

RTÉ Business case proposal:
Follow-up news programming

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Abstract

News does not consistently follow-up on older stories to advise the audience of a news item's final outcome. On the other hand, research has found that people desire closure. This paper is a hybrid business case and public relations plan for the implementation of follow-up news programming at RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann). Follow-up news programming is defined as news reports that consistently revisit local, national or international news stories for which the audience does not have a conclusion. Currently, this type of programming does not exist. Follow-up news programming at RTÉ will allow the broadcaster to expand its program offering, compete locally and globally with other news outlets, and enhance communications with its audience.

Introduction

Audiences are bombarded with news around-the-clock. The daily news cycle has evolved from daily to twice-a-day to breaking news as it happens. In the race to be the first to report news, news organizations have lost the journalistic qualities of reporting (Reinardy & Bacon, 2014; Shepard, 1998). The race to break news leads to inaccuracies in reporting, incomplete reporting or even press releases that become news reports. In the midst of this change, news rooms are suffering from layoffs, declining readership, lost revenues and a dire need to re-evaluate their business models to accommodate new methods and technologies to deliver and report the news (Shea, 2015; Lecompte, 2015). In addition, audiences can now select the category of news they wish to receive ranging from business/industry news to celebrity gossip to niche hobby stories. Upheavals have left the news industry scrambling to survive. One such outlet is RTÉ in Ireland. This business case proposes RTÉ implement follow-up news

programming. Although RTÉ is the national broadcaster for Ireland, it has encountered libel lawsuits and investigations for its incomplete reporting.

Literature review

Overview of RTÉ

RTÉ (Raidió Teilifís Éireann) is Ireland's national public-service media organization. It began as a small, wireless station and has expanded into radio, television and digital platforms. It also provides arts programming through its branded orchestras, quartets, and choirs. The most recent legislation, Ireland's Broadcasting Act of 2009 section 39 (2009), tasks the organization with providing unbiased, diverse, high quality and innovative programming responsive to audience needs and promote media literacy. To accomplish the legislative goals, RTÉ's 2014 Annual Report stated that its vision is to:

“...enrich Irish life; to inform, entertain and challenge; to connect with the lives of all the people.” This is to be accomplished through the delivery of “the most trusted, independent, Irish news service, accurate and impartial, for the connected age...and...provide the broadest range of value for money, quality content and services for all ages, interests and communities...” (RTÉ 2014 Annual Report, p.2)

RTÉ is funded by tax payers through a television licence fee of 160 euros paid annually by each address that has a television.. Through the use of this funding and commercial revenue, RTÉ has numerous radio, television, and digital stations that provide the audiences listening and viewing choices. RTÉ has five television stations and nine radio stations of which five are digital. In addition, the organization has four apps that stream news, dramas and documentaries along with several television and radio news programs such as, *Oireachtas Report*, *This Week in Politics*, and *European Parliament Report* (delivers and/or recaps political news), *Claire Byrne Live* and *This Week* (retrospective look at the news and garners audience feedback) and *Prime*

Time (delivers in-depth discussion and analysis of the news) and *Morning Ireland, News at One, One News, Six One News, World Report*, and *Nine News* (which air at various times throughout the day and delivers the latest national and international news).

The organization values creativity, innovativeness, resourcefulness, responsibility, respect, honesty and accountability within the company and with its audiences. The fulfillment of these objectives as mandated through the legislation and the vision as outlined by RTÉ has come at a cost. Economically, this is only the second year that the organization has broken even; the organization is struggling financially.

