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THE FORCED ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TELEVISION JOURNALISTS' ADAPTATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC THROUGH THE LENS OF TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

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THE FORCED ADOPTION OF TECHNOLOGY:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON TELEVISION JOURNALISTS' ADAPTATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC THROUGH THE LENS OF TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

This study focuses on local news leaders and journalists who faced unique circumstances in 2020 due to lockdowns and various restrictions because of Covid-19. This historic period provided a unique opportunity to see how journalists react to the forced adoption of technology when nearly every newsroom was forced to adopt different methods to continue newsgathering. Findings showed managers and journalists alike want to create connections between coworkers, but found it awkward to connect through a new workplace culture based on transactional relationships where very few opportunities have arisen for emotional bonds. Technology acted as a bridge connecting coworkers to their job and each other. As the pandemic evolved, technology became more of a barrier preventing strong emotional connections.

Keywords: Journalists, television, news leaders, coronavirus, COVID-19, pandemic, work from home, hybrid-workplace

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Introduction

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, television journalists had to incorporate technology in unprecedented ways into their daily routines to produce news shows. The transition to remote work increased the efficiency of journalists because they were freed from traditional routines. Work from home allowed managers to save time and money while allowing for more versatility in quickly publishing or editing stories from anywhere. This is especially true as 5g networks become more prolific throughout the world — particularly among those seen in large news-hub cities in the U.S. (Newman, 2021). Managers may have preferred work from home, but implementation was difficult due to stretched resources. Less money due to budget cuts limited opportunities for new tools and new system developments (Beckett, 2021). Journalists who worked outside of the newsroom found that while the forced adoption of technology due to newsroom closures kept them safe from the virus, they also suffered due to a lack of connection with their colleagues (Perreault, M. F., & Perreault, G. P., 2021)

The lack of research focused on this timeframe has created a gap in the literature and provides a unique opportunity. The pandemic was the first time in the 21st century that external conditions forced journalists to adopt and incorporate new technology, nearly at over-night speed. This adaptation occurred out of the necessity for newsrooms to stay healthy, rather than from competitive market forces.

The pandemic is the first time that the modern journalism industry has been disrupted on such a global scale. The lockdowns created difficulties in how newsrooms operate digitally

and how journalists adapt to their new work from home environments (Van den Heuve, 2020). The study utilizes key theories of technological determinism as a foundation. In particular, Fischer (2006) theorized that technology is first adopted at the individual level as a tool. The larger collective level then creates a system that first guides the tool's use, eventually regulating the use and development of both the tool and its system. This study used Fischer's theory as a foundation because his frame provided a more encompassing view of the system that emerged as a result of the pandemic rather than the personal motivations from each journalist (Fischer, 2006; Van den Heuve, 2020). Fischer's work also helps because it can be applied to times of great disruption, like the COVID-19 lockdowns (Fischer, 2006).

Through in-depth interviews, the study focused on two research questions: one that focused on technology adoption and changes in the social structure immediately after the pandemic hit and lockdowns began. The other focused on the evolution of workplace culture and what technology lasted throughout the many different phases of the pandemic.

Findings suggest that most journalists like some element of hybrid work, at least for morning meetings. Like the element of working somewhat virtually, Zoom interviews will stay. Zooms are cheap, easy, and convenient; however, the combination of morning meetings via Zoom or Teams plus virtual interviews creates a bleeding between work and personal life to a greater extreme as before the pandemic.

Literature Review

Defining technological determinism

Technological determinism, in essence, takes humans out of the system that drives technology—humans are out of the mix. The technological determinism theory implies that the free market creates a drive towards certain technologies. Thus, technology is like a child's wind-up toy: wound by science and thrust forward by profits (Dafoe, 2015). Once the product is created, the market drives the potential consumers to adopt through forces such as product distribution and a perceived need for the technology itself (Kritt & Winegar, 2007). Others adopting the technology creates a snowball effect where more and more people incorporate the technology into their daily lives to the point where those who have not adopted it are 'left behind.' In turn, the technology itself is constrained by society's social norms (Kritt & Winegar). Counter to a "hard technological determinist" view, Dafoe (2015, pp. 1050) considers technology as an object with a functional intention, a technique in humans' routines, an institution's organizational hierarchies, or a socio-technological system that can combine all these aspects. The user is the main focus for Dafoe (2015) because the user determines what technologies fail or succeed in combination with the forces of a free market.

Some critics of technological determinism argue that the theory assumes that technological change comes from outside society, such as scientific development. This technology is thrusted forward by scientific development but adopted due to the ability to make a profit. For technology to be profitable, market heads must find it promotable, easy to use, and

to have a consumer in mind (Hoof & Boell). In this view, the way in which technology adoption occurs on a larger scale is like changes in the weather or “loosening and tightening constraints,” that will create less opportunity to adopt new technologies (Heilbroner, 1994, pp. 69). The potential economic constraints combined with human routine create a system in which human and non-human elements, like the free market, compete for adoption of new technologies (Heilbroner, 1994).

Fischer (2006), like some technological determinists, argues that technology drives social change. However, rather than focusing on technological determinism as having an "outside" force coming to impact the "inside" of social life, there cannot be a use for technology without a system in which it operates. As an example, Fischer (2006) used television as a non-interesting thing when lying on the ground, but very interesting when it displayed content. For that content to exist, a new industry of production and distribution had to be created and those systems were (and are still) largely shaped by the market and cultural forces. Fischer (2006, pp. 30-31) argued that the market force and cultural logic must entangle to create an idea of technology. He breaks down his argument into five key questions to investigate adoption: "who adopted the device? With what intention? How did they use it? What role did it play in their lives? How did using it alter their lives?" The questions emphasize user agency and intention in their choices but also acknowledges that a system is needed and that system is created outside of individuals’ agency.

To have a functional definition of technological change, one needs a definition for technology itself. Technology has two functional definitions: 1) a tool or machine that solves real world problems or 2) a combination of human knowledge on how to pool resources to fulfill wants or needs (Bates, 2019). The second definition is favored in this study because it shows how technology is pointless unless used by humans and systems are created based on how humans use technology (Bates, 2019). The technology that society decides to adopt determines how and what kind of knowledge is communicated and transmitted, because technology provides the infrastructure and the formats for storing, communicating, and processing information (Hoof & Boell, 2019).

This study expanded on Fischer's work because it can help provide a more holistic view of the pandemic system rather than the internal motivations individual journalists face (Fischer, 2006; Van den Heuve, 2020). Belair-Gagnon & Steinke (2020) argued an expedited adoption of new technology may not be “aligned” with journalistic values.

