

2015 ENGAGING NEWS
PROJECT STAFF

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2015

ANNUAL REPORT

2015 HIGHLIGHTS

RELEASED EIGHT RESEARCH REPORTS ON ISSUES FACING THE NEWS INDUSTRY

MET WITH MORE THAN 90 WORKING JOURNALISTS TO DISCUSS HOW THEY COULD USE OUR RESEARCH

MORE THAN 20 NEWS ORGANIZATIONS ADOPTED ONE OF OUR PRACTICES OR TOOLS

RECEIVED MORE THAN 60 MENTIONS IN THE MEDIA, LEADING TO INCREASED AWARENESS OF OUR PROJECT

SPOKE AT SEVERAL PROMINENT EVENTS, HELPING US EXPAND OUR CONNECTIONS IN THE NEWS INDUSTRY AND ACADEMIA

WORKED WITH UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

WON BEST PAPER FROM THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND POLITICS DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

MENTIONED TWICE IN NIEMAN LAB'S LIST OF TOP 10 DIGITAL NEWS RESEARCH ARTICLES OF 2015

ENGAGING
NEWS
PROJECT

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

The news media are a critical institution. Ideally, they provide the public with the information necessary for democratic participation. Today, much is amiss. We live in a world where news organizations struggle for audience and sustainability, and American citizens are either withdrawn from politics or attracted to polarizing partisan content.

The need for journalism intervention is critical. The Engaging News Project aims to be part of the solution. The success we've seen since starting this initiative in 2013 has encouraged us to develop a long-term plan to turn this pilot into a movement, and transform this project into a full-fledged organization.

2015 has been an incredible year for the Engaging News Project. We have seen tremendous growth in all aspects of this initiative. From the adoption of our work by newsrooms across the country to increasing discussion of our

research in the media, this year has been our best year to date.

We can't wait to see what 2016 will bring. We already have been hard at work on a variety of research projects to be released throughout the year, touching on a range of topics including headlines, comment sections and page design. We also have been chosen to present at the 2016 South by Southwest Interactive Festival this March in Austin.

Of course, we wouldn't be where we are today without our supporters and funders. Our heartfelt thanks goes to the Democracy Fund, Hewlett Foundation, Rita Allen Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and the Moody College of Communication. We also would like to thank Google and Facebook for their generous gifts. And to the friends we have made along the way — journalists, editors, academics — thank you for all of your support.

Sincerely,

Natalie Stroud

Dr. Natalie (Talia) Stroud
Director, Engaging News Project



The Engaging News Project's primary goal is to identify new tools and practices for today's newsrooms.



Top photo: Dr. Ashley Muddiman, Faculty Research Associate, speaking at the news:rewired conference. Photo courtesy of journalism.co.uk.



Bottom photo: Dr. Josh Scacco, Faculty Research Associate, speaking at the International Symposium on Online Journalism. Photo courtesy of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas.

RESEARCH

This year we released eight reports on issues facing the news industry. Highlights from our reports include:

1 CLASSIC VS. CONTEMPORARY PAGE DESIGN

A news website with a contemporary homepage design yielded more page views and increased learning from news articles compared to a website with a classic, newsprint layout, according to our research. Across three experiments, we found the contemporary website had at least a 90 percent increase in unique page views compared to the classic site. We also found that study participants' recall of details from the articles, although low overall, increased by at least 50 percent when they viewed the contemporary homepage.



2 ONLINE CIVIL DISCOURSE

Collaborating with the National Institute for Civil Discourse, we released three reports examining civil discourse online:

1. We surveyed and compiled what is known about about online civil discourse.

2. We reported on a series of focus groups that looked at how to engage young people in online dialogue about politics.

The focus groups demonstrated that young people are often reluctant to get involved in political conversations online, but that they were interested in forms of online engagement that were more fact-based and more personal.

3. The third report shared the results of an experiment we conducted testing whether having facts, background information that included pro and con arguments, or both affected participants' commenting behavior. We found that people are more willing to get involved in political discussion when they're provided with background information containing pro and con arguments.

3 COMMENT STRUCTURE

There are several benefits — and limits — to using a three-column comment section as opposed to using a traditional one-column section.