As the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) is discovering, licence fee public broadcasters are at the mercy of politicians who may or may not choose to renew the legislation that gives the organization its existence. Households are increasingly watching broadcasts online whereas the licence fee is attached to televisions that are physically in households. Generally, the public is required to fund the broadcaster whether or not they actually view its contents. Although the licence fee can appear to be a stable source of funding, there are factors that threaten this continued revenue stream (Elstein, 2015). Australia is currently reviewing its television and radio licence fee structure. The government seeks to deregulate and reform its media sector citing the increase in broadcasters and fewer barriers to entry into Australian media (Mason, 2015). RTÉ's finances are vulnerable; its licence fee accounted for 54% of its 2014 revenues (RTÉ 2014 Annual Report, p. 10). While RTÉ's business model is in need of revision, its reporting has suffered from credibility issues.

RTÉ News has had several reporting errors:

- In 2009, RTÉ settled a defamation lawsuit after its *Prime Time Investigates* program accused a nursing home owner of social welfare fraud (Roche, 2012).

- The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) reprimanded RTÉ for publishing a fake tweet during the 2012 live presidential debate. A debate audience member accused the broadcaster of tampering with his question in order to further damage a candidate's campaign.
- RTÉ was accused of libel by Father Kevin Reynolds. Its *Prime Time* broadcast falsely claimed the priest fathered a child in Kenya. As a result of the accusations, the RTÉ paid 1 million euros in compensation and damages to Father Reynolds while fines and legal fees have topped 1.5 million euros (McCarthy, 2015).
- The broadcaster was also accused of biased coverage of political hopefuls when it did not cover candidates polling at less than 10% (May, 2014).

Audiences criticized RTÉ's handling of these incidents. They were viewed as glossing over the apologies to the priest, having an anti-Catholic bias, and not being forthcoming in their apologies for the presidential debate occurrence (McInerney, 2012).

Pat Rabbitte, a current representative for Dublin Southwest and the former communications minister for Ireland, accused RTÉ of imbalanced coverage of the water charges issue. RTÉ has not proven TD Rabbitte's accusations untrue or incorrect (No author, opinion column, pg 14, 2015). The organization has had its share of financial woes and its credibility called into question by the BAI and its viewers.

On the other hand, RTÉ has been the recipient of numerous awards and nominations for their radio broadcasting. In 2012, RTÉ was named Radio Broadcaster of the Year at the New York Festivals Awards, Raidió na Gaeltachta won Radio Station of the Year at the Celtic Media Festival, and Radio One won Radio Station of the Year at the PPI Radio Awards. That same

year, the broadcaster received four Justice Media Awards for its journalistic research and analysis of the government's decision to shelve its plans for a National Children's Detention Facility, a legal dispute between a bank and a local Irish family, a court's failure to investigate and prosecute white-collar crime, and issue of how suicides are handled by the coroner. In 2015, RTÉ garnered 38 nominations at the PPI Radio Awards in which the RTÉ Radio One was the recipient of the News Programme Award, News Story Award, its own Richard Crowley was the News Broadcaster of the Year, Philip Boucher-Hayes was the News Reporter of the Year and RTÉ Radio One was the Full Service Station of the Year. At the Association for International Broadcasting Awards, RTÉ's Radio series *Voices* won for Best Radio Current Affairs Documentary.

RTÉ's television division has garnered awards for its current affairs reporting. In 2015, *Inside Bungalow 3* (produced by RTÉ's Investigations Unit) received an award in the current affairs category of the Irish Film & Television Awards.

Overview of the news industry

News cycle. Journalists receive news from a myriad of sources throughout the day. News is broadcast perpetually and comes from sources such as websites, cable channels, and, more recently, social media. There is little time to reflect on a story and dive into its details before the reporter must go on to the next news story (Shepard, p. 80). One piece of news can cause it to leapfrog over more valuable and informative news and cause more serious news stories to be pushed "below the fold" (Smerconish, 2014, p. 1). Often, unfavorable company earnings or political news was released on Friday evenings to ensure minimal attention. However, news cycles can no longer be manipulated by timing the release for weekends or holidays. Today, the only thing that really obscures the news is "the next big thing" (pg. 1).

