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# NOTHING ROUTINE: TELEVISION NEWS MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19, ORGANIZATIONAL UNCERTAINTY, AND CHANGES IN NEWS WORK.

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NOTHING ROUTINE: TELEVISION NEWS MANAGEMENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19, ORGANIZATIONAL UNCERTAINTY, AND CHANGES IN NEWS WORK.

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# Dedication

To my parents Md. Ashadul Islam and Hasna Hena Begum, who are my inspiration and source of unconditional love. To me, one of the most beautiful things in this world is seeing them proud and smiling, I know my work makes them both.

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## Abstract

COVID-19 has impacted television news routines and created organizational challenges that required re-organization of journalism work (Wood, 2020). This shift created considerable uncertainty for news creation. Some of the journalistic professional values such as information gathering, interaction with sources, news judgement, information verification, proximity, human connections (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) were applied in a different way. These shifts also affected news quality. Media sociology is the study of the forces that influence news content. This study focuses on Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchical influence model primarily with regard to COVID's impact at organizational and routine levels. The purpose of this study is to explore the virus's impact on news work (organizational and routines), and management's organizational responses toward journalism quality. The study includes in-depth interviews with broadcast news managers (news directors) in the southern Midwest of the U.S. (n = 13). The results of the study indicate the virus's impact creates more horizontal (less hierarchical) and multilayered influences on news content. The pandemic is a macro-level influence and above the hierarchy of the influence model. It has hit everywhere. Yet, the data in this study suggest its influence on news is fluid, flowing up and down among organizational, routine, and individual levels.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

> On a normal day, we're all gathered in a conference room- sipping coffee while pitching and debating story ideas. On this day, there are about 40 of us gathered on a Zoom call. All of our reporters and photojournalists are now working remotely. The digital team works from home. Also, the entire sports department, some assignment editors, managers, IT, video editors and producers (Wieland, 2020, para. 3).

The quote above from CBS4-Denver's news director Tim Wieland describes the new normal in television news work in the era of COVID-19. The virus has impacted broadcast journalism in unprecedented ways, forcing journalists to work from home, changing their daily routines of gathering and producing news while creating ongoing organizational uncertainties and challenges (Tameez, 2020). The virus and associated health risks have required news managers to guide their organizations' responses and attempt to maintain professional quality programming in a social-distanced, remote, virtual work environment (Miner & Roche, 2020). Former President and Publisher of *The Washington Post* Philip L. Graham said that over time journalism has been considered the first rough draft of history. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, journalism transformed into the first rough draft of the future (Banaszynski, 2020).

Nearly all stations have turned to remote work during the pandemic. A March 2020 survey of US news directors found 92% acknowledged that many or most of their staff are working from home (RTDNA, 2020). A report from the National Press Club Journalism Institute also noted, major news organizations, including *The New York*

*Times*, *The Washington Post*, MSNBC, *The Los Angeles Times*, *BuzzFeed*, *Politico*, and AXIOS are encouraging journalists to work from home (Fischer, 2020).

The initial broadcast industry response to the virus came from the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) in February 2020, which created guidelines for newsrooms that advocated holding meetings via phone or video instead of in-person, equipping digital and production teams to work remotely, maximizing use of remote units, and news teams (Photographer/Reporter) meeting offsite (not in the office) (RTDNA, 2020). In short, remote work influenced journalists' traditional daily routines, changed regular practices. For instance, typically, a journalist in the U.S. starts a day with a story idea, pitches the story to the editor, reaches out to sources, sets up interviews, and finally writes down the story for the designated media outlet (Carpenter, 2008). But the changes COVID -19 caused in news work routines created numerous immediate challenges from information gathering, processing, and broadcasting (Fischer, 2020). Likewise, news programs and production changed; studio guests were not allowed and were replaced by Zoom or other platforms for interviews and on-air discussions (Benz, 2020).

Similarly, COVID-19 forced news organizations to adjust with the changes and therefore, organizations initiated new policies to keep running routine practices (Wood, 2020). News organizations promptly changed news operations and journalists started learning to adapt to the changes created by COVID-19 (Kafka, 2020) as journalistic jobs involve quick decision-making, working in real time, constant communication, and contact (Deuze, 2005). Newsrooms are using new operating processes such as distance reporting, data-driven stories, open-source investigation, and storytelling (Bell & Posetti,

2020) to report the news. Many news organizations set up small remote studios and shifted production equipment so news anchors can do shows from home (Mays, 2020). Likewise, many television managements asked the field crews not to report at the office building (RTDNA, 2020) and started handing off all the TVU's (live video solution units) from the building back alley as "Drive-thru TVU." Another report from RTDNA (2020) mentioned that most of the television management's thinking process of getting work done and on air has changed, which impacted journalistic work.

These restrictions have inevitably had an impact on news quality, both in terms of content and production (Mediashi, 2020). Remote work has left many journalists without direct supervision, causing concerns about content quality, primarily access to sources for interviews and verification (OpenNews, 2020; Benz, 2020). Remote news gathering through Zoom and similar platforms also produces news with lower visual and audio quality. Further, news stations felt the economic impact of the virus. Many reduced their staff at a time when they had to produce the same amount or more content while taking into account new rules of news production (Mediashi, 2020). In general, broadcast journalists' daily routines involve time pressure and multitasking (Fernandes & de Mendonça Jorge, 2017), and during the pandemic, journalists are under even intense pressure (Mays, 2020). All these changes created instant challenges for news managers, who found their staff feeling overworked, stressed, and struggling to find a home-work balance (OpenNews, 2020). According to a pre-COVID-19 study, when journalists are under severe deadline pressure, they mostly focus on finishing the work, show no creativity, sometimes even put less clarity on a complex event (Dennis, 2017). Professional journalists noticed even more time pressure and complex situations during

COVID-19 and the impact of remote work on news production (Fischer, 2020). They mentioned there will always be a need of in-person manpower in some of the journalistic work and news productions tasks (Tameez, 2020).

Over the past year, professional journalists showed concerns related to the changed news work and journalistic professional values. In-person needed productions, video and events are losing the original characteristics due to the changed news work (Miner & Roche, 2020). One of the *New York Times* reporters said, as journalists are responsible for covering the news, some of the journalistic work such as in-person contacts, source development, and some events should not be shifted online (Fischer, 2020). Another report said this pandemic effect might last longer than many had anticipated, and as a result, most of the newsrooms will continue with work-from-home for an uncertain time, while policies on places, production and editorial have been changed (Fischer, 2020). However, journalism professionals predict long-term distant and remote working could be depressing for the news workers and influence their work (Benz, 2020).

Media sociology is the study of the forces that influence news content. Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy of influences model identifies five levels of influence that shape news from macro to micro levels: social systems, institutions, media organizations, routines, and individuals. Most importantly this model argues that these influences are interconnected, and the impacts are hierarchical (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The current study focuses primarily on COVID-19's impact at organizational and routine levels, exploring the impact of the virus on news routines and management's organizational responses. In addition, following to Gans (2004) and Gitlin (2003) who asserted how

journalists apply their professional values in their news work routines which directly impacts the quality of news content. The organizational routines in which journalists work form a structure, constraining action while also allowing it (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 7).

It is the role of management to coordinate organizational responses to changes and uncertainties in the business environment (Drucker, 2008). The primary functions of management are to plan, organize, integrate, measure, and develop people to complete the work and achieve the goals of the organization (Drucker, 2008). In dynamic environments, employees look to management to lead by making hard choices, communicating a vision, and keeping the perspective of employees in mind while crafting initiatives to organizational uncertainty (Gade, Dastgeer, DeWalt, Nduka, Kim, Hill, & Curran, 2018). Drucker (2008) said, management is responsible for the individuals who are causing the problems to the organization and the organization's policy-related issues. In addition, managers introduce a variety of changes in the newsroom as part of the reshaping so that newsroom practices can acquire some foresight in any uncertain environment. Each of those actions could be considered an innovation (Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg, 2008). Nevertheless, the changes are not frequently structured, and it is hardly ever understandable how those ideas could be assembled and implemented in support of obtaining goals. To remove the obstacles that prevent organizations from changing, management generates multiple innovative ideas to create a vision, communicate that vision, and introduce a variety of initiatives to motivate people (Kotter, 2007). Moreover, during dynamic and uncertain times management grasps the collective knowledge from the organization to create a series of solutions (Drucker,

2008). As part of organizational influence in journalism, news managers interact with other divisions, communicate initiatives, and coordinate their efforts while they also compete (Gade, 2008).

The COVID-19 virus has created considerable uncertainty for news creation. This, in turn, has created organizational challenges that required re-organization of journalism work (Wood, 2020). During this collective crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic newsrooms tried to find the answers of how the industry would survive, how the employees would be safe, how they would continue content creation, and many more while keeping everyone's safety and health in mind. Meanwhile, keeping social contact is where journalists' jobs start (RTDNA, 2020).

Hence, this study, guided by media sociology, explores the impact of COVID-19 on broadcast news routines and management's organizational responses that influence content. It attempts to explore how COVID-19 has impacted the routine level works including information gathering and content production and on the organization level managers influence on daily routines. The study includes in-depth interviews with broadcast news managers (news directors) in the southern Midwest of the U.S. (n = 13). Through these interviews the study is primarily interested in how news managers have guided organizational responses to COVID-related work disruptions and environmental uncertainty. Ultimately, the study investigates the challenges created by the virus to broadcast news work and organizational responses that attempt to maintain professionalism and news quality in unprecedented times.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

To explore the COVID-19 virus's impact on broadcast news work and management's responses to virus-related changes, this literature review first explores how COVID-19 impacted overall news work. It then turns to media sociology as the theoretical framework to study influences on news work, particularly focusing on organizational and routine level influences. Finally, the literature review focuses on the role of management in organizational responses to uncertainty.

## COVID-19 impact on broadcast news work

At the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) forecasted the high risk of being infected by the virus through close human interaction (CDC, n.d.). Hence, the CDC advocated for staying home as much as possible. As a result, this virus changed the way of executing the job responsibilities – whether in person or remotely, and reshaped the overall workplace culture (Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2020). Regardless of a high level of health risk, journalists are considered essential services, thus, most of the media organizations across the world shifted virtually.

When the COVID-19 outbreak spread rapidly, newsroom leaders promptly sent the maximum number of employees to remote work because managements were concerned to keep the industry running (Littleton, 2020; Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2020; RTDNA, 2020). Many also cancelled all scheduled news-related travel. Editors sent internal emails and made public statements about how they were adapting (RTDNA, 2020). In small markets, even television news managers started working from home (Littleton, 2020). Because similar to any other business, media organizations needed to

plan for individual operations to coordinate remote workers (PWC, 2020). COVID-19 interrupted most of the organization's normal way of doing work and media companies and broadcasters radically brought up changes and started adopting new approaches to create content. Ingenuity and innovation that normally take years has sprung up in days, as working from home becomes the new normal for everyone, from video editors to on-screen talents (Sawer, 2020). However, interpersonal communication and coordination related challenges emerged among remote coworkers. Hence, professional journalists mentioned, a lack of mutual knowledge among remote workers could cause a lower willingness to give coworkers the benefit of the doubt in difficult situations (Larson, Vroman & Makarius, 2020). In addition, from the beginning of the outbreak, many broadcast organizations are operating out of an open-office layout and using their project offices for a few projects. According to a broadcast journalist,

> In some industries it is quite easy to work from home and jump on a Zoom meeting, make a sales call from your kitchen table, or fire off emails from the terrace in your garden, but in the world of television production – with actors – this simply is not an option. (Lehaen, 2020, para. 8).