Users have limits to what they can reasonably implement in their daily lives. For example, a person may hold back from freely adopting technology due to personal constraints, like older people who are shy around computers, or constraints by the system, such as when broadband services are not available in their geographical area. Opportunities are also created by the technology and the system. As the telephone reached mass adoption, a collective pressure and the ease-of-use of the tool pushed non-subscribers to buy a phone and, to meet this need, a telephone system and network was extended across the nation (Fischer, 2006). Thus, in Fischer’s view, there is a tension between the collective decisions of users, the system

that emerges and the larger institutional forces, such as market and government entities, that regulate the system and also, in turn, restrict or afford certain uses of the technology itself (Fischer, 2006).

History of Technology and News

The widespread adoption of media technology is driven by tragedy. The Civil War created wide communication changes. Before, horseback or trains delivered newspapers. But the civil war advanced cheaper printing technologies that allowed the papers by Fredrick Douglas and other abolitionists to become more widespread (Marten, 2012). The arrival of the telegraph in the late 1840s foraged an opportunity for faster communication. The advent of the technology led to the creation of the Associated Press in 1849. This quick advance in technology was brought by necessity from the war and the advent of congruent technologies --particularly the expansion of the railroads-- that furthered the ability to sell newspapers and increase demand (Marten, 2012). The Civil War illustrates how older technologies, such as the railroad or telegraph, advance or are refined at a quicker pace under national crisis (Kelly, 2020). The Titanic demonstrates how useful but previously unknown technology can become widely adopted after a tragedy.

The Titanic sank in no small part due to communication issues with the ship's radio. Fifteen minutes before the Titanic crashed with the iceberg, a wireless operator on the Californian, which was 20 miles out, attempted to contact the Titanic to tell the operators they were surrounded by hazardous icebergs (Kovarik, 2012). The resulting investigation from the U.S. Congress resulted in the passage of the Radio Act of 1912. The act created antitrust laws for

communication, greatly expanded Federal radio regulation, and created an international SOS signal (Kovarik, 2012). It was shown that the radio on the Titanic was already becoming irrelevant. The creator of the radio, Guglielmo Marconi used the patent system to freeze the technology into place and cement his commercial monopoly. Unlike some ideas in technological determinism, Macaroni used the patient system to hinder the advancement of technology. Other companies, like Reginald Fessenden's National Electric Signaling Company, proved to be more effective but none had the economic power of Marconi. The U.S. only became interested in high-frequency radio after the Titanic's tragedy shook the nation (Kovarik, 2012).

Newsroom sociology and technology

Schudson (1989) posited that focusing on journalists as "gatekeepers" is problematic because the metaphor does not expand upon information. The journalist as a gatekeeper decides what prefabricated news gets released. Instead, Schudson (1989) argues that journalists do not operate in a vacuum and are influenced by their time. Reporting itself is about the interaction between journalists and officials (Schudson, 1989). To analyze news as a product, the output of news organizations needs to be investigated. Schudson (1989) wrote that journalists will "modify their own personal values" to fit within the values of their company. This modification is not always evident when transitioning a newsroom to digital workflow.

Before the pandemic, Deuze (2008) noted that some digital transitions caused a lot of angst and missteps. Some employees quit rather than change their traditional methods of reporting (Deuze, 2008). Online journalism, which provided an outlet for citizen news, gave

some journalists a professional identity crisis. This crisis created tension on the contradictory functions in society. Because citizen journalism via the web blurred the professional line for journalists, some reported no longer having a guide or drive to report (Deuze, 2008). This creates a clashing of systems in which management may press certain technologies, but journalists resist (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020).

Cohen (2018) found that journalists' move to "digital first" showed that reporters were sitting in newsrooms on a computer for the majority of their work; they were not reporting in the field to the same extent as journalists in previous eras. One journalist she interviewed said:

> I only consider myself a journalist because I'm writing news and stuff. But I'm not going out. I'm not leaving my computer. I've talked to people on the phone sometimes. But I'm not going into the field. I'd love to do more of that. I don't know if there are any opportunities for me to do that. (pp. 577)

Cohen's (2018) participants' responses were indicative of developing business models for internet-based news products. These practices included journalists tracking how news consumers are finding their stories through technology such as Chartbeat, Omniture, and Parsley. Cohen contended that journalists felt high levels of anxiety and depression because "their journalistic training and editorial judgment comes second to the information from metrics (p. 580) " Some indicated that they did not have enough time to write stories and complete all their tasks. For the digital journalists, there was no boundary between work life and non-work

life due to being tethered to smart phones and an obligation to constantly check social media. This lack of work-life balance was further frustrated by an expectation to work whenever news breaks (Cohen, 2018).

Technology adoption may grow exponentially under a national crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom became so popular that its name is now synonymous with video chatting (Kelly, 2020). However, this push for digital tools came with a cost. Newman (2021) studied the reaction to the shutdowns from the perspective of three types of workers in a newsroom: 1) boots-on-the-ground-reporters, 2) project managers and 3) managers. Managers, whose essential role in newsrooms did not change too much during the pandemic, mostly felt that their peers understood their jobs while only half of the project managers, who were responsible for instituting new procedures, felt the same. Meanwhile, reporters said that they mainly missed the face-to-face interactions in the newsroom.

The London School of Economics found that journalism during the pandemic was missing a "human factor." That humanity in journalism has a sense of purpose and kind of impact. Beckett (2021) argued that journalists needed to not only work on their technology use during the pandemic to help incorporate more data stories through Artificial Intelligence (AI), but also to find more emotional literacy, which was lacking without an interpersonal, in-person connection. The concept of emotional literacy becomes more prominent when combined with the idea of AI, which could hypothetically act as a "hybrid-journalist" and do much of the fact gathering and writing stories without the potential biases of humans. A collaborative effort was especially seen with data and visual journalists. Belair-Gagnon and Steinke (2020) found that

online journalism quickly has been outpaced by new technologies which created an overwhelming amount of options, leading to increased fatigue. That fatigue may have been a contributing factor to why journalists were hesitant to adopt technology at the very beginning of the pandemic (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020).

The pandemic caused an alignment of systems rather than a clash of systems in the pandemic; therefore, this alignment of virtues caused a faster adoption of technology through necessity (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). Ndlovu and Sibanda (2021) found that journalists adapted their old workplace culture into a digital space instead of creating a totally new way of working. Professional boundaries were simultaneously less enforced. Individuals began communicating with their bosses via WhatsApp, a popular text-message alternative communication app, and Zoom. This allowed the journalists to better adapt their old culture to a digital environment. The authors also warn that young journalists entering the industry may not have the same "old workplace" reference leaving them with no sense of a newsroom's culture or ethics and that they may even lack a social, human element necessary for strong journalism (Ndlovu & Sibanda, 2021). The work-from-home element also puts a greater stress on careers because of dissolved boundaries (Milliken et al., 2020). Perreault, M. F., and Perreault, G. P. (2021) found that working remotely increased emotional stress among journalists.

