that we're part of the problem. Media are part of the problem because they amplify more extreme voices instead of reporting on those with more moderate political ideas. (Negrete)
- There are limits to what we can, and should, try to do on this front. After all, extreme and polarizing figures can be monetized because they generate more clicks. The media do amplify polarization by giving these figures attention. (Mahtesian)
- There are incentives for media to not address polarization. After all, it generates page views and gets people excited. (Krache)
- News organizations could directly confront the idea that people don't trust the media and think about how to get people to their sites despite polarized views. Local television advertises that they're "looking out for you" and uses stories that play to people's emotions. Sports is a way to bring people to the site and then once they're there, they might actually learn something. (Francescutti)

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<sup>5</sup> Garrett, R. K. (2009). Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate. *Journal of Communication*, 59, 676–699. Stroud, N. J. (2011) *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## THE BRAINSTORM: What can digital innovators learn from one another?

Participants were invited to share an example of digital innovation used in their news organization.



Sara Carothers presents The Washington Post's Truth Teller app.

**Mark Francescutti** admitted that one of his greatest fears as a journalist is not reaching his audience. To help resolve that fear, The Dallas Morning News teamed up with a local sports talk radio station to create Sports Day Talk, an app that features both the radio station's broadcasts and the newspaper's sports coverage. In its first six months, the app had 77,000 downloads and a usage rate between 50 and 90 percent.

In today's changing digital world, it can be difficult for a cable news program to last more than a few years. But with a willingness to adapt to its audience's needs, CNN Student News has been one of the network's top rated programs

since 1989. **Donna Krache**, the show's executive producer, said that the program went exclusively digital this year to meet the needs of its audience, which is primarily middle and high school teachers and students.

When The Sacramento Bee was struggling, **Tom Negrete** contacted an unlikely source: Stanford University's Department of Computer Science. With their help, the Bee built a "road map" to help improve their web presence. This has included using a Facebook login in the comment section to help the newsroom better understand their audience. The newspaper is always working on partnerships with other organizations to share news content, with the goal of keeping readers on their website and off of search engines.

**Keira Nothhaft** shared the success The Arizona Republic has had with AZ, a twice-a-week newsmag designed for tablets. The magazine features a variety of interesting content and interactive features. For its work, The Arizona Republic received the 2013 Innovator of the Year Award from APME (Associated Press Managing Editors).

**Mike Dyer** of The Daily Beast said the majority of users read one article and then leave the website. To keep them on the site, The Daily Beast created the "Read This List." Every time a user clicks on an article, four other articles appear underneath it. Each article still has its own web address, allowing the site to capture page views. With the addition of the "Read This List," The Daily Beast's page views jumped by 40 percent and the average visit time tripled.

When The Texas Tribune started live streaming coverage of the Texas Legislature, audience interest was low. But, **Rodney Gibbs** said, that changed in June 2013, when the Tribune was the only media outlet covering Wendy Davis' filibuster. Since then, the Tribune has begun live streaming a variety of events, such as a press conference for Senator Ted Cruz and a fundraising dinner for Davis. Gibbs said each live-streamed event averages 2,000 to 10,000 viewers.

When **Charles Mathesian** worked at Politico, the site's biggest innovation was simple: reengineer the traditional story model. Mathesian, now at NPR, encouraged his reporters to get away from what they used to think was a story. Instead, he told them to think about what people actually want to know about, and then break it down in a readable way.

**Sara Carothers** told workshop participants that the idea behind The Washington Post's Truth Teller app came from a fairly simple question: How do people in a crowd know if politicians are telling the truth? Truth Teller features a database of facts. The feature provides fact checking as close to real time as possible, so it can be used during speeches or interviews.

**Jonathan Keegan** likes to have a deep connection with reporters. This allows reporters to come to him early with ideas for graphics and interactive features— like The Wall Street Journal's Health Care Explorer. The Explorer allows users to compare health plans offered through healthcare.gov. Users also can share their findings with others through Twitter.