This reporter also mentioned how challenging it was to conduct meetings and interviews via Zoom. RTDNA (Wieland, 2020) described how TV newsrooms start their days now:

> This morning, there were just six of us on the Zoom from our desks in the newsroom. A little chime sounds as each person joins from home. The call is filled with the sounds of dogs barking, babies crying, children looking for

> something to do, somebody's spouse asking, "Have you seen the remote?" These are the sounds of our homes, now part of the soundtrack of our morning editorial meeting. (para. 3)

At the beginning of the outbreak, RTDNA (2020) provided social distancing guideline protocols, where it advised not to work from the office but work from home. The guidelines suggested, if necessary, only essential staff should workers from the station, but all work should maintain social distance and other safety protocols, such as reporters and photographers using different vehicles in route to news gathering; guidelines also suggested limiting access to the editing panels and production control rooms. RTDNA (2020) also advised to wear a mask in the office, sanitize the workplace, regularly checking employee's temperature (if possible), etc.

In addition, due to the social distance guidelines nationwide all live events at stadiums got cancelled, shopping malls, theme parks, theaters, resorts, and other venues closed totally which resulted in lost in revenue from ticket sales, advertising and promotions (RTDNA, 2020). Those beat reporters were reassigned.

Information gathering to post-production, most tasks are getting done from home. The visual nature of television demands that an event is covered whenever it happens (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) but COVID-19 did not allow this, and television stations became dependent on archive footage to a great extent (Littleton, 2020). These television stations also had to heavily rely on technological tools such as Zoom for interviews, stand ups and discussions (RTDNA, 2020). The news industry had to learn how to adapt with the lockdown and social distance requirements. As a result, journalists started gathering experts' reaction via Zoom or other platforms from around the world. Often news

organizations were noticed using User Generated Content (UGC) to fill up the slots, even while it's not necessary (RTDNA, 2020).

A face-to-face interaction has always been a staple of news work (Zanni, 2020). The pandemic forced broadcast stations into routines that have limited in-person interaction among sources and employees. Nearly all work had to be done virtually. To stay relevant and connected with contemporary issues, newsrooms needed to change almost in real time and therefore, news organizations innovated new ways of functioning (Lehaen, 2020). Due to the lack of in-person interactions, reporters generate sources by a "deskside meeting" with people, talking casually over coffee rather than doing a formal interview (Mediashi, 2020). They are not always able to add the dynamics in the interviews as they were used to. Powell (2020) said, reporters are significantly using video calls rather than a phone call when they are working remotely. During this past year, some of the news organizations-initiated training for both managers and staff in order to adopt remote work. Likewise, managers provided extra laptops, microphones, and digital audio recorders to staff so they could record podcasts and other interviews from home. Yet, a lack of coordination with news work (Wieland, 2020), editorial supervision and guidance, left reporters missing important issues (Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2020).

The broadcast industry in general depends on teamwork, with team members coordinating different tasks to create "daily fresh" content, which is often updated several times throughout the day (Lehaen, 2020). Teamwork has meant that journalists not only cover events together, but they also collaborate for news ideas and story angles as routine practices of news work (McCluskey, 2008). Hence, the television industry builds a

creative team who can adopt innovations within a very short notice. While much of a reporter's job is done remotely, the photographers and videographers who put together visuals to complement a reporter's work have a more difficult time because they cannot be on the news scene (Powell, 2020). In addition, reporters depend on their editors for the guidance of story development (McCluskey, 2008), which has shifted to virtually during the pandemic (Lehaen, 2020).

In addition, remote work for a longer period has caused trouble to access information, and social isolation might reduce news workers networks and contacts (Larson, Vroman & Makarius, 2020; RTDNA, 2020). Remote work and COVID-inspired layoffs have also limited the quality and scope of news and information reported (Bolstad, 2020). Although televisions 24 hours of news cycle had a mandatory requirement of producing content and fill up the slots (Neason, 2020).

A 2020 study by the Pew Research Center revealed that 65% of workers who are now working remotely all or most of the time (but rarely or never did so before the pandemic), feel less connected to their coworkers and have a harder time getting their professional work done properly (Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2020). Likewise, navigating remote work without direct supervision and limited resources has made it harder to plan and meet deadlines (Willens, 2020). Broadcasters find themselves increasingly challenged to produce sufficient fresh contents that consumers have come to expect (Neason, 2020).

COVID-19 affected new organizations' news judgement as well. COVID-related issues get most priority and the daily news pool is certainly missing other relevant and important issues (Powell, 2020). News judgment evaluates stories based on professional

news values and provides the audience a clear idea on the importance of the issue (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In its simplest conceptualization, news judgment is the process of winnowing down thousands of potential story ideas to the few that could be transmitted by the news media (Bissell, 2000). For journalists, news judgement is a mandatory, routine part of news work where journalists decide which information is useful and relevant and which is not (Carlson, 2018). Shoemaker and Reese (2014) suggest that through the winnowing down process, positive or negative forces facilitate the flow of items through the various gates. This gatekeeping practice is collaborative with news managers engaging and directing reporters on selection stories (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Reese (2007) said, traditional gatekeeping models are distinct, and can fit into different journalistic contexts.

The virus's impact on production has been as great as on news judgment and information gathering. Television anchors presented news programs without their usual audiences in the studio. Studio guest discussion and more than one anchor in the studio was stopped; producers have been encouraged to record their guest interviews in remote locations, rather than studios (Willens, 2020). Most stations set up small studios in the homes of reporters and anchors for live shots and news shows (Willens, 2020). This is unprecedented from a production perspective and a huge transformation from polished and controlled in-house audio-visual studios (Zurawik, 2020). Clearly, visuals are an essential element for television, and the quality of visual reporting has suffered since the virus. Visuals help audiences make a correlation between information and usable knowledge, and they provide symbols in a universal language (Barnes, 2011).

No doubt, the pandemic and its wide-ranging repercussions is one of the biggest stories of most journalists' careers (Littleton, 2020). Thus, journalists kept working remotely. Many reporters were in their job while grappling with homeschooling their children. During the scheduled live shot or stand ups, reporters quickly dressed up, at least the top and opened their iPad. Many anchors were provided personal microphone sleeves to use during recording sessions to minimize the threat of contamination (Willens, 2020). Many employees with families had carved up their houses into multiple workstations. A television producer describes the changes as:

> We felt an impact, as we worked hard to prevent disruptions in our programs. In the first few weeks, like many industries, we thought we would have to improvise and implement a temporary strategy to see us through the lockdown. However, we soon realized that we would have to adapt to the 'new normal,' and create a successful long-term plan. (Lehaen, 2020, para. 4).

**Media sociology- organizational and routine influences in news work**

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) discussed a hierarchy of influences model for understanding the complex factors shaping news content. Typically, the hierarchy influences content from social-system level (macro) to the individual level (micro). In between these two, social institutions, media organizations and routine level exists (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

The larger *social system* includes ideological forces, sometimes taken for granted for ideas and meanings of content within a cross-national and cultural context and influences overall media performance. Within this system *social institutions* often regulate media organizations that merge into a larger institution and build relationships

with other powerful institutions such as governmental bodies, market forces, etc. Within this context *media organizations* allow journalists to work, set their occupational roles, determine organizational policies and, most importantly, structure itself. Organizations are responsible for the content. They decide how a journalist will operate within a *routine* to create the content, following structural patterns and decisions based on professional values. Finally, on the individual level where a journalist communicates and can impact the content directly (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Through the conceptualizations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Shoemaker, Eichholz & Wrigley, 2001) the influences on content that impact journalistic professionalism have been examined on a variety of levels at multiple news organizations. Shoemaker and colleagues further suggest that these forces can be identified on all levels of analysis: social system, social institutions, organizational characteristics, routines of communication work, and individuals. This approach argues that content appears in the media directly related to how the media work is organized. The hierarchical influences are as effective in the digital age as before and the levels of influence can be dynamic and multi-directional (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). This level-by-level review shows how new research is located within the hierarchy of influence model, but the changing media ecosystem (e.g., COVID-19) has brought new conceptual challenges (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016). Similarly, Gans (2004) and Gitlin (2003) theorized content influenced by media organizations and routines. It is necessary to define how decisions are made within a context, so that the process can be further analyzed with regard to its potential for change and therefore, to produce more desirable content (Sylvie & Huang, 2006). Hence, the current study focuses on two levels: routines

and organizational levels within the context of COVID-19 and assessed the further changes related to these.

The routines make sure certain behaviors of journalists and practices that form the structures of the media work. As a social practice, routine practices include those unstated rules and ritualized validations where everyone has a clear idea about the process of the work. In studying routines Reese and Shoemaker (2016) said, leaders exercise power. within organizations by establishing a pattern of practices that serve the needs of the organization, adapt to requirements of information sources, control the workflow, and give it a meaningful structure. In the case of journalism these range from deadline and space requirements to pack journalism (Reese & Shoemaker, 2016).

Routines are specifically essential for television news because the work involves complex technologies (Klinenberg, 2005) and real-time deadline challenges (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Hence, broadcast news work requires more coordination between the manager and employee to put a news show on air. Most importantly, for journalists, routines establish norms of how journalists apply their professional values to their work (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Adam, 2001). For example, Reese (2007) explains the role of news judgement and gatekeeping in routines practices. Reese noted how journalists consult with the final gatekeeper (news managers) to determine what news stories to cover based on news judgments. For journalists, this guidance determines what issues or events are reported and how (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001; *Zelizer, 1993*). They are the patterned practices and rules that "form the immediate context, both within and through which these individuals do their jobs" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 165). Nearly every news decision is shaped by this routines practice. For television news,

these routine decisions are an important element of news work because of the limited work force and demand for fresh daily stories (Shoemaker & Cohen, 2005; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

However, those norms of professional journalists that Shoemaker and Reese (2014) and Adam (2001) mentioned are such social patterns which define what it means to be a professional journalist, and they are valuable for journalism (Welbers, Van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, Ruigrok, & Schaper, 2016). A gatekeeper is a professional journalist who exercises news judgement based on the news values. Gatekeepers consider prominence and importance, conflict, and controversy, unusuality, human interest, timeliness and proximity while deciding what makes a story (Shoemaker, Lee, Han, & Cohen, 2007). A gatekeeper a takes a decision based on his/her professional values such as serving the public- which is a common ideology of all journalists (Deuze, 2005), objectivity and watchdog role (Skovsgaard, 2014). These values also contribute to the content that a journalist delivers. (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Unbiasedness is another professional value and approach of gatekeeping (Reese & Ballinger, 2001). Different strategies, routines and norms stress journalism values and allow journalists to navigate between truth and insanity (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2000). Similarly, professional values refer to some of the routines practice such as news judgment, norms and practices of verification to determine what information should be circulated across and also ensuring the quality (Singer, 2007, 2010) In addition, *t*he Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) (2014) code of ethics encourages journalists to follow four principles as their foundation of ethics and professionalism: *truth, minimizing harm, independence, and accountability and transparency*. These principles emphasize

seeking *truth* by ensuring accuracy or verifying the information, fact-checking, etc., and then reporting it. To *minimize any kind of harm* journalists are expected to be respectful to all parties including sources and audiences. To serve the citizens, journalists are obligated to work *independently* so that they can avoid any type of conflict of interest. Journalists are also obligated to take responsibility for their work and stand for explaining their decision to the public, which is considered as *accountability and transparency.* In addition, Ward (2015) said, "Journalism ethics balance many values, from transparency to truth-seeking to minimizing harm. There is no absolute hierarchy of values with transparency at the top" (p. 48).