Savić (2020) found that the pandemic caused a completely new business model based on computer technologies. The change to a digital workforce mindset included changes to the nature of work, its variety, amount, speed, and value. The unprecedented speedy transition to

telecommuting caused a change that is here to stay (Savić, 2020). This move replaced traditional workplaces. Both employees and companies consider shifting to digital a widely accepted move (Savić, 2020). The potential of collaborative digital interaction is also boundless as journalists can pool their knowledge and skill to work on joint projects (Bunce et al., 2017). Digital collaborative software such as Slack or Google Docs increased the feasibility for remote work (Bunce et al., 2017). Digital spaces have no desks, chairs, meeting rooms, or water coolers to facilitate relationships between coworkers. The physical space that journalists occupy, called relative space, does not exist online. Relative space creates connections by happenstance or through casual discussions (Bunce et al., 2017). Messaging software, such as Slack, then creates an equidistant space, meaning everyone has equal opportunity to message each other. There's positive and negative aspects to this. Slack and virtual spaces do not limit the potential of journalists to talk to other bureaus, but it's harder to gain attention for small things that people could chat about around physical desks. The equality online creates a higher focus; it also allows for more creation of team culture and norms. This massive digital space can also form bonds between remote workers in different bureaus such as Miami and New York (Bunce et al., 2017). Bunce et al. (2017) found that the relationship between the traditional newsroom can be translated online. Likewise, digital relationships can slip easily into a physical newsroom. Social platforms that users have previous familiarity with are also more likely to form relationships. For example, Slack feels like a Facebook-type of social media and Zoom feels like FaceTime (Bunce et al., 2017). The online focus has its downside: Bunce et al. (2017) found that because Slack tracks when users are active, there is a greater pressure on journalists' time. Similarly, not all

journalists use online tools the same way. What will work for one journalist, another may find very difficult (Bunce et al., 2017). One way to help mitigate the damage of moving to a digital newsroom is to continue cultivating journalistic routines through workplace culture (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). For example, journalists still had morning meetings and an afternoon check-in, but they just did those old routines virtually (Belair-Ganon & Steinke, 2020). Journalists tend to value tradition, therefore innovation may not be aligned with the ideals of journalism. A hierarchy of influence from peers and bosses can help increase the likelihood of technological adoption. This possibility of adoption is exponentially increased if peers and bosses can communicate the technologies' importance to journalists (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020).

In summary, technological determinists believe technology drives social change. The work of Fischer (2006) indicates that technology and social systems affect each other. As individuals interact and use the new tool, social and technological systems emerge. Some of these changes are intentional and some are unintended consequences. This unpredictable outcome of adoption then, in turn, may change the technology or its use. (Fischer, 2006). Tragedy also changes technology out of necessity. This was evident from the evolution of the radio and government regulation after the Titanic sunk (Kovarik, 2012).

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, communication within newsrooms went from face to face to an almost entirely virtual world in the matter of weeks or in some cases, mere days. Many journalists reported feelings of fatigue and some rejected technology and working remotely (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). Journalists felt mental anguish and said they missed

physically interacting with their co-workers. Many had a difficult time adjusting to the new normal. This was especially true for reporters, many of whom are highly social by nature (Belair-Gagnon & Steinke, 2020). This study aims to discover how lockdowns affected newsroom culture and the use of technology helped bridge the gap during forced distancing and seeks to discover how loosening pandemic restrictions after widely distributed vaccines changed technology adoption and therefore the change of social structure once journalists started moving closer to "back to normal."

RQ1: When TV journalists first faced lockdowns, what technology did the newsroom adopt and how did it immediately change the newsrooms' social structure?

The focus of this study is local television journalists. Other scholars have suggested a focus on broadcast newsrooms (Coddington, 2018). Journalists have resisted management decrees when there is an inherent conflict between the news values of a journalist and the potential profits of a news organization (Bunce, 2019). Research in the pandemic showed that managers used various strategies to help control trust, cooperation, and power dynamics in their communities which in turn was meant to prevent work overload, psychological duress, and job insecurity (García-Avilés, 2021). This question seeks to find the relationship between adaptation and coping skills at the levels of management and journalists.

RQ2: After vaccines became widely available, how did the changing adoption of technology influence the social structure of the newsroom?

This question sought to explain how the social dynamics of newsrooms changed as technology tools became normalized into newsgathering routines. While beneficial, there is usually some downside to adopting new technology. Specifically, this question helped discover how remote work impacted newsroom social structure as these tools become normalized work practices. Overall, the two research questions cover two time frames, i.e. the beginning of the pandemic and after vaccines were widely available, and how these changes affected two levels of a newsroom, i.e. managers and journalists.

Methodology

To address the research questions, this study used a qualitative approach to discover the changes in the newsroom social and technological systems caused by lockdowns triggered by COVID-19 spread. A qualitative method was used to provide information at a greater depth to how journalists and managers handled the rapid technology adoption of technology. This study also interviewed journalists who switched jobs or started their news career (who were fresh-out-of-college hires) during the pandemic. Local TV stations were the focus of the study. A gap exists in the literature on television journalists during the pandemic. Focusing on local broadcast journalists is also key to this study because of the nature of getting “to air” and other considerations a visual medium requires. Print and digital journalists worry to a lesser degree about delivering high definition content to the public (García-Avilés, 2021; Santos & Mare, 2021).

The sample

While this study intended to use a purposeful sampling, a 2% percent response rate made the originally planned method unsustainable. Instead, the study pivoted to a convenience sample using a non-random technique to choose participants based on their merits and unique experiences as relevant to the research focus. The downside of the convenience sample is that it is more vulnerable to bias because the process is not random (Molyneux & Zamith, 2020).

Participants were drawn from the alumni of Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication program who are now working journalists, National Press Photographers Association members, and recommendations of other journalists. Two participants (out of the 137 contacted) responded to the initial outreach email and were included in this survey. Initially the researcher sought to gather a sample of 10 managers and 10 MMJs (multimedia journalists). A lack of responses and time restraints resulted in a sample of 10 journalists and five managers. Other studies have used a similar number for participants. The fifteen participants were all full-time journalists. Included in the sample were reporters, MMJs (multimedia journalists who shoot, edit their own work), on-air personalities, photojournalists and managers. Part-time employees were not selected (Molyneux & Zamith, 2020).

The average age of the journalists surveyed is 32. There were three female journalists selected and seven male journalists selected. The average age of the managers was just under 45. Years in the journalism industry ranged from 2.5 to 45. All managers surveyed were white males. This is not indicative of managers in the news business overall. Just over 17 percent of TV newsroom managers were people of color, according to a Nieman Lab report (Childers et al.,

2020). Around one-third of news directors are women (2019 RTDNA/ Lawrence Herbert School of Communication at Hofstra University Newsroom Survey, 2019). Journalists consisted of three minority journalists who were Black, Hispanic, and Filipino. The other seven journalists were all white, however the Filipino journalist was also half white. Three interviewees' held a master's degree as their highest education level and two of the three who held master's degrees were managers. One participant held an associate's degree and the remaining 11 had bachelor's degrees.