To put readers' comments more in perspective, The New York Times started asking for a little more information. **Sasha Koren** said that when users leave a comment, they are asked additional questions, such as demographic information. This information is used to put comments into columns corresponding to their different characteristics. Not only does this help reporters understand the comments more, but it can also lead to possible sources; Koren said that a Times columnist went through a story's comments so extensively that she ended up with three more column ideas – and she used the commenters as her sources.

# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

## THE BRAINSTORM: What do you wish you knew about digital news?

What do newsrooms wish they knew more about (a) packaging and distribution, (b) platforms, (c) content, and (d) interactive features?

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### Packaging and Distribution

- (1) Does “recommended” content work for attracting readers?
- (2) Is less packaging more?
- (3) How might individuals read differently based on the packaging of a news story (skim vs. reading all of story)?
- (4) How do demographic groups respond differently to webpage templates and news segments?
- (5) Which news segments are more effective at particular points in the day?
- (6) How does the tone of the headline influence click-through rates and other metrics?

### Platforms

- (1) What is the next platform after mobile? Wearables?
- (2) How does the platform influence consumption? Should content be different for mobile-friendly platforms?
- (3) Who is the audience for Facebook/social news content?
- (4) How do individuals respond to organization by topic as opposed to by platform?
- (5) How might an individual’s reaction to a site differ based on whether they have to sign in?
- (6) What does the loss of television (especially cable) revenue mean for the online side of television news outlets?
- (7) How does interaction differ by platform (tablet vs. mobile)?
- (8) In the digital age, what is the role of print journalism?

### Content

- (1) How do individuals comprehend visuals, text, and statistics/data packaged with a story?
- (2) Which headline types (e.g. curiosity gap headlines) go best with which types of story content?
- (3) How do individuals respond to news story types (metanarratives, infographics, etc.)?
- (4) How might individuals respond to information portrayed in infographic form versus a bar chart/other content visualization feature?
- (5) What content should be shared and what does shared content mean for journalists?
- (6) How can we make text special?

### Interactive Features

- (1) Could slider images convey information in a different manner compared to traditional pictures or text?
- (2) How might “Buzzfeed-type” buttons influence interaction on a site?
- (3) Do bad experiences with interactive features inhibit future site use?
- (4) How do you scale interactives to wider/global audiences?
- (5) Could we create a crowdsourced rating system, like a Consumer Reports, of different programs and tools for creating interactives?

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

### **SARA CAROTHERS**

NEWS PROJECTS PRODUCER

THE WASHINGTON POST

Sara Carothers is a News Projects Producer for The Washington Post, where she shepherds cutting-edge digital projects into the newsroom. She's a proponent of embracing technology that can take journalism to places never before possible. As product owner of things like Truth Teller, an app that fact-checks political speech, she works closely with editors, developers and engineers to make journalistic dreams a reality. Sara was a national politics producer at the Post during the 2012 campaign and election season. Before that, she produced online coverage for NPR's foreign, business, and technology desks, giving radio journalism a lively existence on the web as well.

### **MIKE DYER**

CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

THE DAILY BEAST

Mike Dyer is currently Chief Digital Officer at The Daily Beast, where he is responsible for providing the overall company vision for digital products and brand strategy, and leading the cross-functional teams responsible for their execution. He is also responsible for defining and expanding new capabilities and revenue strategies, and attracting and leading high-performance teams. Beyond his current role, Mike is a proven creative leader with a track record of taking an outsider's view of industries' complex business challenges, and developing and sustaining innovative, effective solutions. In addition to publishing/journalism, he has taken this approach to create new, original work and new ways of working in other industries, including marketing/advertising, global philanthropy, politics, and entertainment. He is also an international award-winning screenwriter and director for film and stage. Mike's work has won numerous awards, including Cannes Lions, Effies, Webbys, MITX, MIXX, OM-MAs and CASE awards. His work has been featured in Creativity, Communications Arts, The New York Times, RIFF, Los Angeles Film Festival, Forbes, Mashable, Fast Company, SHOOT, and ESPN.