Nevertheless, at the routines level journalists contend with tensions among the presumed content preferences of their audience, the format requirements and deadlines imposed by their organization, and the availability of reputable news sources. Hence, producing news is not only a social artifact but also a combination of stakeholders based on a journalist's consideration (Shoemaker, 2006). Over time news workers rely more on daily routines to accomplish their daily tasks properly (Ettema, Whitney, & Wackman, 1997), and in an intense situation, routines become a mechanism that helps journalists get daily production done (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Television news work is more prone to routinization because of its reliance on complicated technology (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Compared to newspapers, television news relies more on technically skilled, efficient workers who could use video cameras, editing equipment, live broadcast equipment, and more (Klinenberg, 2005). Television reporters use that technical equipment while always keeping in mind that those have some limitations, and the reporter must function within that. Despite those

limitations, knowledge regarding them and developing routines help journalists to ensure daily news production (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The complex use of technological tools and news production made editorial supervision more difficult.

Work routines are shaped by organizational approaches that structures to work. Media organizations guide how journalists work, set their occupational roles, determine organizational policies and most importantly, the structure of work itself. News managers lead the organizations, and they are responsible for the content. Managers decide how journalists work in the organizational setting, ideally creating routines that create content reflecting decisions based on professional values (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Organizational forces could include policies about covering topics in certain ways (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim & Wrigley, 2001) and could emphasize certain aspects, angles, or interpretations (framing); or by trying to keep certain coverage out of the news or off the main news agenda (agenda cutting) (Colistra, 2018).

Organizations govern employee routines to meet the needs of the system and to help reduce uncertainty in two ways: control and coordination of the news work (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Shoemaker and Reese explained, through routines, both management and employees respond to needs of the organization. News organizations select topics, gather information, process, and then deliver the news to the audience within a specific deadline and space. Thus, routines reduce the uncertainty and variability in accomplishing the overall goal of the organization. Additionally, routines that develop between different departments in the organization are known as coordination. Coordination normalizes the relations between inter- departments. That's how employees know when and how to apply their specific skill or knowledge on a subject and reduces

uncertainty (Hilmersson & Jansson, 2012). Therefore, news organizations adopt routines to constraint and optimize the relationships between the organization and the overall work environment (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Gade, 2008).

Organizational process refers to the formal course of action through which the organization makes sure "things get done" (Lowrey & Gade, 2012). Here procedure is a formal guide of how a job needs to be done, for instance, supervision, objectives and standards. Organizational process is also involved with oversight, which means monitoring and ensuring something.

Management is a representative of the organization who is empowered to see (and be responsible) the work and goals of the organization are achieved (Gade & Raviola, 2009). Organization influencers are based on the title - manager, supervisor, senior vice-president, etc. (Li, Jeffs, Barwick, & Stevens, 2018). Typically, managers make the tough calls, and for the results of their decisions, for better or worse (Kokeemuller, 2020). Because decision makers reach a certain level of power within the system, and they usually have experience, skill, originality, sharp and emotional intelligence (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004). Hence, managers are also influencers because influencers are those professionals who generally influence decisions on a regular basis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, media organizations have quickly navigated new ways of contextualizing information beyond traditional metrics (Marconi, 2020). Local news organizations started taking advantage of open-source data analysis tools, free online courses for journalists to leverage machine learning libraries for reporting. In addition, collaboration for content within national and international news organizations became a part of journalism during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marconi, 2020).

**Management response to COVID-19: innovation and change**

The traditional definition of "management" is responsible for the fact that the individual professional contributor presents a problem within the structure (Drucker, 2008, p. 5). Similarly, people who are responsible for managing are known as managers or "bosses" (Drucker, 2008). Managers can improve a situation based on the acquisition of organizational knowledge, and the continuing analysis of performance in all areas of work (Drucker, 2008). Also providing employees with the right structure, training and development so that they can perform and respond to the changes. Managers have organizational influence when they are successful at identifying what is important and can induce others to behave a certain way (Bryman, 2013). Managers perceive that their organizations value them because of their greater support to take risks, and greater influence to initiate changes that redefine organizational norms in the unusual environment (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). Hamel (2008) said, in the modern age companies make a strategic plan to adapt a context and make employees efficient, if any pace of change continues to accelerate. In addition, modern management heavily focuses on common goals, standardization, specialization, hierarchy and planning and control. These contribute to maximizing operational efficiency and reliability in large-scale organizations (Hamel, 2008).

However, media management is different from other industries. Hollifield (2008) wrote, "media management is different in fundamental ways from management in other industries because of differences in the underlying economics of media products, the utilities audiences gain from content, and the externality effects media have on society" (p. 182). According to early studies, management relies more on collective knowledge

during uncertainty or any dynamic situation to address the issues and end up with solutions within the organization (Kanter, 1983). Those changes guide the employees to perform in an uncertain environment (Kets De Vries, 1993).

Likewise, media managers perform more strategically (Picard, 2011) and make decisions based on the environment and resources (Chan-Olmsted, 2006). Although changes in the newsroom involves creating a new culture because journalism work changes and revises the job performance evaluation so that the changes reflect to the goals of the new system (Gade, 2004). Therefore, bringing change is a difficult job for managers. In addition, changing is also involved with professional values (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). Newsroom managers show higher levels of professionalism when they make changes at larger media organizations and try to minimize errors (Lowrey & Gade, 2012). Often in a higher volume of pressure or uncertainty, managers may change media organizations' formal policies to respond to change (Meyer & Rowan, 2012).

Within these changes managers need to show more leadership, influence, and innovation (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004). Changes have established work patterns, require certain levels of coordination to introduce new ideas in innovative ways to approach work (Dal Zotto & Van Kranenburg, 2008). In a discussion of change and management innovation Lowrey (2012) said when change happens, people act very calculative and in optimizing ways. This approach explains the adoption of innovations within the organizations as well. Through a rational decision, a manager scours environments for innovations so the problems that emerged in the organization could be solved (Rogers, 2003). Further, managers evaluate their choices. New opportunities could turn into ideas and then the ideas could be widely used in different sets of knowledge.

Such knowledge could already exist based on the experience of the employees or could be a result of environmental changes (Drucker, 2008).

**Literature summary and research questions**

COVID-19 created such an environment, when newsroom managers organized new ideas in story ideation, assigning reporters, information gathering, processing, controlling their routines, coordinating, major organizational decisions, etc. (RTDNA, 2020).

This study builds on a circumstance where COVID-19 has impacted routines of news work, including news judgment (Powell, 2020), information gathering (Littleton, 2020), information verification (Larson, Vroman & Makarius, 2020), news production (Willens, 2020; Zurawik, 2020), etc. and how organizations are responding to them. It is the role of management to steer an organization through uncertainty by creating initiatives and policies that allow the organization to successfully do its work and achieve quality journalism. Based on this theoretical framework, this research is intending to explore the following research questions:

RQ 1a: How has COVID impacted information gathering?

RQ 1b: How has COVID changed news production?

RQ 2a: What is management's perception about the influence of COVID on news content?

RQ 2b: What is management's perception about the impact of remote work on content?

RQ 3a: What management initiatives have been taken to address the impact of COVID?

RQ 3b: What management initiatives have been directed precisely managing remote work?

RQ 4a: How effective are the initiatives that have been taken by the management?

RQ 4b: What are the ongoing COVID-related management challenges?

RQ 5: How have management initiatives impacted journalism quality?

# Chapter 3: Methods

To explore the impact of COVID-19 on broadcast news work and answer the research questions this study conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of television news directors in Oklahoma.

In-depth interview is an appropriate method to produce a deeper understanding of the perspectives of individuals or small groups and get an appreciation for a situation specific people are experiencing, their knowledge, and perspectives (Mears, 2012; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). The purpose of in-depth interviews is to understand the underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of respondents on a particular subject (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Similarly, in-depth interviews allow participants to relate their lived experience, and the opportunity to probe and ask follow-up questions to gain additional explanation and insight from participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Dupagne & Garrison, 2006; Geertz, 1973). One of the biggest opportunities of in-depth interview is that this method offers a semi-structured format which allows the researcher to ask questions depending on the interviewee's answer. These aspects could facilitate a researcher to add dimension and depth to the research (Brounéus, 2011). Thorough the open- ended questions, the researcher can obtain the answer of "why" or "how," which gives respondents the freedom to answer in their own words. Also, this way participants can provide relevant explanations. The respondents cannot just answer by saying "yes" or "no" (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001).

News managers' experiences related to COVID-19's impact and their responses are the core of this study. Therefore, this study aimed to examine television management's knowledge, ability and views which they have achieved in two forms: the

interview and explanations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). In addition, managers are the right sample to interview because of their roles in news organizations (Drucker, 2008). In this study news directors provide all the information regarding changed policy and practice of the newsroom, journalists, and production systems as they are responsible for creation of new policies (Drucker, 2008).

**Population and Sampling**

To study the virus's impact at the routine and organizational levels of news work, a population of 19 television news directors in Oklahoma and those contingent states with designated market areas (DMAs) that include Oklahoma were recruited to participate in the study. These televisions are affiliated with national broadcast networks. The 19 televisions in the population are : KJRH-2- NBC, Tulsa; KOTV- 6- CBS, Tulsa; OETA-112- PBS, Oklahoma City; KFOR- 4- NBC, Oklahoma City; KTUL-8 - ABC and CNN, Tulsa; KOCO- 5- ABC, Oklahoma City; KTUZ- 30- Telemundo, Oklahoma City; KWTV- 9- CBS, Oklahoma City, KSWO- 7- ABC, Lawton; KOKH- 25- FOX, Oklahoma City; KOKI- 23 - FOX, Tulsa; KXII- 12- CBS and FOX, Sherman, TX; KAUZ- 6 - CBS, Wichita Falls, TX; KTEN- 10 - NBC and ABC, Denison, TX; KFDX- 3 - NBC, Wichita Falls, TX; KNWA- 51 - NBC, Rogers, AR; KFTA- 24 - FOX, Fort Smith, AR; KHBS- 40 - ABC, Rogers, AR; and KFSM- 5 - CBS, Fort Smith, AR. The news directors worked in DMAs (market) ranging from 44 to 159 (Nielsen DMA ranking, 2021) or mid- size to small markets.

This study chose purposive sampling because this type of sampling allowed for choosing study participants who have the knowledge and ability to provide insights that can answer the research questions. (Emmel, 2013). The study probed the specific

population (news directors) most relevant to addressing organizational perspectives on the COVID-19 situation and their experiences. In addition, qualitative studies seldom generalize the findings to the entire population (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017) since the central value of this type of study lies in obtaining a deep, even though partial and unpredictable, understanding of a social reality in a specific context (e.g., COVID-19).

**Measurements**

This study measured *organizational level influences on content* by asking management what type of adjustments were initiated to maintain the news operation, namely the re-arranging of work routines, how remote work has impacted coordination of news work, and whether news organizations are collaborating to co-create content with other organization. *Routine level influences on content* were measured by probing impacts on routine information gathering and news production practices. Questions inquired about COVID-19's impact on news judgment, interviewing, choices of sources, information verification practices, and on production of news shows, including the challenges of creating a program, and presenting visuals. *Remote work influence on content* was measured by asking management how COVID-related rearrangements of news work impacted content creation, how much of the news work get done remotely, about employees' productivity, and editorial guidance on content creation. To measure *management initiatives* news managers were asked about their adjustments and initiatives related to COVID-19 and remote work. To measure the *effectiveness* of the management initiatives news directors were inquired how the initiatives are helping in coordination of news work, how their staffs are responding and how collaborative competitors changed the news work. To measure *ongoing COVID-related management challenges,*

participants were asked about their responses toward uncertainty and a dynamic environment created by the virus (e.g., the hurdles in coordinating remote work, challenges in content creation, challenges of remote work). Finally, *management initiatives and impacts of journalism quality was* measured by news director responses to what is journalistically sacrificed to the virus and how management initiatives sought to maintain journalism quality, including news judgment, sourcing choices, information verification, and supervision.