The different companies ranged from two Disney stations, two Gray stations, one Tegna station, one Tegna and Standard General Media merged station, three Sinclair stations, one Hubbard Broadcasting, two NBC Universal stations, one Mission Broadcasting and Nexstar co-ownership, one Nexstar, and one Scripps station (see table 1).

Table 1

	Stations represented
ABC News/Walt Disney Company	2
Nexstar/Mission Broadcasting	2
Scripps	1
Tegna/Standard General Media	2
Sinclair Broadcast Group	3
Hubbard Broadcasting	1
NBC Universal	2

NOTE: Description of station ownership represented by participant sample.

Markets for the journalists ranged from the smallest at 172 in Dothan, Alabama to rank five in Dallas-Fort Worth. Overall, five interviewees were from small stations, defined by under 50 in the Nielsen DMA Ranking (Out of Home Advertising Association of America, 2021). One manager worked for upper management and managed stations ranging from rank seven to 203. For the purpose of this study, a small market is defined as less than rank 50 on the Nielsen DMA Ranking system (Out of Home Advertising Association of America, 2021). One manager was counted in both the small market and large market because he managed multiple stations over different market sizes (see table 2).

Table 2

	Small market	Large market
Managers	3	3
Journalists	3	7

NOTE: Description of market sizes for managers and journalists

The interviews

Structured interviews were used to examine the institutional change and responses to managers strategies to help journalists adapt to the forced changes caused by the pandemic (García-Avilés, 2021). Interviews were conducted by telephone to standardize the used technology (Santos & Mare, 2021). A telephone interview was chosen over Zoom for convenience for the interviewees and because some reporters had poor internet signal that could have affected the quality of the interview. This paper also recognizes the potential limitations that may come without seeing body cues (Garcia-Avilés, 2021). An interview guide was used to keep the topics on track and better standardize the interview (DeCarlo, 2018). The question order started with demographic information and moved to a series of questions with intentional order in a loose timeline following the pandemic (DeCarlo, 2018). These questions were open ended. While open ended questions were a risk because journalists are used to being interviewers rather than the interviewee, the goal of the open-ended questions was to create more depth on what is likely important in regards to the pandemic and technology

(DeCarlo, 2018). When a participant answered a question that was not officially asked, but still listed on the questions to ask, the researcher stated for the record that the question had already been answered and asked if the participant had anything else to add (DeCarlo, 2018). The goal of these interviews are to provide a broad sense of the impact of COVID-19 on technology adoption for journalists and how their managers helped facilitate that change. The research questions included the following questions in this order. The first six questions of the study consisted of an emailed questionnaire. This questionnaire asked: the location and Nielsen DMA ranking of their station, if the interviewee worked remotely and miles lived away from station's headquarters, the ownership of the company, a short description and length of pre-pandemic career; and what kinds of technologies the company used (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2021).

The following questions were designed to answer RQ1 and RQ2. To answer RQ1, participants were asked to describe the early pandemic and initial technological reactions to that stage of lockdown. Other questions asked about specific likes or dislikes on the effect lockdowns had on workplace culture along with potential tensions or resistance participants noticed in either themselves or people they interacted with digitally. A follow up question asked about the biggest challenges that came with remote work. Even for participants who did not participate in remote work, every participant interacted with colleagues that worked remotely. Questions that helped answer RQ2 included how participants thought the newsroom had changed after pandemic restrictions were loosened and some bureaus went "back to normal." This was done by emphasizing a period of time after new technologies were adjusted and a

remote workflow became more normal. Another question focused on how workplace culture evolved during the pandemic. The survey ended with an intentionally vague question that left most participants with lingering thoughts on the social dynamic of the pandemic.

The interviews were then recorded and transcribed. For ease of transcription, the researcher used Otter.ai to transcribe the interviews initially; however, once transcribed by the AI, the researcher listened to and cleaned the transcript to ensure correct language and meanings (García-Avilés, 2021). The interviews were all conducted safely at the researcher's studio apartment. The coding, which was done on a Google Doc kept safe by a security key, shall be deleted two weeks after this thesis is accepted by committee and rewrites are completed. After the study is completed, the recordings and transcripts shall be destroyed and deleted from the otter.ai account. Subjects were given anonymity and the researcher assured them that no information that could link them to the study would be published to help ensure confidentiality (García-Avilés, 2021). The interviews had a list of predetermined questions with room for small probings and clarifications to better provide standardization between participants and lend more validity to the experiment (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The set list of questions could also provide more comfort to journalists when answering questions, because some journalists find difficulty answering questions when they are used to asking questions (Molyneux & Zamith, 2020).

The longest interview lasted around 34 minutes with the manager that worked with multiple market sizes. The shortest interview was around 13 minutes with a journalist who worked at a split station and had extensive experience in working remotely before the

pandemic. The interviews were all done during the workday, most commonly at lunch time for their respective time zones. They were recorded using the OU affiliated email for an otter.ai account which both records and transcribes. The interviews were later listened to by the researcher to ensure accuracy and to assist coding. After this thesis is accepted by the committee and rewrites shall be completed, the audio files, otter account, and all records of the recording will be destroyed within two weeks. The recordings were analyzed using inductive coding to identify key words and phrases for every few sentences. The common phrases were then compared to result in the findings. Common, connecting themes, concepts, or ideas were noted. A key kept track of prevalent ideas (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The coding was done inductively because there is not much previous research to build upon with pre-established ideas. Instead, the work was analyzed for prevailing themes that emerged in the interviews (Jansen, 2022). A semantic approach was taken in these interviews, so only things that journalists explicitly discuss was analyzed in the study. The semantic approach was chosen because telephone interviews do not allow for analysis of body language or other indicators that may make a latent approach easier (Jansen, 2022). The interviews were doxastic interviews, meaning the interviewer did not engage in analysis at the time of the interviews, but instead act as a listener and a prober (Berner-Rodoreda et al., 2020).

The coding

The coding of the interviews was done using descriptive codes through value coding. Every few sentences, a word or short phrase summarizing what was explicitly stated in the interview was used to identify prevailing themes or ideas in the interview (Saldana, 2021). The

interview was on the left and the code written in capitalized letters on the right (Saldana, 2021). This method was chosen because it helps find prevailing themes across managers and journalists alike. Because this was done with descriptive coding, it helps reduce potential bias from the interviewees themselves that may form from values coding (Saldana, 2021). Participants received no financial benefit from being part of the study to help limit the potential perception of an ethical qualm (Molyneux & Zamith, 2020).