### **MARK FRANCESCUTTI**

DIGITAL EDITOR FOR SPORTS, ENTERTAINMENT AND LIFESTYLES

THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Mark Francescutti is the Digital Editor for Sports, Entertainment and Lifestyles at The Dallas Morning News.

### **RODNEY GIBBS**

CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

Rodney Gibbs ensures The Texas Tribune leverages technology wisely and creatively across all aspects of the organization. He has started two digital media companies. The first, Fizz Factor, developed handheld games for Nintendo and Sony platforms. The second, Ricochet Labs, created social-mobile games for news and entertainment brands, including the BBC, Lollapalooza, and The Texas Tribune. Active in the digital media community, Rodney serves on the boards of KUT, Austin's NPR affiliate; the Austin Film Society; and KLRU, Austin's PBS affiliate. He has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Rice University and a MFA from the University of Texas.

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

### **JONATHAN KEEGAN**

DIRECTOR, INTERACTIVE GRAPHICS  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Jon Keegan is Director of Interactive Graphics at The Wall Street Journal. He has been leading the interactive news graphics team since summer 2013. Before that, he worked as an interactive designer and developer, and has been at The Journal for 15 years. Jon is a big fan of news apps that can clearly highlight the story within the data and give the reader access to the same tools used for analysis. He lives in Brooklyn with his wife and sons Blake and Cole.

### **SASHA KOREN**

DEPUTY EDITOR, INTERACTIVE NEWS DESK  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Sasha Koren is a Deputy Editor of the Interactive News desk at The New York Times, a group made up of editors and technologists with diverse backgrounds in reporting, editing, programming and data science, among other skills. She and the social media and community teams she oversees are responsible for creating broad opportunities for readers to engage with Times journalism in all its forms. Earlier she was an editor on The Times's features desks and within its Opinion department, focused on digital initiatives, as well as a product manager. Prior to joining The Times she was an editor on an array of projects including an arts foundation journal, an annotated database of music and books, a corporate intranet, an AIDS-prevention training manual and a holocaust memoir. She lives in upper Manhattan.

### **DONNA KRACHE**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, CNN STUDENT NEWS  
CNN

Donna Krache is the Executive Producer for CNN Student News and the creator of CNN's "Schools of Thought" education site. Based in CNN's Atlanta headquarters, Krache oversees the CNN Student News staff and serves as the content manager for the CNN Student News program and Web site, [www.cnnstudentnews.com](http://www.cnnstudentnews.com). Additionally, Krache contributes to numerous in-house projects as a writer/editor. Krache has been with CNN Student News since 1992, first as an educational consultant and curriculum writer. Krache contributed to the teacher's guide for the movie Gettysburg and for "Sept. 11, 2001: A Turning Point in History – The First 30 Days" video and education guide. She won an Association of Educational Publishers Golden Lamp Award for those materials. In 2007, Krache was awarded the DeWitt Carter Reddick Award from the University of Texas School of Communication for outstanding achievement in the field of communication. She has led teams that have won Peabody Awards for their contributions to coverage of Hurricane Katrina and the 2008 presidential elections. Prior to joining CNN, Krache had been both a middle school and high school teacher of subjects including U.S. history, world history, government, business and economics, as well as a media relations director and a speechwriter. Krache holds a bachelor's degree in government from the College of William and Mary and a master's degree in education from the University of New Orleans.

## WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

### **CHARLES MAHTESIAN**

POLITICS EDITOR FOR DIGITAL NEWS

NPR

Charles Mahtesian is NPR's Politics Editor for Digital News, responsible for directing online coverage of Washington and national politics and providing on-air political analysis. Prior to coming to NPR, Mahtesian spent five years as Politico's national politics editor, where he directed its political and campaign coverage and authored a blog on the American political landscape. He joined Politico after five years as the editor of the National Journal's Almanac of American Politics, the biennial book often referred to as "the bible of American politics." Before that, he was a national correspondent for Governing magazine, where he covered state legislatures, governors and urban politics. He began his career reporting on elections and congressional redistricting for Congressional Quarterly, where he was also a contributing writer to the books "Politics in America" and "Congressional Districts in the 1990s." Prior to coming to NPR in his current role, Mahtesian had served as an election night analyst for NPR and was a frequent guest on NPR's "All Things Considered" and "Talk of the Nation," MSNBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews," and on FOX News, C-SPAN, CNN and the BBC. He earned his bachelor's degree in politics from Catholic University in Washington, D.C., and his law degree from American University.

### **TOM NEGRETE**

DIRECTOR OF INNOVATION AND NEWS OPERATIONS

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Tom Negrete is Director of Innovation and News Operations for The Sacramento Bee, a new role for The Bee and Tom. In that role, which began in January 2013, Tom has reached out to launch projects focused on data research with Stanford University, the University of California, Davis, and California State University, Chico, and Sacramento. Prior to that, Tom served in a number of roles since joining The Bee in 1994, including managing editor for digital (2007-2013), and assistant managing editor for sports and business (2001 to 2007). Prior to joining The Bee, Tom worked on the national copy desk at The New York Times. He is a graduate of UC Berkeley and the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

### **KEIRA NOTHAFT**

SENIOR DIRECTOR/NEWS CONTENT AND PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Keira Nothafft is Senior Director/News Content and Product Development at The Arizona Republic in Phoenix. In this newly created position, Keira is directing cross-departmental efforts toward the development of new products, product improvement, audience segmentation and technology solutions. Prior to this role, she spent almost a decade as the director responsible for the teams writing and editing for the front page, the local section, azcentral.com's home and news pages, the copy desk, the library and the tablet team. She has also been the Republic's design director, deputy features editor, sports designer and a copy clerk.

## PROJECT FUNDERS

### **TOM GLAISYER**

INVESTMENT PRINCIPAL

DEMOCRACY FUND

Tom is an Investment Principal at the Democracy Fund, which fosters the highest ideals of the American republic – government of, by, and for the people. Based in the Washington, D.C., office, he supports the fund's mission to invest in efforts to ensure that the U.S. political system is responsive to the priorities of the American public and has the capacity to rise to meet the challenges facing the country. Tom invests in organizations working to inform the American public and reduce deceptive practices with a focus on the innovative use of media and technology. In 2012, Tom joined the Democracy Fund, bringing with him a strong background in media research and policy, as well as social media advocacy consulting. He led the Media Policy Initiative at the New America Foundation's Open Technology Institute where he sought to track and influence media efforts at the local, community, and national levels. Previously, he was a consultant and analyst focused on leveraging online platforms for knowledge management and building and sustaining advocacy networks. Tom also brings more than 14 years of international experience in information technology implementation and organizational change to Omidyar Network. Tom received his bachelor of engineering and economics from the University of Birmingham, England, and his master's of international affairs from the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. He is also pursuing a PhD in communications at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

### **KELLY BORN**

PROGRAM OFFICER, SPECIAL PROJECTS

HEWLETT FOUNDATION

Kelly Born is a Program Officer responsible for a portfolio of grants that fall under Special Projects. Before joining the Hewlett Foundation, Kelly worked as a strategy consultant with the Monitor Institute. She also has extensive experience consulting with both the government and private sectors. In addition to her experience as a consultant, Kelly has worked with Ashoka in Peru, the World Bank's microfinance group CGAP in Paris, Technoserve in East Africa, and both The Asia Foundation and Rubicon National Social Innovation in the Bay Area. She also guest lectures for UC Santa Cruz's course on Women and Development. Kelly earned her B.A. in business with a minor in economics from Pepperdine University, where she graduated Valedictorian. She received her M.A. in International Policy Studies from Stanford University.

## STAFF

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