The interview protocol included 21 questions (the interview protocol is in the Appendix) probing dimensions of COVID-19's impact on broadcast news work, organizational and routine level impacts on news content, and management initiatives in coordinating the changed environment while attempting to maintain professional journalism quality. The interviews were designed to answer the research questions and allow participants to share their perceptions and experiences. The interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded to provide the data for the study.

**Data Analysis**

This study followed the process of qualitative thematic analysis for analyzing the data. This approach is useful for summarizing key features of a large data set (King, 2004) and examining the perspectives of the participants, identifying their similarities and differences and unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

This study applied the constant comparative technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the researcher analyzed the data by connecting participants' responses to questions exploring dimensions of routine and organizational concepts influencing news work and news content, identifying themes through the patterns and repetition of key terms and

ideas in the responses. The researcher used the app otter.ai (https://otter.ai/) to transcribe the interviews. After the transcription, the data were arranged chronologically according to the sequence of the interview protocol (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Each piece/unit of information was coded for the source. Then the data were organized into an initial category which emerged from the data. To follow the techniques of constant comparative analysis each new category was compared to the other units previously categorized. If some units did not fit into any preexisting category, the researcher assigned a new category. Throughout the process the researcher emphasized on comparing units and searching for relationships and themes among the categories (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

# Chapter 4: Results

Thirteen of 19 television news directors of the population were interviewed for this study. Among them two managers hold ‘news director’ positions for two television stations, which means this study covered 15 television stations. The participants include nine males and four females. The interviews were conducted from March 10 to 25, 2021, about a year after the first effects of the virus were felt. The timing of the interviews allowed for managers to have extensive experience with managing through the pandemic and an opportunity to consider its longer-term impacts.

**Research question 1a** inquired about the impact of COVID-19 on information gathering. From the data, six themes emerged. News directors talked about the COVID-19 impacts on their routine news work: dependency on digital tools, teamwork, news judgment, access to information, verification, and dependency on social media.

Reporters’ daily work routines became absolutely technology dependent due to the remote work and social distancing policies. Due to the safety protocols most of the reporters/photographers were not allowed to go to events and therefore newsrooms heavily relied on Zoom for conducting interviews and other purposes. However, this dependency did not always come out effectively. News directors expressed their frustrations as:

> I think for us what it boiled down to more was to figure out how we are going to get the story without sending a reporter/photographer to somebody's office to do an interview or for gathering information. Then the Zoom became a thing, I had never heard of zoom before this.

Similarly, COVID-19 and remote work changed the typical concepts of reporters' information gathering and content creation. Few reporters worked in the field and they used long boom sticks and microphone stands. Reporters set the microphone and stayed away for safety purposes. Some of the news organizations provided extra human resources to help the interviewee using the microphone so that the reporter can keep their distance. However, most of the reporters were working from home. So, visual collections and interviews were happening from home. Reporters used microphones for Zoom interviews.

News directors mentioned the importance of promptness in content creation where it relies on teamwork (reporter/photographer). Since the pandemic pushed the workforce home, most of them ended up working individually. Reporters have no contact with actual events. In many cases, reporters have no connection with photographers. Reporters' scripts were being written without seeing the video, and were only based on their phone conversation, and not assembling. The photographers edited the videos by themselves. News directors described how these impacted teamwork as:

> During the pandemic reporters and photographers are working separately and most of the work is done virtually. Now the reporters write their scripts, do their voice tracks by themselves and send it to the photographer who will put them in the computer. Then the photographer put the package together and then sent it back to the reporter to have a look and make changes if it requires. Whereas this teamwork practice used to happen with two people in the same room or the same van or sitting in a room or on a computer together and collaborating, it just doesn't happen that way anymore.

> When we plan for a story, it's very important the team being together who will execute the plan. If the reporter and photographer work together, they keep discussing between shooting and the end of the production. In the pandemic, which is mostly missing, and another important thing is promptness, we are not getting a quick well-planned report.

> We have a lot of stories related to COVID. Initially when we have stories with the health department, it's very difficult to get interviews with doctors. Sometimes we were able to get Zooms, but in person interviews are kind of out with doctors. And that's just been a reality.

Similarly, remote work drastically limited reporters' in-person contacts, and therefore, access to information. In addition, reporters were not able to go to certain places for information or to go to events and shoot live. News directors said the shutdown of most of the legislative and other essential workplaces resulted in difficulties accessing information they needed to fully report important stories. Often reporters did not see the documents in-person and talked to people for more information, which ultimately limited their sources. Similarly, COVID- related stories were prioritized, but no doctors or health service organizations were found for interviews. Also, at the beginning of the pandemic few people knew about the virus; therefore, news staffs struggled due to a lack of knowledge and news sources as well. There were limited indoor gatherings. In addition, many sources would not grant in-person interviews, which also resulted in limited access to information. News directors spoke from several angles on these issues and talked about the importance of in-person interaction/interview:

> Usually, especially in a small market like ours, the reporters know, the officials, officials know the reporter. So, if we need an interview with the mayor, we just call him and say that we're coming over, and that ends. Now nothing is open for public, you can't go anywhere If anything happened, we couldn't get a reaction afterwards, because there were no ways to get these people to interview.
>
> This environment made it harder as sometimes people don't want to give an interview, or even if they are willing to give an interview but they don't want to due to safety reasons. Also, sometimes interviewing elderly would be hard because they have a hard time with technology and with Zoom so that made it really hard.

Information verification became tougher to a great extent, according to the news directors interviewed. In the past year reporters have had almost no connections with actual events, and with less access to human sources, information is often hard to confirm. Therefore, it takes longer to verify information. Additionally, as verification became harder reporters reported making more mistakes with adding information in the story. In addition, major parts of the news shows were occupied with COVID-related stories. Newsrooms had little control over reporting the information, relying on the Center for Disease Control and other organizations for facts and data. Sometimes news managers even put content on-air, without verifying the information:

> We had a reporter who did a story about a burglary. Somebody caught a burglary on their surveillance video where he didn't find the story. He's working from home. So, he took the easy way out and said, I'm just going to run this

> surveillance video with what this guy said, he never called to see if the police filed a report. He didn't verify that video to see what time it was taken.
>
> Generally, a lot of information that we verify is through email or court documents or even over the telephone. That again, if I were to ask someone a delicate, quite a delicate question, that would make them feel uncomfortable. I think it will be easier for them to dismiss me because it's a Zoom call rather than in my office. If I was in the office with them, it would be more difficult for them to avoid the question because physically there this is a whole lot easier.

Lack of access and verification led news organizations toward social media for stories and sources. According to a news director:

> We relied heavily on social media, and on people emailing us. I would say social media was probably the biggest for us getting new stories and for sources.

**Research question 1b** asked about the impact of COVID-19 on production. Four themes emerged from the responses of the participants: home-made production, difficulties in collaboration and tech issues, lack of original content and poor audio-visuals.

The pandemic impacted the process of content creation and therefore, the television screen got a changed look. According to the news directors, since most of the productions are getting done remotely, often the shows have an amateur look. Some of the news directors called this ‘home-made’ production where no guests were not allowed in the studio, there was no creativity in camera shots and presentations, and shows were monotonous. News managers said, it’s hard to produce a fine-tuned show when the

majority of the producers and staff are still working remotely and only few are in the stations. Organizations provided some production equipment at home, but that is not enough for a professional production. According to the managers:

> So, we got our producers, our assignment folks, our digital team, our digital content team. And pretty much scaled it down to just the minimum people that actually had to be in the building and everybody else sent home. So, we had to change the way our shows, our camera shots, things that we know used to do, have a two shot of your anchors, and we don't do that anymore.

> Our production was affected a lot. Think, we are talking about the quality standard, and now you're broadcasting from home. Now it looks like you are home casting or like you're on YouTube, right? That's how it affected the quality and affected the staffing at the station.

> It made us look different on the air. First, we have a normal TV studio like the rest. But we put one anchor on one side. One person weirdly over the far side. And so, we did that for months, and it just looked kind of funny. That was all we could do. So, we kept everybody apart, we did a lot of double box stuff.

> We used to have guests on the morning show, so we'd let people come into the studio and do interviews about upcoming events in the morning show and we had to stop that because we didn't want people from the outside coming in.

Similarly, working from different locations, producers, anchors, and other staff are having hurdles in collaborating with news programs. News organizations reorganized the workflow and have set up mini production studios at their employees' houses. Also,

the regular news shows are affected, especially by breaking news or last-minute news entry situations. Lack of coordination clearly reflected on television screens and thereafter management stopped doing many regular production related practices.

> Normally when everybody is in the same room and there is breaking news, I just tell everyone what is happening and make sure if we've got the information. Then I start talking to the producers and it's like you're right over here and he is over there. In a breaking news situation what happened recently is people were talking, they were calling each other, and it was kind of a mess. We didn't do the right job. They're producing a show with a computer and iPad and they are in touch with a director who is also at home. It is so hard.

> Even in the studio we used to collaborate all the time. When two anchors are sitting next to each other, there is a lot of body language you are using and communicating with your colleague in ways other than verbally. Such as, I might put a handout underneath the camera to alert this person that I got new information or sharing a script or something like that and they can't do that anymore because now they sit distantly, and we use two cameras.

Due to the social distancing policy and lack of access, there was often a lack of original contents, news shows were mostly dependent on archive footage and animated still photos. In addition, other televisions and social media became sources of videos. Therefore, production became a less creative job. Similarly, due to social distance policy many stories could not be produced due to a lack of appropriate visuals. News directors describes the news programs as:

> Audience watched on the screen- kids walking around in backgrounds, cats jumping out and people's shots and dogs barking and lots of interruptions. We're at Zoom meetings at home and things aren't right in the background.
>
> We had a hard time getting used to and then figuring out the new normal that I'm not going out to interview somebody. I'm just going to try to look through our archive system.
>
> By working in a silo, you're not able to engage people as much as you would if you were working together. And so, it has had an impact on our ability to be creative, and our abilities to do the best job and has an impact on our abilities to avoid mistakes.
>
> I interviewed a student for a story, but I wanted some more video of her, and she didn't feel comfortable because of the whole COVID situation. So, that's what makes it harder. So, if I were in a newspaper, I would have been fine but as somebody that needs video, it makes it harder.

The biggest change of production appeared as poor audio-visuals on television screens. According to the news directors, Zoom or Microsoft Team interviews ensured some interviews and discussions, but due to poor internet connections, audio and visuals were not as good as before. In addition, interviews on Zoom or Teams were not an effective way of revealing information. Re-ordering of news work made sure the news on air but could not eliminate the presence of poor audio-visuals. Nonstop Zoom interviews for news and programs, small studios in the living room, chroma-fake backgrounds could not make television look good. Hence, managements' evaluations are as follows:

It has affected the quality; I feel Zoom just isn't the same as actually being with a person and having a good camera recording them grabbing that good video and having that connection with the person that you're talking with.

Now we can't do a fancy shot or a lot of graphics, you have to go back down to the basics. We're just a minimalist newscast is what I call it.

Mostly it has inhibited their storytelling. And again, when you're seeing a story on the air, and the people are being interviewed like this, the audio quality is not the best, the video quality is not the best. It's not an intimate way of seeing or hearing from someone.

**Research question 2a** inquired into management perception about the influence of COVID-19 on news content. News directors shared their perceptions and four COVID- related themes emerged from their responses: news judgement, limited regular practices of television content creation, less human connection in stories and placement and format of the stories.