Findings

Before discussion related to the research questions, findings from the pre-interview gave a view of the technology newsrooms adopted. Research question one sought to understand journalists' initial reaction to the pandemic and lockdowns by both seeking to find what technology was adopted, how, and why; this question also sought to address how early days of the pandemic affected journalists socially in their workplace culture and any potential disconnects between managers and journalists. The participants also gave basic information regarding their most relied-upon technologies. In the pre-interview, Slack, Zoom, Outlook email, and Teams were the most commonly used chat softwares. Almost universally, Zoom was considered the best software to conduct interviews, largely due to interviewee familiarity. Other common technology were devices to remote into computers at the station such as VPNs (which stand for virtual private networks that act as a secure internet connection that better allows mirroring of a laptop into a physical bureau's desktop computer), cloud devices to share footage like OneDrive or Sharepoint. This section is organized into two different parts with three subsections. First, research question one findings will be answered by highlighting the failures of

social Zooms and a disconnect between managers and journalists. This first section also addresses the learning curve that came with new technologies and the struggle to form a work-life balance when people work at home. Then, a discussion on research question two finding by addressing Zoom interviews and why they will stick in the journalism industry. This idea of a hybrid-work situation as the new normal will also be explored in morning calls. Finally, research question two will be highlighted through new workflows made normal during the pandemic, but technology problems through bad internet connectivity can make hybrid-work less easy than anticipated.

Research Question One

Learning Curves

All journalists mentioned struggles with internet connectivity and physical issues with remote work. This seemed to be exasperated in smaller markets or markets that spent more time reporting in rural areas with less access to the internet. Not all managers and journalists felt this emotional toll. Half of the journalists said they did not see any tensions in adopting technology in themselves. Several reported seeing older journalists having more troubles with technology. One 38-year-old photojournalist had to explain to his colleague how to unmute microphones on Zoom and how to download a PDF. This journalist described a steep but manageable learning curve for older journalists. Younger journalists (aged 35 or younger) tended to not have as steep of a learning curve. More experienced journalists who started reporting before the pandemic

started said that the pandemic forced them to break out of previous patterns to tell a story with very little visual availability. Journalists describe how they could not enter sources' homes or offices and had to shoot through windows, garages, and doors. Some journalists said they relied on file footage. One Scripps station gave each editor and journalist an external hard drive with file footage to help avoid downloading issues. Journalists could film what they could and use the file footage which could cut down on required time to download and upload footage.

> We got a lot better at file sharing, being able to help each other out, you know, where it used to be somebody would need file video for insert story here. We created external hard drives that went with every MMJ that had a lot of stuff on it, and if they didn't, then our chief photographer would transfer them from the main archives. So we actually got really good and efficient about the sharing of video transferring files.

This feeling of work life balance was harder when journalists had to use their own devices during the pandemic while feeling unsafe. One large market data journalist said he had to use his personal super computer just to have enough bandwidth to run data without causing a computer to overheat. Contrarily, Journalists and managers in smaller markets said that they had to operate similarly to life before the pandemic while noting different health conscious moves such as installation of plexiglass or mask-wearing. The biggest reason that small market journalists and managers alike said they had to operate in the status quo is because upper management and station owners did not provide necessary equipment. One manager said he asked for fifteen laptops for his reporters

and journalists to stay safe. Nexstar gave him three. There were severe challenges to scaling up remote work and smaller markets felt neglected.

> What [company management] could have done better is supply us with more equipment faster. At my market we don't make the kind of money big markets make you know, when I asked for 15 laptops they gave me three. As far as technology getting to us in the quantity it should have and up to speed it should have I think they were behind.

Social Zooms

Toward the beginning of the pandemic, some managers used video chats to have virtual cocktail hours or parties as a way to connect with colleagues. One journalist said he found these get togethers superficial when still lacking appropriate safety gear and dealing with the emotional toll of the pandemic. Other journalists initially liked the happy hour, but too much screen time eventually took its toll. Managers found these social approaches quickly lost their appeal. Journalists were reliant on technology to communicate with the newsroom, with their sources, and with many family and friends. Journalists did NOT want to use digital communications to better connect with colleagues, emotionally. Many said they felt burnt out from too much screen time. Ultimately, managers could not force an emotional connection through digital means.

> Every Friday night for the first few months. We did a zoom party where we all sat there on Zoom. And then when we realized after a few hours through a couple of months...the novelty really truly wore off. We didn't want to work on a screen all day and then hang out on a screen at night.

> There were just 40 people being in these little party Zooms to 30 to 20. And at that point, it just got ridiculous. It was stupid. It was just, it was miserable. It was truly miserable. And we're doing our best now to try to rebuild some of that.

Managers and journalists both agree that eventually the novelty of meeting online was too much. The only camaraderie that reporters felt they had in the newsroom was the universal background of surviving a global pandemic. Journalists who were hired at new stations described an inability to connect to coworkers emotionally. Many described their interactions as entirely transactional. Every journalist desired “face to face time” or more meaningful interactions with their coworkers. This connection is only just now coming to repair workplace culture as some pandemic restrictions have loosened. Journalists describe coming into the newsroom during the height of the pandemic as tense and brisk. As much as journalists wanted to connect, their fear for safety outweighed the desire for emotional fulfillment.

Some managers sought to avoid this situation by implementing more of a conscientious “human factor.” All managers spoke about the difficulty of when to push a person who might be using the pandemic as an excuse for laziness or a “lack of discipline.” Managers had a recurring theme of uncertainty when it came to managing journalists’ mental well-being.

> We have to maintain, you know, some semblance of normalcy, to avoid isolation and to make sure we can best serve the folks that we need to. And by the way, one of the things that was really important initially for

> me, and I think it's something that is always important, is non-transactional communication. So in other words, like every conversation is about hey, can you do this? For me, hey, what do you need? How's this project going? What are you doing today? Like, you have to have some of those BS conversations that you would at work, right.

While emotional connection during the pandemic affected workplace culture, one journalist moved across the country and transitioned from an MMJ job in Alaska to a reporter job in Hawaii. She said that she began feeling the effects of burn out more proximately because she had difficulty talking to her new coworkers about their unique stresses. She credited the easier access to Zoom interviews for further blurring the line between work and home and accelerating burn out. Mentally, this was the most difficult task for journalists. Moving forward, journalists and managers said they wanted to repair the dissolved workplace culture that the pandemic caused, but have no way of knowing the best manner in which to form bonds. Some respondents talked about getting back to normal, only to find a new surge in cases caused the newsrooms to shut back again. While not all newsrooms were affected by vaccines, some said the shots helped give a formerly lacking stability. Journalists also seem to feel as if they have better communication due to different tools such as Slack or Teams that make it easier to fire off quick messages in breaking news situations. The downside is that managers and journalists both must be tethered to their phones and constantly checking different applications to ensure stronger communication. Therefore, the tools available to

journalists do help with stronger communications, but the journalists have to be more aware of sending and receiving meaningful communication.

Work-life balance

The easier access to Zoom interviews also further blurred the line between work and home. Mentally, this was the most difficult task for journalists. One large market MMJ explained that she was constantly looking for stories to a greater extent than before the pandemic and felt like she could not say no when Zoom was so accessible, even if it ate her personal time.