Slower news cycles allowed events into and out of the spotlight more slowly and an issue could remain in the public's mind longer. The issue maintained the public's attention span until it was resolved. However, today's news coverage saturation quickly spends the public's attention span and curiosity which leaves audiences and the media looking for the next new sensation at the risk of leaving important issues unresolved (Rosenthal, 2004). Add to this, the element of technology and, "topics come and go with perplexing speed. Every ping of the iPad brings a different topic, another opinion, another link, another survey...Are media consumers better served, better informed? Who could possibly know?" (The Australian, no author, p. 24).

Although Rosenthal (2004) stated that audiences are initially fed facts then opinion, it is not clear whether audiences are now fed opinion then fact due to the pace of the news cycle. Each of the outlets mentioned and many others note the pace of the news and audiences feel the pinch. Although the news arrives fast and furious, it does not lend itself to informed audiences, newsworthy information or thorough reporting. RTÉ's lack of thorough reporting led to a defamation and libel lawsuit that brought its journalistic practices into question by the BAI and RTÉ's viewers. In many cases, the news cycle leaves the quality of news reporting in question.

Quality of news reporting. In a letter to the editor of The New York Times, under the title, "The 24-Hour No News Cycle," Schmitt writes that with the perpetual news cycle, viewers are not provided with information of national and international importance to lead to informed opinions and decisions. Instead, viewers are faced with trivial coverage of presidential candidates playing sports. There is a desire for more serious reporting that informs of not only national issues of the day but news of international interest.

In "Bureau of Missing Bureaus," Fleeson notes that foreign coverage is primarily crisis-oriented to the exclusion of the coverage of brewing troubles. The lower profile or lack of

foreign coverage contributes to Americans lack of interest in and understanding of international affairs. News organizations close bureaus because the costs of maintaining them are expensive. In turn, the American public is less knowledgeable about global affairs today than they were 30 to 40 years ago. It becomes a vicious circle. When the public knows less about a place then it will not likely demand information about it. The networks will state that the public is not interested; therefore, they do not provide the information. With the closure of bureaus, news outlets are forced to obtain news from sources such as news wire services.

Paterson (2006) examined the amount of measurable verbatim news agency coverage by a range of major online news services, including CNN, BBC, (US) ABC, Sky and Guardian, and found in every case usage had grown substantially, on average from 68% in 2001 to 85% in 2006. The Australian Center for Independent Journalism (ACIJ) and the independent online news organization Crikey, found that nearly 55% of stories were driven by media releases or articles derived from other forms of public relations or promotions (Crikey, 2010). Lewis et al. (2008a) studied 2207 newspaper articles from *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and found that 73% of the articles were from public relations and agency copy. When Lewis et al. (2008b) conducted a similar study examining U.K. broadcast media (BBC Radio 4, BBC News, ITV News and SkyNews), 59% were found to have used public relations and agency copy. Forde and Johnston (2013) surmised “...If you’re going on anonymous wire reports by people you don’t know, then what is it? It’s rip and read” (p. 37). With the use of wire reports, press releases and agency copy as the source of news and/or substantial portions of news stories, there may be errors in the reporting that arrives at the news organizations.

Maier (2002) examined reporting errors. He found that 55% of the news stories used in the study were factual errors such as misquotes, incorrect numbers, inaccurate and misleading headlines and misspellings. Maier (2012) conducted a similar study of news stories in Italy and Switzerland and found 60% of news stories contained factual inaccuracies while 52% of Italy's news stories were factually inaccurate. Maier (2007) noted that news sources found it futile to request that the reporter correct errors. The news sources felt the corrections were futile because: a) the corrections were hidden, b) what has been read cannot be unread, c) it's not worth the effort and doesn't make a difference, and d) constantly correcting errors becomes tiring. News sources also expressed that continual correction of reporters' errors would damage the relationship because it is unwise to "...pick a fight with people who buy ink by the barrel" (pg. 39). News story errors are the highest they've been in 70 years. The frequency of errors also negatively impacted the news outlets' credibility in the eyes of its audience (Maier, 2005). However, a 1998 study found that when newspapers corrected their reporting errors readers viewed the newspaper as more credible (Gelfand, 1999). Unfortunately, inaccuracies become a part of the story's permanent record, which can leave future audiences with inaccurate historical accounts.