This virus affected the traditional norms of news judgment and gatekeeping to a great extent. Multidimensional impacts related to news judgement were noticed. How to report became more important than what to report. According to the managers, during the pandemic their primary goal is to ensure the safety of their employees and protect the business. As a result, news managers focused more on stories where it was safe for the reporters to go. Inevitably, they had to cancel information gathering-related travel and killed many national and local important issues, including the presidential election campaign, election night coverage, and public demonstrations in social issues (e.g., police

brutality) in the past year. News stations also could not pay attention to many local events which have local significance. Most of the participants said:

> It has impacted my news judgment. Certainly, COVID has been a big focus of our news coverage this past year. It has impacted because I only focused on how we can keep safe, we have to be careful, we can't go to venues where there's large crowds.

> Yes, sometimes we had to consider the situation because of COVID. There were other stories that we would just have to push to the side.

> I think the biggest thing was our shows have really become more national. We're finding ourselves we're not going from macro to micro- there's so many things happening on the national level that will absolutely affect you locally but we're not paying attention.

According to the news directors, differences of routine information gathering impacted news content. COVID-19 limited many of the regular practices of information gathering and content creation. There are fewer reporters stand ups, fewer in-person interviews with real sources, fewer live shots from actual events, and changed productions affected the content. News directors said:

> In a normal situation when you've got eight minutes to fill in your news show and you never want to put color bars on your screen, but we got to get on TV and put-up color bars. These situations we used to handle easily by quickly arranging a stand up in the newsroom or things like that. Also, we'd have reporters just come

> back from a story they have no time to finish a package, they would do a newsroom shot in the news. Now we have put up plexiglass shields around the newsroom, so you couldn't take a newsroom shot, couldn't see through the flex to get to the camera.

Television stations focused more on COVID-19 infection data, death rates, safety measures, and related to these and storytelling remained in typical format. This past year news organizations seldom produced feature stories or long format stories that projected human connections. As a result, the news shows had a repetitive look. One of the news directors said:

> The sacrifice I think is the human connection in stories, it's not the same feature stories. It's not the same way as when you see the interview of the two people on the couch and the reporters try not to tear up and you can see the person tearing up. So, I think that the biggest sacrifice is just the heart of stories. You can replicate but it's not the same. Human connection of interviews and the ability to kind of have a conversational interview versus and kind of build that rapport with somebody you don't know; it can be very hard to build rapport with anyone.

During the pandemic format and placement of the stories influenced the news content. News organizations pushed aside non-COVID stories; relatively fewer non-COVID stories were covered. News managers seldom allowed making a package for non-COVID stories. Most of the time those stories formats were VO/SOT (small visual and a sound bite), IV/SOT (only the information read by the anchor and a sound bite).

Even if the station decided to make a package from the story, it was placed after a couple of items or almost at the end of the news show. One of the news directors said:

> There were stories that normally we would have put a package on but now I might run a 22 second video or ignore it altogether because we just didn't have the horses to go after it.

> Our news shows look a little different now. Most of the cases our first couple of items are occupied by COVID-related stories. We have few other stories but we kind of got a mindset we want to prioritize COVID stories. Whereas those other stories have news value and in a normal time they would have placed at the beginning of the show.

**Research question 2b** inquired into management perception about the impact of remote work on content. According to the managers five remote work-related themes emerged that influenced the content: collaboration, less powerful and less effective content, dependency on event organizers and social media for content and news source, less editorial guidance when needed and limited organizational resources to face a big situation.

According to news directors, remote work limits reporters' collaboration with the newsroom. Since the pandemic started, more than 80% of news staff started working remotely, resulting in less sharing within the newsroom, ideation, whom to interview, what to ask, story development, reporter, and photographer collaboration impacted the news content. One of the news managers said,

The challenges that we've seen are being able to find a story, gathering a story, not being able to be in a building around your co-workers and toss ideas around and be creative. The workforce really affects people, especially in news.

Television contents were less effective and less powerful, according to the news directors. Because remote work limited reporters' connection with sources, reporters had in- person contact with their sources and therefore, in many cases they were not able to reach out for information or reaction. Aside from that, often reporters managed an interview via Zoom but were not able to manage their sources to shoot for the essential visuals for the story. In those cases, the news went on air with just the sound bites. Hence, many potential good stories were missed on the screen. Stories were also not very fine-tuned in many cases and that ultimately affected the overall television content. According to the managers:

> Our stories are not as powerful, not as effective. We're doing the best we can under the circumstances. But working in a newsroom allows people to engage in conversation and collaborate, bounce ideas off one another. When you're working by yourself, that doesn't happen. And that's what is so unique about a newsroom.

> You can work from home, but it's not the most effective way. Because the audience is missing out on the creative juices that flow between people, when ideas are shared. And ideas can be acted on and improved upon.

Remote work made news staff more dependent on event organizers and social media for content and news sources. Often the news organizations asked event organizers to shoot the event and send the video clip to them as most of the news workers were

restricted to go to the actual events. Additionally, television news often joined event organizers Facebook Live or other live events from their site. Therefore, television news relied in many cases on others and broadcasted content the way the organizers arranged. News organizations are still doing this practice. News directors shared:

> We didn't shoot the video; we asked the organizers to shoot the video. Because again, we don't put our employees in a situation that would compromise their health. We would ask the event organizer to take pictures or shoot via cell phone video and send it to us and we'll give them a courtesy.

> Remote work really impacted the quality right when we went back to using these Zoom interviews and all of a sudden, all this empty headspace. You don't have control of the shot you're taking with what you've got. You're at the mercy of the person you're interviewing via Zoom whereas I could do this, I could do that, I could do all of this, so it really is that was the impact.

News directors felt that a lack of editorial guidance to the remote employees is also responsible for the lower quality of content. They arranged virtual meetings but that was not adequate. Often many news managers called for extra meetings to catch up with the workers and tried to keep them motivated and focused on their work. Sometimes even that could not minimize the issues related to remote work and content creation. According to the news directors:

> In generally, the meeting focus is going to be what we're trying to get from our story. In a normal situation, I told reporters, you can't report the story inside this room, you get out of the office and what you find may change completely what

we're planning. You may find a different reality and if that's true. Don't feel you have to make it fit what we said. You tell me what the story is as opposed to what we thought it was. Although now it’s totally opposite, neither we discuss that way, nor do they go out.

In a breaking news situation, all of a sudden, you're just texting everyone and saying get on the Zoom, so we can talk about this. Then one could have a whiteboard and write the different angles and then email everyone out with what was discussed. Here's where we're going to do it. Next moment I had to follow up whether everyone got the message rather than whether they are following the message. Sometimes it really does not work.

You can't advise your staff of many things where we can’t dictate in this environment. We can't necessarily oversea when somebody's home, in their apartment, potentially using their own laptop. We can't dictate what exactly they have, what programs they have, and those types of things.

However, smaller television organizations struggled with limited organizational resources to arrange better technical support for their remote workers which also affected the content. Smaller organizations have limited resources to face a big situation compared to large companies’ who have arranged better technical support and other facilities for the remote workers.  According to the news directors:

I didn't really think I'd ever see a time when we'd be able to do things like that (remotely). Because I always thought you need a newsroom, you have to be in the building. There's no way you can do it from home. But I still do worry about the

big situations, such as if there was a Colorado shooting here in our area, we would not be able to handle that.

Compared to most of the bigger stations in the state we have limited facilities. They did work remotely or had a vast part of their team working remotely, we did not have the capability, we did not have the technology and it would have been just too expensive to buy all that or to allow us to do that. We neither could provide appropriate safety, nor deliver the content.

For us we're smaller television stations, so it might be a little different than for some of the bigger markets. When this started our first evaluation was how do we work remotely and keep people safe. We had to evaluate what our infrastructure only allows us, what's our ability to be remote, contentment did not come to mind.

**Research question 3a** asked news directors about the initiatives that have been taken to address the impact of COVID-19. Five themes emerged from their responses: arrangements of remote work, coordination of remote workers, safety protocols, content collaboration with other organizations and mental health benefit packages.

At the beginning of the pandemic when state or city-wide lockdowns were declared and the administration advocated for remote work, news organizations tried to arrange all the possible facilities within a short time so that the news staff could work from home. According to the news directors, the virus forced them to change the newsroom operations overnight and sent most of the news staffs home, including reporters, multimedia, photographers, producers, anchors, meteorologists, the assignment

desk, and all eligible people. Few people came to the office, nearly all worked remotely. Management had to rearrange the workflow-how reporters and photographers will work distantly as a team, how the office will distribute cameras and vehicles, how they (reporters and photographers) will voice and edit their stories, what are the alternative sources to get information, how producers and anchors will work, how the news shows will keep running and many more. Newsroom managers shared their experiences:

> The biggest adjustment has been to keep people safe. And to do that we've had people work remotely. We had to reorder the operation. The beginning was really tough, I had to initiate so many changes with the entire operation particularly my reporting and production team.

> In my organization, initially no one was allowed to enter the building. First few days, reporters and photographers waited at the back alley and someone from inside handed over shooting equipment. Same for the deposit. At some point we stopped the reporter to go outside, it was only the photographer. We also stopped our anchors to come to the set. Only a few production and technical people were at the office.

Coordination between news and other departments' remote workers became one of the major jobs for newsroom management. News managers significantly increased communication with their employees to coordinate changes, particularly the adjustments that were initiated. To some extent management initiated extra meetings. Most of the meeting format was video conferencing. At the beginning most of the employees were not sure how those changes would function, but over time everyone started learning.

Managers kept themselves busy with figuring out whether everyone received the instruction emails, whether reporters knew their assignments, whether the assigned person was following the live speech and taking notes, whether producers knew whom to connect at the live shows and so on. In addition, coordinating with other departments and business partners were also increased. According to the managers:

> There was a lot of unrest, and uncertainty. I mean, obviously people didn't know what is going to happen, no one's ever seen this thing before, how things will work remotely, there were so many questions. At the beginning even we were not sure whether the new adjustments would work.

> I think I communicate with my teammates more than ever. First, we just didn't know how the video conference functioned. In a few months we learnt video conference, and increased information sharing. We relied more on video conferencing for communication because you can get it on your phone, on your laptop, anywhere. So, it was a great way to share information, we were using it like crazy. And then we found different platforms for meetings and communications.

Managements also initiated COVID-19 virus-related safety protocol. News managers said their first priority has been to keep a COVID-free newsroom and protect the business. Managers-initiated safety protocols, including setting up Plexiglas between desks, mandatory mask-wearing, routine sanitization, maintaining social distance, and makeshift duty. One of the news directors said,

> Our primary goal was to keep people safe. We have to protect the business at the same time as we have to protect our employees.
>
> The biggest change was making sure that people are saved by having them work remotely, reporters and photographers who stay in the field, and their safety. Our anchors are sitting on the set 12 feet away in different positions. We have also put-up Plexiglas in the entire newsroom. So, every desk is surrounded by Plexiglas in order to keep people safe. And we also have a rule that when you're in the newsroom, everybody's got to wear a mask, and also social distance.
>
> The reporters were never allowed to have physical contact with people in the past year, even not now. Reporters who have physical contact with people that are talking to them are required to maintain social distance and never put a mic on anybody.

News organizations started collaborating and sharing content with their network-affiliated stations and other news organizations during COVID-19 because many newsrooms often din not have enough content. Televisions stations that are already affiliated with national networks started using more network content. News directors said,

> We used to collaborate with our partners in the pre-COVID. But our collaboration ranges get bigger during the pandemic. In addition, I personally initiated a partnership with a television station in Oklahoma City that we became a sharing partner with.