> You're kind of always on that because essentially like especially if you can just get a Zoom call and you kind of are always on because if you have to be able to work within people's time limit and we're always stretching ourselves, but if they can do it this time you make it happen because you need an interview. So I feel like in that sense, you're even more obligated to be involved in work at home, because you can't really say no to an interview. Whereas before it was like a lot there's no way I'm going to be able to make it you know across town to do this in person interview that's going to take a half hour and then I gotta get back like there were more. It was more time consuming, but now there's no reason I can't jump on Zoom really at any time.

This idea of not being able to stop was echoed throughout all but one journalists' experience. One of the main reasons journalists said they could not separate work from home life is the physical space that work started taking in people's homes. Many journalists said they did not have the luxury of a dedicated space. Even for managers,

one Arizonan manager said that he had to use his kids' playroom as an office, which led to many distractions when they finished school for the day. Part of the problem is that inability to take a break journalists' mental health is a lack of managerial oversight, in part because they too were attempting to make work from home functional. One Sinclair manager said he luckily had a spare bedroom that he was able to convert into an office, but he recognized the struggle that a lot of newer, poorer journalists had to struggle through.

> We were able to make it work. We were fortunate because not everyone has that luxury. And that's a really important thing. As a manager, I know I've been in the business long enough. I've got a house I've got a spare room that I can work out of so I'm very fortunate that I could separate the two. I know there are a lot of people, especially just starting out, who if you're—if this happened when I was in the mid 90s when I had a single apartment with one bedroom, it would have been very disruptive. So I think it's important for managers to understand that, like any good manager, they have that empathy to understand that just because your situation is comfortable doesn't mean it's comfortable for everyone else.

In summary, journalists had a hard time connecting with each other on an emotional level while physically separated during the start of the pandemic. Managers attempted to bridge the gap with social Zooms and other forms of digital engagement, but these methods ultimately failed because journalists hated spending more time on a screen when they were already relying on technology for all of their work communications. The mental strain from blurring work and life balance affected many aspects of journalists'

life. Journalists and managers felt frustrated because they had to learn new technology. These frustrations were only made more intense by poor internet connectivity and technology errors that made journalists want to quit.

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to see how life evolved for journalists throughout the pandemic. This question explores what technologies stuck around two years into the pandemic and what faded into obscurity. This question also attempted to see what types of workflows would continue well after the threat of COVID would vanish. These new workflows and lasting technology would then in turn affect how workplace culture and methods of journalism would be sustained long after a return to in-person work. The most surprising overarching theme was not the ease of Zoom, but how interviewees reacted to Zoom over time. Many respondents reported an evolution in interviewees expectations. Initially many interviewees requested in-person crews to film their interviews. The thought process in the beginning for interviewees was that in-person crews were more professional and made them look better, according to participants in the study. This changed with greater time and with the general population's familiarity with Zoom. Participants found that they could save more time and have greater control over interviews through Zoom.

Zoom Interviews

The extra time saved from the using Zoom interviews and virtual meetings were not only used for more time to report, but a common tension many journalists felt were technology issues. Some journalists said that they had issues meeting their deadlines because of slow connectivity and difficulties sending large files over the internet. One journalist in particular lamented that her newsroom would not pay for Zoom nor home internet. While that station provided a hot spot, it did not have enough bandwidth or reliability to send large, high quality video elements to the newsroom. This sentiment was echoed as journalists and managers alike recounted missed deadlines for otherwise good stories due to nothing more than slow transferring to the bureau.

> There were a lot of arguments at home with my wife…I would have a lot of tension because I would be frustrated with the way the day went. And then I would come home and continue to complain about it. I'd be stressed because I'm getting a script late or I can't feed video back through FTP because the internet is slow or missing slot because the internet is too slow.

Managers and journalists felt divided about the use of Zoom interviews. This was inconsistent between managers among themselves and market sizes. However, journalists who had a background in videography or multimedia journalists said they overall disliked a reliance on Zoom. Journalists now tend to see virtual tools and virtual interviews are largely as tools rather than a necessity, or in one NBC journalist's words, “My relationship with technology is a love-hate relationship. I love to use technology but

when I'm abused by technology, I get very angry and want to throw things against the wall." These journalists and managers said that the normalization of Zoom interviews exasperated an already dying storytelling industry. But the usefulness of the tool overweighs potential visual "trash." The Scripps manager below summed up the situation well.

> [Zoom] will stick. It is far too convenient. Like when you're thinking as a journalist and, you know, trying to coordinate schedules. The opportunity to interview somebody on Zoom is invaluable now, to be able to get the story done on time. I miss the photojournalism part of it, and how it looks versus being able to go out and do an actual interview on scene. But I think it's a tool that's never going away.

Other journalists echoed the time saving measures of Zooms, but also said it opened up a wealth of diversity in interviews. Less travel time for journalists meant they could interview experts that were further away or otherwise could not access due to time constraints or expense. Zoom also provided a way for markets far away from the east coast to better interact with politicians or leaders that would otherwise be inaccessible or not prioritize local news. A small market manager explained the greater accessibility.

> It has opened up the world of interviews. Today they're offering, the White House is offering a Zoom with one of the health advisors talking about mask mandates. They never did that before. But now that there's Zoom you know, I can just send in the request and you know, that day I get that interview and we can have it on the air that night.

Not only did the Zoom interviews look bad on screen, but an unintended consequence is that interviewees gained more overall control over interviews. This power dynamic shift prioritizes the comfortability and convenience of the interviewee over the visual appeal of in-person crew lead interviews.

> Interview sources, too, are so used to [Zoom]. Like, there's some interview sources, where they're just like, I don't want a crew coming to my office all the time. You know, like this, these Zoom interviews are easy and knock them out. So I have a feeling that they are going to stay around.

Morning meetings

One of the very few agreed upon positives of the pandemic is the greater efficiency in morning meetings. The idea of morning meetings or primary meetings to plan the news was universally loved in a hybrid manner. Every manager and journalist found the morning meetings more efficient and more focused. Virtual morning meetings allowed reporters to begin newsgathering as the meeting was going. This saved an extreme amount of time by keeping pitches short and focused. All participants said that they expect morning meetings to continue virtually. What once started as a reliance on virtual meeting software has now turned into a normal tool for reporters' and managers' lives. This flexibility to start the day from a bedroom proved to be very beneficial for reporters' mental state. One female MMJ from a large market described how taxing it was to feel the doom of reporting on COVID day after day. Using

technology to meet from home allowed for a gentler start to the day and help journalists mentally warm up to reporting difficult topics.

> [Virtual meetings] made us more efficient, instead of an editorial meeting that took place in a conference room. Now it's on a Zoom call every day regardless of how many people are back in the building because people just aren't and a lot of the reporters are encouraged to be remote and to to be out and already gathering news by the time we were having a 10 AM, 3 PM meeting.

While morning virtual meetings were easier for time constraints and from a managerial standpoint to assign stories, there was a disconnect where some reporters valued efficiency, but others felt like they were not heard. The journalists who felt like they were not heard wanted more back and forth in the pitch meetings, but other journalists valued the extra time they had to news-gather.