Study participants rated a three-column comment section more favorably than the one-column comment section. Participants also were more likely to leave a

comment in the three-column format. Yet readers were less likely to interact with comments in the right-hand column when seeing the multi-column design.

4 HEADLINE PRACTICES

Even though they've been around as long as newspapers, headlines still raise many questions for editors. Specifically, what headlines will

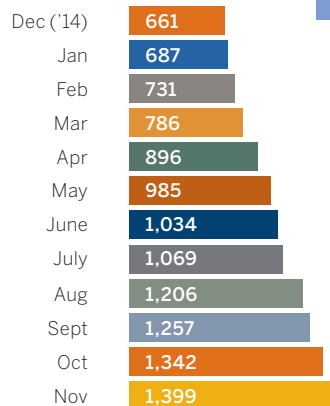
catch readers' attention online? In 2016, we will be conducting research on what makes a good digital headline. As a lead-up to that research, we released a

report on what we already know about the functions and types of headlines, their content and use in news stories, and their effects on audiences.

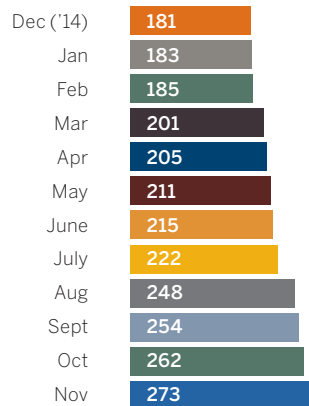
OUTREACH

This year we made great strides in getting the word out about the Engaging News Project. We look forward to continuing this trend next year.

FOLLOWERS – 2015



LIKES – 2015



ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS PRESENTED AT A NUMBER OF MAJOR EVENTS THIS YEAR:



International Symposium on Online Journalism

Excellence in Journalism conference

News:Rewired digital journalism conference, sponsored by journalism.co.uk

NYC Media Lab Annual Summit

National College Media Convention

Online News Association annual conference

Breaking Through: Increasing Civic Participation Before, During, and After the Elections

THE ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT RECEIVED MORE THAN 60 MEDIA MENTIONS THIS PAST YEAR FROM A VARIETY OF OUTLETS:



BBC
FUTURE OF NEWS

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

NiemanLab MEDIASHIFT

Poynter. MOTHERBOARD

AMERICANPRESS
institute

NEW YORK
SCIENCE@US

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

The best way to measure our success is hearing it straight from working journalists and editors. Having our tools and practices adopted shows us we are making a difference in newsrooms.



WORKSHOPS

Our two News Engagement Workshops have been a fantastic way for us to connect with digital news leaders and to hear straight from them what challenges and opportunities they face. Our last workshop, held in Princeton, N.J., had representatives from 10 news organizations: *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN, NPR, Politico, Vox.com, *The Denver Post*, NJ Advance Media, Philly.com, and Gannett Digital.



FEEDBACK

“(The workshop) was such an inspiring few days and really reinforced the big picture opportunities we have to serve and influence our audiences. It is incredibly easy to get lost in the day-to-day management of a team, or a newsroom, and lose sight of the big picture. So thank you for the inspiration!”

Allison Lichter

The Wall Street Journal/Princeton Workshop Participant

COMMENTS

Based on our research on journalist involvement in comment sections, Philly.com began encouraging their reporters to interact with commenters.

“At Philly.com, we’ve been really inspired by the work being done by the Engaging News Project. They put out a study that showed that having writers moderate and comment on their own stories improved the tenor of comments overall. A handful of reporters ... have started to do this and anecdotally, we feel it’s been pretty successful.”

Erica Palan

Director of Audience Engagement (as told to Poynter)



What percentage of U.S. residents express their opinions about political or community issues on the Internet?



Submit

Built by the Engaging News Project

QUIZ TOOL

Our quiz tool has now been used by more than 20 news organizations, some of which have used it on a regular basis.

The website Science Friday has used the quiz a few times since March 2015. Their first two quizzes had more than 30,000 views each.

The Center for Public Integrity creates a quiz each month to

test their audience’s knowledge about money in politics. Reporter Michael Beckel said: “Thank you for making (a tool) so easy for us at the Center for Public Integrity to use!”

In March, three Gannett television stations shared the same quiz on Grammar Day on their websites. Between those three sites, the quiz was viewed more than 11,500 times.