> Collaboration gave us a more wide-reaching content and again people in a small market care more about their town than anybody else's. If something is happening in Texas people want to know about It, especially like when we had the winter storm, it kind of took the attention off COVID for a couple of weeks because people were really suffering from the winter storm. We shared other organizations' stories.

A few news organizations initiated mental health benefit packages for their employees. Managements thought if they can keep their staff's morale up, it would eventually be helpful for the overall news work.

> We've gotten an increased benefits package for mental health. That includes a virtual counseling session. So those are some things that have really helped us. We also have some policies in place if you travel somewhere where positivity rates are high, you have to coordinate.

Also, some news directors said they keep pushing employees to get vaccinated.

**Research question 3b** asked about management initiatives to manage remote work. Two themes emerged from the responses: virtual meetings to coordinate employees' and providing production tools to the employee's home.

Most of the communication and news work coordination heavily relied on virtual platforms as newsrooms have always had a need for quick response and putting the news on air. Group meetings, one- on- one meetings, large-scale conferences, everything was conducted virtually. Managers felt the importance of seeing staffs, so they asked everyone to join through video calls, although news workers were mostly dependent on

telephones when they were out of workstations in the pre-COVID period. Often managers called for extra meetings to catch up with staffs. Managers described:

> Normally, we have a morning and an afternoon meeting. The morning meeting is trying to plot out the day. And then the afternoon meeting to assign the stories between the two early evening news. Now we do those remotely, by Microsoft team. Sometimes we do little meetings between the managers and then contact the reporters individually.

> We did all kinds of meetings; we changed the structures little, we are less formal now. Because when you see everyone is at home, that environment immediately changes the mood. We were trying to keep things normal when things are not functioning normally.

> I haven't seen my news partners from other organizations since March 2020, but I see them every day. Listening, sometimes more than two or three times a day. I do that with my staff as well. Although I didn't initiate any extra meetings just to catch up with them. There's no excuse for not getting on. Teams are in your office; they are supposed to click on it on time. And so, I don't have a lot more meetings, but I wouldn't say they're bad meetings.

In addition, management provided support to set logistics (laptops, connections with news production operating systems, etc.) at employees' homes so everyone was able to work from home. Likewise, production equipment, teleprompters, cameras, lighting, backdrops for the anchors to use at home have been provided for remote work. Managers

said they could not provide all facilities like an office but without these supports it was not possible to keep the shows on. According to the managers:

> We have to set them up. If someone has to work remotely like an anchor, we will have to set up a camera and lighting and teleprompter at their home. And that requires manpower that requires several hours of work to accomplish.

> One of the big impacts was how we get our reporters on TV. Because initially when people were very panicked about COVID and didn't know much about it. Then we decided to provide the reporters and photographers a laptop, microphone. Our engineers helped them to access the production operating system. For the anchors we provided, light, backdrop, teleprompter, etc.

> Let's say, our producers got COVID exposure, or a quarantine situation, some of them didn't have the laptop to dial in from home. So, we had to buy about a dozen more laptops and send them to the producer's home.

**Research question 4a** asked about the effectiveness of the management initiatives to manage the uncertain environment. The managers identified their initiatives in response to research questions 3a and 3b: arrangements of remote work, coordination of remote workers, safety protocols, content collaboration with other organizations, providing production tools to the employee's home and mental health benefit packages. Management perceived the initiatives had different levels of effectiveness. Managers think the biggest success is that many journalists did not get infected because of the strong safety protocols. However, other initiatives have mixed evaluation. The arrangements and coordination of remote work were greatly appreciated but manages are

also having challenges related to that. Content collaboration is another big success of the management initiatives. Through collaboration the newsroom gets a chance to provide more content, and wider reach, although the newsroom cannot verify or edit others' content. By providing production tools to the employees home it also worked well. Reporters, producers, anchors, and many other levels news workers' work became easier. However, television production is a complex technical process and highly relies on numerous technical tools, proving all of them at someone's home was not possible. Finally, employees who felt less connected with work were identified as more obligated toward the organization after having the mental health benefits package.

Many journalists who are working in the field or from home did not get infected, which is one of the biggest successes of managements' safety protocols. According to the news directors, safety protocols worked well and in most of the cases employees responded to the protocols positively. News staffs were forced in some ways to respond to the remote work. At the beginning everyone was not sure how employees could follow all the rules but now journalists are even more cooperative on safety rules. According to the managers:

> I think our protocols worked effectively. No one got sick from someone at my station. We were following these protocols, and that was comforting every time when this is working, we are doing the right thing, so, so that's why I think they were so effective.

> I would say that they were highly effective to keep our news operation running. When you have a healthy staff, we're able to accomplish our mission every day,

which is a standard form of loan with viewers and keep them safe. And so, a lot of those safety protocols allowed us to continue to do our jobs.

Sometimes bad habits seep in, and people will let their guard down and not wear a mask or not social distance when their allies' story. Few reporters and photographers in the field have been less responsive. Other than that, most of them did respond well.

News managers remote work-related arrangements and coordination worked well in most cases. The main goals of remote work were to keep the shows running, disseminate information, and keep employees safe. To ensure everyone's work management took different levels of coordination strategy. According to the managers, they have been able to do all of the targeted work since the past year. However, to some extent management decisions related to remote work did not work well, in which case they had to come up with other changes. According to the managers, different level employees needed different types of support from them. Initially it took longer to understand what type of support a reporter, photographer, producer, anchor, or engineer needed. Managers provided laptops, cameras, teleprompters, backdrops to their staff's house. However, managers could not set up a Production Control Room (PCR), they could not ensure all the infrastructure that they have in an office setup. Managers said they did not have to stop any news shows, which is another big achievement of the arrangements. The more management handles remote workers, the more they learn all these things. However, in spite of increasing communication and non-stop efforts of coordinating between managers and employees, news managements are still facing hurdles with coordinating remote employees. Often those coordination gaps were visible

on screen through the content. News programs were a great reflection of coordination between anchors, producers, technical people and the guests. Most of the television stations have broadcasted their programs successfully in the midst of a pandemic.

> At the beginning of COVID we were not sure whether remote work would work because we have never functioned remotely before. In our mind, it's essential to be in the newsroom. But we understood the situation. Moreover, it was our responsibility to ensure the safety of our employees.
>
> Some of the employees are skeptical about how remote work arrangements will work. Some of them were fearful initially. Most of them were willing to maintain what we needed to do. The more the staffs realized, the more they cooperated.
>
> It is not an easy job to coordinate 40/50 people from different locations every day and continue production. We know, we were not perfect, we made mistakes, we aired archive visuals without an archive band, we aired visuals without audio and then fixed it on air. Yet, I believe we are doing better than the initial days.

Similarly, content collaboration with other organizations broadened the reach. When most of the people are not planning to go outside, travelling for an interview, or covering a conference was not even a consideration. Managers said, television stations did not miss those stories where they cancelled the travel. They made some adjustments such as interviewing the person on Zoom or used other television stations recorded interviews. Often television stations used other stations visuals and then only conducted an interview on Zoom for a reaction. However, the only limitation of sharing content is having no control over the content. Managers described as:

> Collaboration shows that we can have more reach. Collaboration has a benefit for us because we are in Oklahoma City, if anything happens in Walters or Duncan or Lawton, now instead of making employees drive to all the places to spread out to cover news. Our reporters can cover news from their areas, and contribute that news to this big pot, and we put it all together. So, it's allowed us to extend our reach.

Using technical resources from home and producing content is a big success of management initiatives. This step reduced uncertainty to a great extent.

Mental health benefits packages are also an effective initiative to boost employees' mental health. Managers said, sometimes more focus on work or surviving in the uncertainty pushes down employees' mental health. This package includes employee assistance programs, health insurance, technology and work-related training, stress management training, financial literacy education, etc. One of the news directors said,

> Through the mental health packages, employees would keep trust in us more than before, especially in the pandemic. It's kind of a feeling that organizations do care for them and appreciate employees' efforts.

**Research question 4b** asked about ongoing COVID-related management challenges. Eight themes emerged in the responses: coordination of news work, time consuming remote work, direct supervision when needed, low technical skills, ensuring accountability, ensuring mental health, less productivity, less connection and developing new management strategies.

Coordination of news work is one of the most challenging jobs for the news managers during this pandemic. Routine level work, breaking news situations, pro-active planning for all kinds of coordination is harder than before. Not only that, news managers deal with many organizational issues with other departments which are involved with production, those have also become more challenging. Managers described these situations as follows:

> Just with remote work in general, the challenges that we've seen are being able to find a story, gathering a story, not being able to be in a building around your co-workers and toss ideas around to be creative. You know, the workforce really affects people, especially in news. So not being able to generate as many story ideas, not being able to collaborate is already challenging. Moreover, coordinating with staff and routine work get done are even more difficult.

> I see the governor is making his speech on television, now I have to hear what information he says. Meanwhile, I have to write up a text message about it and send it to at least two to three people because I'm not sure who's on what task at this time. I don’t want to take a risk and don't want to text one person and then ask him to forward to another two persons. If he does not forward, then It would be a mess. Well, now time is being wasted.

> I would say that we are adapting, coordination was the biggest issue initially. We used to focus on everything around the scanner and a newsroom is kind of the center of where all that happens. So, we kept that practice virtually, our assistant news director became the point person for the scanner. In few days he became

> exhausted, because he has basically been holding up this newsroom, 24/7 since this thing happened, but coordination.

Much of the remote work takes more time to get done than what it usually would have taken. Excessive back and forth communication with remote employees kills most of the daytime of a news manager. Often managers keep talking to their employees several times a day to solve one issue. Additionally, managers allow the staffs extra time to learn new systems of the operations. News directors said:

> Most of the time it's hard because I feel like we talk a lot via text, and sometimes it depends on people who are on the other end. If the other end is lost in conversation, I'm in trouble. Sometimes it's too much going back and forth that I feel it's killing my day.

> Most of the things are very challenging to do that were very easy before. If I wanted to grab a producer, and a reporter to have a discussion, and we're in the newsroom, I would just say, hey you guys, come into my office, and we would sit and talk and now you have to contact several people for a meeting and also, we check if they are available. It takes a lot of time to bring everyone together.

News managers say another ongoing challenge is directly supervising employees when they need to. Less in-person contact with employees makes supervision even harder. Managers particularly mentioned breaking news situations or multiple stories coming in from different ends. In a normal newsroom situation, managers can talk back and forth to the reporters and help them with developing stories, set angels and so on whereas now an editor cannot jump into two separate meetings at a time. Therefore,

tracking down the reporters is a real challenge for the editorial team. One of the news directors said:

> There's less one-on-one contact, and there's more telephone contact. But it really boils down to more telephone or virtual conversations, it makes a little bit again makes it more challenging because when I've worked with reporters on the script, I like to have the reporter looking over my shoulder, we're working on a script together so that I could point out the changes that I'm making. So, it still happens over the telephone, but it's not as effective.

News workers continue to struggle with technological requirements of remote news work. Employees are still figuring out the best ways to communicate particularly those employees with low technical skills given that whereas newsrooms rely more on technology for communication, coordination and other routine works. News directors mentioned several incidents where employees even left jobs because of the fear of adjusting to new technologies. In addition, technical disruption is a regular issue.

> We had to figure out how to get the editing software on there and get the video from point A to point B. And where the reporters could go live, how it looked, how it sounded. There was a lot of frustration because their editing software was slow. Some of the reporters did not have high speed internet at home. So, we had to figure that out.