> There was a little more frustration because [colleagues] felt like they probably had less control over what was happening and what was assigned to them. Because it was basically discussed by the producers then assigned to the reporters. So I do remember getting more sort of cabin calls with reporters where they were a little more, not happy with whatever their day's assignment was because you know, their pitch wasn't accepted, and they just kind of were assigned something.

New workflows, bad connections

Now that pandemic restrictions are looser in many parts of the country, as of mid-2022, managers are seeing journalists are facing issues when transitioning back into a physical

newsroom. Rather than learning how to operate in a nearly completely digital newsroom, some journalists are struggling to come back into the office after some younger journalists never had professional experience in the newsroom before the pandemic. Smaller markets are tending to have an easier time transitioning back into the newsroom because rural areas tended to drop restrictions earlier, giving more time for colleagues to bond, but one journalist in a over 170 ranked market said she still feels a disconnect. This participant was hired in October 2020 and did not have any professional full time experience before the pandemic started. She said she was struggling to connect to coworkers and learn systems even after physically interacting in the newsroom because people are still keeping their physical and emotional distance. One Nexstar manager said he is attempting to build workplace culture, but finding reluctance to participate among new hires, or established journalists do not want to spend the emotional energy to connect to new coworkers.

> Technology has gotten better through [the pandemic]. But it's easy to lose sight of what sort of interactions are very important in life. And I think it's still important to just interact with people as much face to face as you can because it can be really easy nowadays just to hide behind a screen. So sometimes the one biggest annoyance that I have, I guess, is I don't want people to forget that that's probably the best way of communication.

Managers seem to see what journalists do not notice: journalists are now using technology as a default communication. One journalist said that technology allowed him to communicate with more than one person better and to send a pitch that may not have made it to the morning meeting to all reporters at once. This small market journalist said that it was easier for him to

communicate that way to better prioritize time as he transitions to the anchor desk. The biggest problem managers said technology did **not** help with is ability to review packages and scripts before air as well providing feedback. Before the pandemic, it was easy to walk around a newsroom and check scripts and give feedback before air. Remote work did not allow enough time to transfer edits back and forth, especially with visual elements. Journalists were also frustrated because they felt like their time was wasted by the amount of time it took to go back and forth before air. Once transitioning back to the newsroom, some managers said that journalists got more irritated by small talk around the newsroom. Journalists became used to working independently and managers said they valued that independence because it kept people safe, but now that some newsrooms are returning "back to normal," some journalists are struggling.

> The distractions, how loud the newsroom was now compared to how it used to be. The conversations that might be having a spirited debate over something news related or non-news related, because these people can argue, suddenly that was distracting them from their job, whereas before they might have been a part of the job.

This change away from the newsroom also created an unintended effect: managers began encouraging journalists to edit out in their communities rather than wasting time coming back to the market. One journalist had a split station in North Carolina between Raleigh and Durham, North Carolina. He said that his colleagues were encouraged to be out in the community. This time saving measure also provided more quality work when filming was available by having the work more "embedded in our community," according

to a California MMJ.

Some stations were more prepared in both hardware and culture. One large ABC owned station and a large Scripps owned station both were well prepared prior to the pandemic for the same reason: They already worked virtually. The Scripps station was trying out a hybrid-work model with four journalists months before COVID touched American soil. The manager of that station said his good fortune was a combination of dumb luck and preparation.

> My newsroom in particular, we were starting a satellite newsroom. And the plan was for them to all be remote. And we had purchased equipment to do all of that. laptops and 5g cards and external lab or external hard drives. We had signed up for Zoom and we had done all these things for these four employees. And then suddenly, we were put in a spot where we're like, this will work for everybody. And so we bought 24 more and went for it. And that was interesting. Like I remember one of my managers saying we could have been the most prepared people just out of complete luck. And it was it actually was pretty fun.

Likewise, the journalist who worked for the ABC owned station worked between two bureaus in North Carolina. Because he was constantly working between one station to provide content for the other, that station was also uniquely used to communicating remotely, giving them a leg up on their competition. A potential problem with the ABC station goes back to camaraderie. Journalists who preferred one station did not have opportunities to form bonds with journalists who preferred working from the other

station. The success of these two stations to adapt quickly to the pandemic shows that a decentralized newsroom is not only plausible, but preferable in a post-COVID world. Contrarily, highly centralized newsrooms where reporters rarely edited packages on the go seemed to struggle most with the pandemic. These individuals also were the first ones to come back to the station and back into old patterns. Newsrooms that had the majority of their workers physically came back missed the chance to evolve into a streamlined version of reporters in deeper connections with the public. In essence, the two newsrooms who saw the most success found it was more important to connect by serving the public than by connecting with one another.

Discussion

Temporary measures taken during the beginning of the pandemic could be considered similar to how journalists work under natural disaster situations. The beginning of the COVID pandemic largely resembled initial days after a hurricane or major flood. One Sinclair manager discussed that journalism may have been better prepared than stations thought. He said that bureaus have had to broadcast through smashed newsrooms from tornadoes, threats of wildfires, and flooding that has totaled stations in NOLA. The only difference between treating the pandemic like any other natural disaster and the reaction to lockdowns in 2020 is that every station needed aid at similar times. Lessons learned from the pandemic and natural disasters can better prepare station owners for the next widespread emergency. Universally, the participants in this study missed face-to-face interactions with colleagues. Technology acted as the only lifeline for journalists to connect at the beginning of the pandemic. Later, a reliance on

technology became the new normal and some journalists struggled with how to connect on an emotional level. Technology during the pandemic evolved from a lifeboat saving people to a prison of their own devices. One journalist mentioned how NBCUniversal created a temporary phone line that acted like a party phone line toward the beginning of the pandemic.

Because the pandemic forced newsrooms to dissolve workplace culture overnight, new hires did not have a chance to bond with new colleagues on any meaningful level, other than the solidarity in surviving a global pandemic. While managers attempted to keep some sense of normality alive during the pandemic, this effort proved fruitless. After staring at screens for countless hours for work, the last thing that journalists wanted was digital happy hours. The carrot of potentially connecting better with other co-workers was not enough to weigh the stick of having potentially meaningful bonds a world away. One journalist described this time like working in different countries; much emotional effort was used to communicate the most basic thoughts because physical distance reduced amounts of nonverbal cues and ease of communication. Journalists and managers had to become much more intentional in their interactions because not enough literal bandwidth – in technology terms – existed to provide easier edits or script revisions. Managers are only now having the opportunity to help coworkers connect past an exchange culture. Journalists seem to be craving this connection with coworkers to help eliminate feelings of isolation, but now some feel as if it is too late to begin bonding with their coworkers. New hires in particular feel as if the remote work culture of the newsroom prevented opportunities to bond. Managers attempted to reconcile this divide;

however, only recently under safer circumstances have managers begun healing the impact of the dissolving of work culture.

