



ENGAGING NEWS PROJECT

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SOLUTIONS-BASED SERIES LED TO SHORT-TERM INCREASE IN TWITTER DISCUSSION

A new report from the Engaging News Project finds that in response to a newspaper series on the issue of poverty, the public tweeted more about poverty. The discussion, however, lasted only a short period.

Solutions journalism reports about responses to entrenched social problems. It focuses not just on what may be working, but how and why it appears to be working or, alternatively, why it may be stumbling.

Although many newsrooms across the country have implemented reporting with a solutions journalism focus, little is known about how the public and communities respond. This research on the effects solutions journalism has on public discourse was jointly funded by the Solutions Journalism Network and the Engaging News Project.

On March 6, 2016, the Chattanooga Times Free Press published a series focused on poverty called “The Poverty Puzzle.” To research the effects of the series in the Chattanooga community, ENP researchers identified the most common words related to poverty that appeared in the series. Researchers then analyzed how frequently those words appeared in tweets from Chattanooga and in Chattanooga City Council meeting minutes.

The analysis found that tweets about poverty among members of the community increased by about 27.9 percent following the series’ publication. However, the uptick did not extend beyond a few days. The analysis was confined to Twitter; public discussion in other spaces may have been more sustained.

Other findings include:

- Community churches and opinion leaders did not use more poverty-related terms in their tweets following the series.
- In the Chattanooga City Council meeting minutes, there were 4 mentions of poverty-related terms in the 12 meetings prior to the series, compared to 26 mentions in the 12 meetings following the series.

“Our findings suggest that this type of journalism can affect public discourse within in a community, but that it may only last for a short period,” said Shannon McGregor, research associate for the Engaging News Project. “It’s up to news organizations and community members to keep the conversation going to ensure that solutions journalism has a lasting impact.”

The Engaging News Project provides research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. Learn more at engagingnewsproject.org