> The internet being the biggest thing. That was a huge impact for us just in terms of if my staff are sending stuff back and forth and the speed/connection interrupts-

> that causes even bigger trouble. Everything stops. If we're using the live view app on a phone, the internet is kind of one of the biggest things.

Therefore, miscommunication and lack of coordination were heavily noticed. These resulted in television stations missing many big stories. Several news directors mentioned similar experiences. One said:

> We had a lot of people a lot of times when we missed the big story of the day because people are working remotely, and they may not have gotten the email, or they may not have gotten the memo that this thing happened. And then also with people working from home say- there's a shooting and your photographer lives 30 minutes away, so we're arriving late on scenes and not finding out information quickly.

> Things became very tough in hectic or breaking news situations, more difficult to manage. Just because it all has to be done when you have all these people in different places. So, we use slack to communicate.

Nevertheless, ensuring remote workers job accountability is another challenge for management. In a regular newsroom set up the manager can understand what the staffs are doing. They often go into the newsroom and check what is happening. However, in a virtual communication reality, managers are struggling with this, because first off, it is difficult to see everyone at a time or keep the meeting running for day long. Secondly, a phone can is not helping to ensure staffs' accountability. Often reporters produce only one story, and they are done for the day. Although, most of the reporters are not going

out, almost not occupied with traffic or other activities. News managers described these challenges as follows:

> When you're working from home, you have to be disciplined to avoid distractions and without so much of supervisory nature without a manager being wiped there. It's easy to be distracted. And I know that firsthand, that has happened with people here. And so, it has been a challenge, holding people accountable when they're working from home.

> Sometimes I have several stories to look at, also maybe breaking news. Those times it takes longer to communicate with other staffs and see what they are doing. I often notice they are not doing what they are supposed to do. It is harder to check on them to see what exactly they're doing all the time.

> So, I understand that people are home, they're cooking in between and they're doing things, but their focus is not totally on work.

Ensuring employees' mental health and stress is another big challenge for managers. More than a year of isolation, health-related stress with family and friends caused mental health problems. Managers said, many of their journalists are stressed out and some have already quit their jobs. Many managers have been overworked given that many of them did not have any days off over the past year. That also puts them in stress. In addition, working individually for a long time puts news workers in stress and they are going through hard times to hit the deadlines. News directors shared the following:

> The biggest thing was maybe mental health. Some of the folks are parents, and now their kids are at home. You know, others are concerned about their family

members, then also the workload. Everything contributed to stress. Combatting all routine level jobs and then with staff's mental stress made things harder.

Sometimes a little bit or sometimes a lot, people have gone through kind of mental problems. Stressing so much about COVID and about their family. It's affected them more in that kind of a way.

I had several employees that told me they felt like a seasonal depression type of situation. I think a lot of employees have been open about the struggles they had on a personal level, which I have an immense amount of respect for. Throughout the pandemic we are having this.

News directors found employees less productive in the past year and that is an ongoing challenge. COVID-19 is not allowing anyone to work in a normal way but television did not stop broadcasting news. Newsrooms have the same demand for content. In fact, during COVID-19 the demand became greater because many people are at home and checking on television news from time to time for updates. In addition, journalists are socially distant for a long time. Less connections with editors and coworkers make news workers less productive. Employees' demotivation also influenced the content. Many of the employees could not adapt to the changes promptly and that also resulted in demotivation to work. Managers said:

It has made everybody less productive, less efficient, because there's limited supervisory control still when someone's in a newsroom. So, that was a big struggle of working remotely, which is being able to keep everybody's morale up to stay focused. All of these contribute to being less productive.

> From a management perspective, I had to navigate having to be able to tell certain people that you're allowed to work from home. But few of the production staff had to stay at the office. And these producers are kind of like the ones left behind, particularly probably the first six, seven months were really hard, and it is still on.

News management feels virtual communication is not enough to establish emotional connection with employees which is another big challenge for the managers. Often reporters do many non-scheduled or extra work just because of the manager's request. Manager-employee's personal relationships or connections help to get these tasks done. This type of mental connection is very much missing since the pandemic.

> One thing that becomes more challenging is the kind of emotional connection that you make with the people that you work with, or that you manage. And that is where the biggest challenge has been where you've had to be really deliberate about planning and scheduling that interaction, because it doesn't just happen.

Frequently developing a new managerial strategy is also challenging for management because they are not sure which one is going to work or how employees will respond in this uncertain environment. Directors said, these human dynamics expanded management jobs but meanwhile developing new strategies and coming up with changes is not an easy task. In addition, management said, COVID-related issues led their jobs toward becoming more strategic and multilayered. Some of the news directors shared their experiences:

> We have adopted many new things as well as our employees and we're still adapting. When your staffs are around you, you can understand their pulse and make decisions based on that but when you're far from them, seeing the employees only on the screen like in the television, it's way tough to make the right decision.

> We had staff members who lost family members, and that makes it really tough, it's just that shakes up the whole staff. Because when you have a small staff, we're more of a family. It's like losing a family member. So, I had to become a psychologist, a life coach. And remember, I was a news director.

**Research question 5** asked how the management initiatives impacted journalism quality. In response to this question three themes emerged: invested more in the health of employees and focused on keeping operations running/surviving, quality is beyond the coordination of remote work and collaborative competitors.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, news organizations' primary focus was to keep their employees safe and make sure that the operation is not stopped. Television stations provided safety guidelines to the employees who are working remotely. Few employees kept working from the office and did not stop going to the field. Those employees had to maintain social distancing policies. In the office, employees' desk was reorganized to maintain the distance, plexiglasses were set up around the desk, mandatory wearing mask policy was introduced, and disinfectant spays used regularly. Initially management did not focus on ensuring journalism quality. News directors said, television stations went to a survival mode to begin. The pandemic forced organizations to reorganize the overall workflow and keep doing work as much as they can. However,

remote work has shortcomings. Television channels had a desire of continuously putting up content and filling up the chunks, so routine work needed to be done. Hence, reporters kept gathering information but in different ways. News sources were different. News judgment changed. Reporters did not verify information as much as they used to. Often television stations aired reports even without verifying information. Not only content but also production was affected. Good visuals are the soul of a television content, however, non-stop Zoom interviews in news and programs made television visually poor. In addition, often poor internet networks made those Zoom interviews even worse. News directors evaluated the journalism quality:

> I can't have any quality at all if I don't have healthy people telling me. If I don't have a staff of people who are physically and mentally able to work, then whatever my other issues are. Because it comes down to this, it's down to the very basics of I got to keep us healthy and focused. And that's been the most important thing.

> We have to protect the business at the same time as we have to protect our employees. And we've done a good job with that. We have as I mentioned, we've got Plexiglas up in the newsroom between desks, we have an open the control room. We're making sure that people in our studio are socially distant on the set. We require that everybody wears a mask inside a TV station. Maybe we are not doing the best as an industry, but we are surviving.

News directors agreed that journalism quality has suffered, no matter how well the news staffs were coordinated. Managers had less monitoring over the remote workers

and those were not enough to maintain journalism quality. In addition, news managers said, due to the lack of coordination, television missed many big stories and could not produce the best stories.

> The way we conduct interviews, these types of interviews recorded on television are not the most effective, the video quality, the audio quality is poor. And it's just not the most effective way to storytelling. It's a convenient way, but not the most effective way.

> I think definitely, there is some quality, certainly visual quality in television news specifically. I mean, no doubt about it, that has been sacrificed. storytelling swings wildly back and forth. In some regard, there is a great amount of higher count of stories to be told that are very obvious, but there's limited access. So, access to it has been, I would say, limited and that is, concerning.

> The beautiful photography and beautifully produced pieces are missing on the screen. There were those lower quality videos because we utilize a lot of virtual interviews and we do a lot of kinds of things that we normally would have seen as a hyperlink TV.

> We have all now been accustomed to the evolution of what happened last year, as it relates to cell phone, video, Zoom interviews, all the different types of video quality. Because now, all I really need is just the information. I don't care if it's all pretty in the background or not.

Finally, content collaboration was a good initiative to many extents. It opened many windows during many restrictions in the pandemic but to some extent this initiative

backfired. Almost all the respondents were a part of national affiliated television network that already used and shared content. However, for the past year maximum news organizations expanded their range of collaboration and many of them started new collaborations with other news organizations. Television organizations even started collaborating with newspapers online and used their content including video, script and sources. Whenever televisions used others' content, they only paid a courtesy, and they had no responsibility regarding the content. Television organizations seldom verify others' information and sources. Often televisions did not consider the quality of the visuals, just aired the content as it is. News directors said collaboration broadened their range of reach, made sure more content was aired but changed their news work well. Televisions are now much more dependent on others for content. All these changes ultimately affected the quality of the content. According to the managers:

> We begin to look at competition, meaning newspapers, other news stations as if they are not the competition. But as another source of gathering news. So, we used to be in the mindset that what newspapers cover we don't want to touch that on TV, we'll do our own story. But now it's different, we're hunting for news. If the newspaper covers something that we can use on TV, we're going to do it. I would say that has probably been the most ways that it's impacted the quality of news.

> Initially all we cared about was the number of contents. So, collaboration really helped. But at some point, we realized those contents were not as standard as we used to air. Also, we had no control on those contents but yet, we had to use those as we can't produce enough content.

In summary, the research explored COVID's impact through five research questions. The primary findings are COVID-19 changed broadcast operations and journalists' routines such as information gathering, source development, story building, verifying, news judgment, teamwork, and production. Organizations-initiated changes to respond to the uncertainties through planning, communication, leading, organizing, and re-organizing work. These two levels of work are directly involved with content creation and ultimately have impacted the quality of content.

Remote work was the first change in the news organizations and this change impacted journalists' routines to a great extent. At the beginning of COVID-19 outbreak television stations quickly sent their staffs to home and work from there. According to the news managers of this study, remote work changes reporter's information gathering, interviewing, source building, story development, information verification, news judgement and so on.

According to the participants all the information gathering-related work heavily relied on digital tools, particularly on Zoom. Information gathering and verification both were dependent on Zoom calls. During the pandemic most of the legislative organizations shut downed and that limited reporters' access to information and opportunities to verification. In addition, due to the social distancing policy reporters had limited in-person contacts. Also, reporter's long-term social isolation caused limited in-person contacts and sources. As a result, several big vents were missing or aired without verification.

Most importantly, remote work impacted news judgement. News judgements help to decide which storis to cover whereas during pandemic how to cover became more

important that what to cover. News managers shared several incidents when they decided news based on their capacity whether it would be safe to send a reporter to the event. Naturally, COVID-related stories got the most priority to cover and were placed at the beginning of the news show and non-COVID stories got less priority and placed almost at the end of the news show vise-versa. Most of those COVID-related stories were heavily dependent on CDC or other health organizations for COVID-related data and facts. News stations had no control or way to verify those data. Overall, journalists applied their professional values differently.

At the organization level, managements reorganized news work and arranged remote work. They provided possible all production-related supports to the remote workers home so that everyone can work from home and news shows keep running. Managements provided camera, audio-video recording tools, microphone, light, teleprompter, backdrop, laptop to their reporter, videographer, and anchors house. In addition, several safety protocols were applied for the few staffs who had to work from the television station. Managers arranged virtual meetings to communicate and coordinate the staffs. In addition, due to the limited access to the information and less in-person contacts television stations were always in shortage of contents. Therefore, managements collaborated contents with their competitor other news organizations. Television station had no control on those contents, they only put a courtesy and aired the story without any verification.

Despite of taking several initiatives news managements is struggling with many challenges including collaboration, time consuming remote work, direct supervision

when needed, low technical skill, ensuring employees accountability, less connection and productivity, ensuring employees mental health and more strategic managerial job.