In a nutshell, the quality of reporting means audiences are inundated with inconsequential bits of information which leaves them less informed about national and international issues. News outlets primarily source their stories from news wire services that may have received the information as a press release that becomes a news story. Finally, audiences are served with reporting inaccuracies that range from mere misspellings to a misquotation or exaggeration of facts. A Pew Research Center study found that "only 25% of those surveyed believed that news

organizations get their facts straight" (Farhi, 2012, p. 34). The mistrust in news organizations has hit their bottom lines.

Finances. It is not the focus of this paper to delve deeply into the financials of the news industry. However, it is important to touch upon the financial state of news organizations. In "Straight Talk About News Cuts," Reider (2014) reported that Nancy Conway, the former editor of The Salt Lake Tribune announced in 2012 that the newsroom staff was being reduced by 7.5%. Marcus Brauchli, former executive editor of The Washington Post announced another round of cutbacks at the news outlet. Time Warner spun off Time Magazine in an effort to cut 25% of its operating costs.

The American Society of News Editors (ASNE) 2015 Newsroom Employment Census found that newsrooms lost 3,800 journalists in 2014. In 2007, there were 55,000 journalists; in 2015 there are 32,900. This drop represents a 40% decline since 2007.

Shea (2015) reported that the executive editor of the Detroit Free Press, Robert Huschka, stated that the paper's circulation has fallen by more than half and home delivery is only three days per week. In the past decade, the paper has been the recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes, two Edward R. Murrow awards and four Emmy awards. Its online presence garners over 10 million readers each month, which makes it one of the most read newspapers in the US. The financial quandary occurs because digital advertising revenues continue to lag a distant second behind print advertising revenues that remain the financial foundation of print media. 2014 saw print ad revenue decline to \$16.4 billion nationally, down from a peak of \$47.4 billion in 2006 while digital ad revenues nationally only reached \$3.5 billion.

In "Editor Stepping Down to Spare Newspaper Layoffs," it was noted that the Standard-Times of New Bedford was recently acquired by GateHouse Media. The acquisition created a

challenging revenue situation for the owners. In hopes of sparing additional newspaper layoffs, the editor and associate publisher, Bob Unger, of The Standard-Times of New Bedford resigned his position. The Seybold Report (2014) stated that Gannett “laid off an untold number of people at its newspapers nationwide, seeking to put the operations in their best light” (pg. 6). Layoffs were also in progress at papers in New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Indiana, Florida, and Tennessee.

Somaiya (2015) noted that Dow Jones, parent company of the Wall Street Journal, laid off teams of reporters and closed international bureaus in a bid to transform into a more digital operation. News Corporation, owner of Dow Jones, stated that overall revenue in the news and information sector of the business declined 9%. Print advertising revenues were down 12% and circulation and subscription revenue declined by 6%. Managers were tasked to identify non-essential tasks, cost-cutting measures, and ways to save money. The cuts included downsizing European bureaus, closing others, and the elimination of staff from their New York offices.

In brief, the news industry has suffered financially as print revenues decline while digital revenues have not yet reached the lower dollar amounts of print. In the midst of the adjustments, news organization staffs were terminated, international bureaus closed, and operations scaled back drastically. Digital has caught news organizations flat-footed as they scramble to implement new business models. In the midst of the industry’s reorganization, emerging technology has replaced some journalists with algorithms.