As managers and journalists had to be more thoughtful of their interactions, technology slowly started getting better; Zoom upgraded its systems to pair with Outlook and schedule recurring meetings, Slack provided software updates to fix bugs, and, once people came back in person, new cameras and microphones started being used that could broadcast from an office to a person's home with better quality. Managers and journalists still need to be more intentional with their interactions because it was harder to get someone to pay attention to a specific messaging app than all of the other distractions on a person's phone. Future research could dive into if specific work phones help reduce distractions and ease communication flow.

An unintended effect of less emotional entanglements with coworkers was more focus on family and friends. When colleagues could not gain emotional support from within their station or company, they were forced to find emotional validation elsewhere. This created tensions in some marriages because journalists who had spouses not in news were not able to relate the pressures of a journalistic lifestyle. For managers and journalists alike, family was more accessible during the pandemic and parents mentioned how much more time they spent watching their children grow up. Because both managers and journalists saw this shift toward family values, many journalists talked about curbing their ambition. Managers discussed being much more lenient with giving time off to spend with loved ones.

Everyone discussed the seemingly droves of people who left the news industry. Those interviewed are still in the journalism industry and could only speculate about why their former colleagues left the industry. Potential speculative reasons they mentioned included mental distresses, a new focus on family, or a lack of pay. Future research could compare people at news stations to those who left the industry to better conceptualize why some people were better able to handle the stress of the pandemic and have a longer career in journalism. A common thread throughout interviews showed that journalism as an industry tends to eat its young and that cycle was made worse through a pandemic where station owners would not prove small, usually first-job-out-of-college newsrooms with appropriate safety or technological resources to already underpaid and understaffed newsrooms.

In the future, this study suggests that while at least some in-person work is necessary for the survival of the television journalism industry, hybrid model work will become more common. Stations and bureaus will always be necessary on some level to assure a television broadcast will make it to air. Broadcasting almost entirely from home will be a phenomena unique to the pandemic because there are no assurances as to the technological soundness of a show at this time. Rather than work being focused exclusively at a station, this paper indicates that newsrooms will become decentralized and TV newsrooms will be used for show production purposes rather than newsgathering purposes. Managers are clear that they want their reporters and photographers gathering news in the field and editing among the public. For a bold claim, this paper also indicates that management may find greater success in reducing the size of the bureaus to save on rent. Instead, owners should be putting that money into

technology to better facilitate remote communication and more reliable internet. Reporters and photographers do not need a desk in an office to produce news anymore. Professionals need high quality hot spots, laptops with high computing capacity, and more thoughtful communication with producers in stations. The money that stations could also save by downsizing could be put into reporter paychecks and mental health resources to better help with station retention of talented individuals.

Many newsrooms are still in hybrid situations. Even if some journalists work completely in the office, odds are that they still have occasional interactions with colleagues that work remotely. For this reason, virtual meetings to plan the news for the day are not going away. Journalists like having more free time and a slower but more efficient start to the beginning of their work days. More efficient morning meetings allow for more time to travel for stories or edit before the piece has to make air. The kinds of technology adopted streamlined text-based conversations, or the technology mimicked round-table meetings. Slack was frequently mentioned as a favorite because different news teams could have their own channels which allowed journalists to be less overwhelmed with streams of different conversations and instead journalists could focus on their own shifts. Teams and Zoom were the most widely used for morning meetings. This style of meetings were meant to feel like a conference room, but ultimately failed because it lacked the spatial awareness that could be found physically. Future research should be done into the potentials of VR as a way to digitally replicate a physical meeting room. A 4D audio experience could help participants feel like they are whispering to coworkers and feel more like a physical space. The “wait your turn” style of virtual meetings

created more efficient meetings. Journalists liked how much time they would save not bouncing ideas back and forth. During their morning meetings, journalists could travel to shoot locations or get a jump on other daily tasks from home. However, some journalists felt as if they were trampled on by their managers and had no input on what stories they would cover for the day. Specifically for COVID, some journalists reported a severe mental detriment in covering COVID daily and feeling the looming doom that they would repeat the same story for the foreseeable future.

Research question two was addressed when this paper analyzed how some journalists felt a shift due to vaccines; however, many journalists did not see a large effect on newsrooms. Policies may not change much if at all, but journalists felt more comfortable with the safety of vaccines. Additionally, looser pandemic restrictions allowed for more visual opportunities. Toward the beginning of the pandemic, journalists talked about how they were not allowed inside of offices, people's homes, or other buildings. Vaccines allowed for some policy changes to be made and made it easier for journalists to gather visuals for their packages. The change for the social structure throughout the pandemic was one of increased isolation and decreased stress. At the beginning of COVID, managers made more attempts to connect their reporters. Those attempts were far from successful and the progression throughout the pandemic showed a normalization of isolation. As the pandemic restrictions loosened, anxiety regarding health also largely decreased. The normalization of isolation is one of the biggest struggles managers face, especially with new hires. It is now normal for new hires to rarely meet their coworkers. People hired during the pandemic said they felt like companies did not have much appreciation

for their efforts or were not aware of their talents that could benefit the station. Workplace culture dissolved into completely business culture.

This study recognizes the potential limitations it carries as it focused exclusively on local U.S. television journalists and did not include journalists who reported in other languages or for international media that operates out of the U.S. Additionally, no national media stations or bureaus such as ABC, CNN, or the Washington, D.C. bureau for Gray television were chosen. This was a conscious choice made by the researcher because covering COVID nationally was a much bigger story with different implications than various lockdowns across different regions in the U.S. In other words, local journalists provided a more personal version of the effects of the pandemic on people rather than infrastructure of the country. This study also recognizes that a convenience sample carries more implicit bias than the originally intended purposeful sample.

One reporter discussed how technology evolved during the pandemic. For example, one popular transcription service Otter.ai partnered with Zoom to create a program that would transcribe the Zoom meeting as it progressed. Technology got better at remote work during the pandemic. Other future research could look into Zoom and other remote technologies to see how different technologies were adopted, feedback given, and consequently improved due to COVID-19 lockdowns. This study focused on a highly unusual time in the history of the U.S. Stations around the nation had to find ways to make broadcasts safe. This wasn't always possible. One small market manager discussed how his whole newsroom had a reality check after a photographer's daughter died from COVID. In a time of national crisis, clear lines were drawn between the haves and the have nots. Station management must see their failures in

protecting their people's health and families of their employees throughout this pandemic. Smaller owner companies such as Scripps tended to do better when connecting employees and helping them feel secure. Other companies such as Sinclair had very strict COVID guidelines which helped keep people safe. Issues arose with companies who were in the process of being sold or who didn't have a budget to make **every** market a priority in safety. Workplace culture and retention is important to the longevity of journalism as an industry, but as some journalists agreed, a career in news cannot substitute for a healthy life.

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