Moreover, news managers agreed that at the beginning of the pandemic their goal was to make sure the on air, but they did not take any specific initiative to ensure the quality of news content. Hence, the managers of the study said since the past year news contents affected in two ways: through applying professional values differently and poor audio-visual productions. Remote work and dependency of digital tools could not make sure the quality of the content.

# Chapter 5: Discussion/Conclusion

This study explored how COVID-19 has impacted television news work, focusing on the virus's impact on news routines and organizational responses led by management to ensure operations and journalism quality during unprecedented, uncertain times. Results reveal COVID-19's extent and extreme impact on television news routines and the ongoing management initiatives to adjust the organization of television news work.

At the routine level, the most tangible impact on routines is remote work. It impacts many aspects of information gathering and verification. Reporters are struggling with fewer sources and less access to information. News directors note ongoing coordination and collaboration challenges, less in-person interaction and editorial supervision, and poor audio-visual production quality. These findings fit with what has been published in the professional literature (Parker, Horowitz & Minkin, 2020; RTDNA, 2020; Larson, Vroman & Makarius, 2020; Zanni, 2020; Fischer, 2020; Tameez, 2020).

Teamwork is one of the most important routines of television news work, particularly information gathering, which the pandemic has impacted. News managers shared how their reporters and videographers work as a team. After being assigned a story and receiving editorial guidance, the reporter and photographer were responsible to organize the story, shooting, editing as a team. However, that practice mostly does not exist now. Since the pandemic started, reporters and videographers have been working from different locations. This has made the coordination more challenging. In addition, the videographer shot the footage, and the reporter wrote scripts without seeing the visuals. This changed the linear and collaborative routine process of creating stories.

Another important routine and steps of information gathering is verification. The pandemic has also affected this. Professional literature suggests that in the past year reporters' way of verifying information has changed to a great extent (OpenNews, 2020; Benz, 2020). In many cases reporters have not had access to documents, they could not go to courts, could not go to the city council meetings, or other legislative places to gather and verify information. Mostly, verification and reaction are now dependent on digital platforms.

COVID-19 stopped most of the face-to-face interaction inside and outside the newsroom, which are routines of television journalism work (Zanni, 2020). In-person interviews are essential to having a human element in news stories and can provide verification and new information. Mediashi (2020) writes that during the pandemic reporters are missing many important aspects of the interview, and sources can easily escape from difficult question on Zoom calls. The data in this study support these assertions. Further, in many cases, editorial supervision has been hampered, with reporters not getting the usual guidance from the editor on story development, angles, potential contacts, etc. (OpenNews, 2020; Benz, 2020). Nearly all the news directors in this study said similar things.

During the remote work, reporters and producers produced content where noticeably poor audio- visuals were presented (Littleton, 2020; Mediashi, 2020; Mays, 2020), though visuals help audiences connect story information and their knowledge of topics and issues (Barnes, 2011). In the pandemic, in many cases only information became the only strength of a visual medium whereas visuals are one of the most required elements for television. Often relevant visuals of a story were missing, and many

stories did not come out due to a lack of visuals. While there was a shortage of visuals news staffs started relying on other sources such as social media. Event organizers' social media pages or public social media pages became sources of visuals and information.

Most importantly, COVID-19 has impacted news judgment and shifted focus from important issues to what is safe and accessible to report, similar to what Powell (2020) discussed. Most COVID-related stories got top priority for coverage and placement in news shows. When non-COVID stories were covered, they were placed almost at the end or second/third segment of the news shows. Certainly, during the pandemic there was a huge need of COVID-related information, but news directors said too much focus on this one issue resulted in missing other big stories.

At the organizational level, management has focused first on remote work and safety protocols, following many of the guidelines suggested by the RTDNA (2020). This study found that management has taken many initiatives to keep broadcasting on, with fewer human resources and remote workers. This supports Neason's (2020) and Willens' (2020) statements. According to the managers, remote work ensured employees were safer and were able to work. That encouraged the management to broaden the scale of remote work. However, managers had hurdles in maintaining remote work, particularly coordination.

The findings of this study also align with Lehaen's (2020) ideas of the difficulty of coordinating employees, an activity that normally occurs in the newsroom. Marconi and Wieland (2020) discussed virtual communication and coordination via email, text, Zoom calls, or Microsoft Teams meetings. This study results found virtual meetings are not very effective ways of coordinating news work for many reasons. Television

managers mentioned that virtual back and forth communication killed a lot of time. Similarly, virtually keeping track of employees, particularly coordination became harder. Most importantly, a small lack of coordination resulted in a big impact such as missing a big story. Managers are still struggling with these issues almost all the time.

This study's literature suggests that routines establish the practices of how journalists apply their professional values to their work (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). News managers select a topic based on the news values including prominence and importance, conflict and controversy, unusuality, human interest, timeliness and proximity (Shoemaker, Lee, Han, & Cohen, 2007). However, many of the news values (Deuze, 2005; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Skovsgaard, 2014) were applied differently during the pandemic. News managers' news judgement was affected by how to cover, not what to cover. The manager's news judgment focused on COVID-19 and news organizations also had less ability to go out and get the other stories. Many official sources such as government offices were not accessible, so reporters had a harder time to maintain prominence. Likewise, a lack of access to people and live interviews, plus often poor visual quality hurt the human element in stories. Reporters were having trouble making deadlines and could not maintain timeliness. It was hard to get the information reporters needed. To have enough content, stations shared content with regional network affiliates and former competitors. This resulted in fewer locally reported (proximity) and produced stories. In addition, some ethical norms, for instance truth, accountability, information verification (SPJ, 2014) were missing from revised news routines. Although the literature also suggests that the professional values practiced at the routine level ensure news quality (Singer, 2007, 2010).

Most of the news directors are worried about journalistic quality because of COVID-related changes in routines and the organization of news work. Some of the news directors are most concerned about surviving and keeping the industry running during the pandemic, not focusing on journalism quality or professionalism. Management has taken several measures, most common is setting up production equipment in reporters and anchors homes. In addition, many small organizations started collaborating on content (Marconi, 2020), which made organizations more dependent on others. There is broad agreement among news directors in this study that both content and production quality has been sacrificed, a view also asserted by Willens (2020) and Zurawik (2020).

From management perspective a key finding is managers job become more challenging and multilayered. Developing new strategies is not an easy task. Television news works' ongoing challenges provides an indication toward uncertainty. In the midst of a pandemic, television keeps producing news by facing many challenges each day. The participants in this study mentioned how difficult the information gathering, processing and broadcasting became. After one year of the pandemic, management is still struggling with coordinating the news work, time-consuming remote production, editorial guidance, adopting technology, ensuring remote workers' accountability and productivity, establishing emotional connection with employees, and ensuring news workers mental health. Uncertainty from COVID-19 created a lot of confusion, requiring management to show leadership and become more involved in the day-to-day coordination of work. News directors said COVID-19 requires new ways of thinking about staff evaluations, because they are not present and visible in the newsroom. It is less clear and harder to know exactly what news staff is doing and how. Moreover, the news directors said they

aren't sure how COVID-related changes to news work will affect journalism quality in the long-term, which is the biggest uncertainty for the entire industry.

The television managers in this study all yearn for going back to working with full staffs in the newsroom once the virus will pass. Yet, they acknowledge remote work will stay in some format even when the pandemic ends. Several news directors emphasized the need for fair and equitable organizational policies on remote work. News managers predicted some of the policies might come out when the virus passes, and news operations will go back to the newsroom. Those include that many television stations may invest less in information gathering and stop relevant travelling. Management might be interested in investing and buying technical equipment. Likewise, they are likely to organize more training opportunities for staff. Most importantly, hiring strategies will change, stations will focus more on people who are able to work from any location. Therefore, television stations will emphasize more on technical skills.

Most of the managers expressed concern about the impact of remote work on journalists, noting the additional stress and difficulty of home-work life balance, as well as extended demands and increased work hours. Meanwhile, they noted some potential longer-term benefits of remote work primarily opportunities of learning digital technologies that open new ways of storytelling and extending demographic reach. These, they believe will be useful for the industry. Finally, this pandemic will push for the other technology companies to work better and make their streaming better which will be beneficial for television.

According to the participants of this study, the pandemic taught the ripple effects of one individual incident that no one knew. From the television perspective, it hit on the operation, which affected every single step of news work from information gathering to going on air. Thus, the participants are focusing on the lessons of this pandemic. News managers said, this provided them with the knowledge to prepare for any kind of uncertainty in the future. COVID-19 has shown the organizations the idea of their strengths, how to fight back, opened many windows to learning new skills, the importance of making quicker decisions, showing leadership, and so on. Managers mentioned that the television industry in general does not revert back to where they were, so the industry will move forward based on these lessons. Some of the managers are expecting to put the lessons together into a new model of newsroom operations that will help sustain television news long-term.

The study is limited by a relatively small sample. No claims of generalizability beyond those interviewed are merited. Future research could build on this study by including a larger, more diverse sample of news directors. Managers in this study also point to longer-term impacts of the virus on news work and content. Future research exploring these longer-term impacts on news routines and content would be valuable, especially given news directors' concerns in this study about the challenges of maintaining professional quality television news.

Reese and Shoemaker (2016) wrote the connected, networked nature of digital news requires some rethinking of the hierarchical relationships of factors influencing news content. They note the digital ecosystem creates a kind of multilayered push-pull of influences on content, where the flow of power over news shifts levels and can move in

multiple directions. This study reveals how influences on news manifest themselves during a disruptive pandemic, where in order to maintain continuous operations, television news organizations had to shift nearly overnight to new work routines. The routines changed faster than the organizations could manage them, and management finds itself still groping for organizational responses to ongoing challenges. News judgment and content creation routines have had to change in the face of COVID-19; stories are missed, sources are unavailable, news is not as easily verified. News organizations have little control over these impacts on news work routines.

Remote work means news organizations rely more on individual journalists working outside the view of their news directors and colleagues and socialized norms of a professional newsroom. Individual level influences may indeed become more prominent in some contexts. Much like Reese and Shoemaker (2016) suggest, data in this study indicate the virus's impact creates more horizontal (less hierarchical) and multilayered influences on news content. The pandemic itself is a macro-level influence on news content, unaccounted for in the hierarchy of the influence model. Its impact transcends social systems and cultures. The data in this study suggest COVID-19's influence on news is fluid, flowing up and down among all levels in the hierarchy of influences model.

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# APENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What adjustments have you made to your news operations because of the COVID virus?
2. How has the virus impacted news judgment? Or impacted how you determine which stories to report?
3. How has the COVID virus affected your reporters' information gathering?
4. How has COVID affected your reporters' access to and choice of sources for stories?
5. Has the virus impacted the extent to which your reporters verify information? How?
6. How has COVID affected the production of your news program?
7. What challenges are there to creating a news program in the COVID era?
8. How much of your news staff's work is done remotely?
9. What kind of challenges are posed by remote work?
10. How has remote work impacted your news staff's coordination of news work?
11. What types of news meetings are held?
12. How does remote work impact guidance reporters get from editors on story development? Are reporters left on their own to determine focus or angles of their stories?
13. How has remote work impacted your reporters' productivity?
14. How has remote work affected your news content?
15. As a news manager what initiatives have you taken to address the impact of COVID?
16. How did your staffs respond to the initiatives?
17. How effective are the initiatives in coordinating news work?
18. How effective are the initiatives in maintaining journalism quality?

19. What parts of news are enhanced by COVID? What journalistically has been sacrificed to the virus?
20. Are you looking to collaborate with other news organizations for content? How is this collaboration changing broadcast news work?

What does the future look like? How will the COVID adjustments play out after the virus passes?