Technology. RTÉ Radio 1 show entitled “The Media Show” aired on April 26, 2015, produced a segment about computer-generated news. The reporter, Rona Tarrant, spoke with Scott Frederick, Chief Operating Officer of Automated Insights. He stated his company provides a software solution to traditional journalism by humans. As the data arrives, the software

analyzes billions of statistics to provide a historical context to the data and in “near” real-time the coverage is created. The result is an article that looks and reads as if it were written by a human. Another prominent company automating their news is The Associated Press. Lou Ferrera, AP Managing Editor, states he introduced the algorithms reporting last year for company earnings reports. Prior to the automated algorithms, his team used humans to manually produce about 300 reports. With the automated reporting, the number of reports has increased to 3000. Automated reporting is cheaper, faster, and more reliable than traditional reporting according to the segment.

“Automation in the Newsroom” by Lecompte (2015) highlighted how algorithms are changing news and how audiences engage with news stories. An algorithm is a set of rules designed to accomplish a particular task. News outlets such as ProPublica, The New York Times, BBC, Yahoo and others use algorithms to help them tell stories ranging from individual company earnings to industry news to issues of inequality and public safety. Algorithms release journalists to “tell stories that matter” (p. 1). The Associated Press (AP) currently produces between 3,500-4,500 stories per quarter using algorithms. Half the world’s population sees AP’s local, national, and international news. The Nieman Report concedes that robot journalists need editors as humans do; however, the focus is not on correcting the story but retraining the robots not to make the same mistake again. This has led to more stories with fewer errors. Since the AP began the project, only two published errors have been traced back to the algorithm. Those errors were due to data entry errors performed by humans.

Algorithms provide more transparency than human journalists. The journalist may be in the midst of a bad day, may have had an unpleasant interaction with a source, or any myriad of situations that may skew the story’s objectivity. Algorithms remove this variable and provides an unbiased account. The New York Times has published several stories “that use in-story

interactions to adapt a story to a user's existing knowledge or view on the subject" (p. 18). The Algorithms allowed the reader to personalize the story and interact with the information in the article. The interactivity may confirm the readers' assumptions or teach the reader something new. (Lecompte, 2015). Not only have algorithms allowed personalization of individual stories, it allows personalization of an individual's news landscape.

Technology permits audiences to view only those news stories for which they have an interest. If a reader is only interested in celebrity and entertainment news or only interested in news from a section of the world, the reader can have only those news stories delivered. The dramatic increase in available news using algorithms along with more control over the news one sees can serve to reinforce what an individual already believes about himself and the world around him, hence the *Daily Me* (Sunstein, 2001).

Technology clearly has affected journalism in a variety of ways from whether or not the story is seen by the reader to whether or not the story is written by an algorithm or a human.

Summary

As stated earlier, this literature review provides an overview of the landscape of the news industry. It is by no means exhaustive. In-depth study of the factors mentioned warrant individual study; however, the overview provided by this research makes clear the variables that affect the news one receives each day.

The perpetual news cycle leaves audiences with a barrage of stories they may not consider newsworthy which leave audiences less informed about international and national affairs. The desire of news outlets to be the first to break a story means that quality reporting is often sacrificed which can range from simple misspellings to the overstatement of facts in an

article. Couple this with the digital age and advances in technology, one can understand why newsrooms have struggled in the areas of finance, operations and unemployment.

The digital age has inevitably influenced the financial status of newsrooms. The desire for digital content has caused print revenues to decline while digital revenues are a fraction of those of print. The decline has led to the merger of news organizations and the acquisition of others, layoffs of thousands of journalists, and the closure of national and international bureaus. In the struggle for news, outlets have chosen to use news wire services to obtain news stories. Many of these news stories are press releases or promotions that are retooled into news. However, technology advances have made it possible for news organizations to produce more stories, faster, cheaper and more efficiently. Although these paradigm shifts in journalism may create conundrums for newsrooms, these changes may present an unseen benefit to journalists. Journalists may now have the time and resources to provide a complete story much to the pleasure of audiences and newsrooms alike.

By offering follow-up news programming, RTÉ will have the opportunity to set itself apart as a news organization. RTÉ can be known as an organization that provides its audiences with quality news coverage that is comprehensive, complete and unbiased.

A SWOT analysis is presented to show how RTÉ can benefit from implementing follow-up programming into their news operations.

SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis will present RTÉ's internal strengths and weaknesses along with external opportunities and threats. In addition, goals, objectives, strategies and tactics are suggested in order for RTÉ to address its weaknesses, opportunities and strengths.

Strengths:

- News streaming is available for those outside of Ireland (e.g., in the U.S.)
- On-air news talent is professional and knowledgeable
- Multiple channels to relay news (online, radio, television, app, social media)

Weaknesses:

- Little personalization of international news stories
- Special interest groups dictating RTÉ's programming
- Too few news reporting categories

Opportunities:

- View news competition as global
- Promote two-way communication with news audiences
- Offer more international news and in-depth info on current news

Threats:

- Licence fee funding vulnerable to political whims
- Competitive news programming from independent stations in Ireland & globally
- Cable and satellite English-language news programming on digital/multi-channel homes & online

Goals, objectives, strategies and tactics

Each SWOT element does not have a goal specifically; in other words, it is not a one-to-one ratio. However, each of the strategies and tactics under the goals encompass elements of the SWOT.

Goal: To present more in-depth and comprehensive news programming on RTÉ.

Situation: This goal and subsequent objectives, strategies and tactics will help RTÉ present programming that is comprehensive on varied topics that will better inform the audience about current and past news events.

- Objective: To present 10% more objective, comprehensive and personalized programming by December 2017
 - Strategy: Place a personal slant on international news stories. Through the personalization of the news, the viewer can readily see how the news item affects him/her personally.
 - Tactic: In each story, state how the story ties back to Ireland through statistics, historical or cultural accounts, or simply proximity using a screen crawler or graphics
 - Tactic: Provide a quote from a local organization, charity or notable figure that may have a connection to the event and can explain how the news item affects Ireland's culture, economy, security and/or standing in world affairs.
 - Tactic: Talk to the locals at a restaurant, on a bus or other venue; ask them for their opinion about the news item and use the footage in the news report
 - Strategy: Provide comprehensive and in-depth reporting on past news stories.
 - Tactic: Revisit a local, national or international news story after six months or more to allow time for action to occur on the news item
 - Tactic: Provide a bullet-point history of the main themes of the news story & revisit the actors.

- Tactic: Provide news story corrections
 - Tactic: Take responsibility for previous errors in reporting
 - Tactic: State why previous reporting errors occurred. The errors could have occurred because it was fast breaking news, notable actors in the news item misstated some facts, an eyewitness account was erroneous, etc.
 - Tactic: Provide news story updates of the actors and the news story's conclusion or update and report subsequent implications. The news story actors may have set a deadline for action. If the deadline was missed, report that update in the follow-up news item. Implications following a news story could be the passage of new legislation, the discovery of a scandal, etc.
 - Tactic: Place news story follow-up reporting on the RTÉ website, app, television news & online streaming
 - Tactic: Promote the news story follow-up through social media, commercials, and current news programming
- Strategy: Review rationale for current and future programming choices to prevent the perception that special interest groups guide program choices
 - Tactic: Implement objective and standard operating procedures that explain why or why not certain programs aired. Guidelines around programming choices will avoid the appearance that special interest groups guide RTÉ's programming.
 - Tactic: Provide churches, charities, and civic organizations with public service announcement airtime.

- Tactic: Offer opposing views/organizations equal air time in news story reporting
- Strategy: Offer more news reporting topics. Additional news topics will broaden the type of news RTÉ provides. Audiences that tire of news consisting of crimes and scandals may appreciate news that uplifts their spirits or helps them make better economic decisions.
 - Tactic: Report local consumer news to make audiences aware of new scams or rip-offs, how to get out of debt, how to find bargains, etc.
 - Tactic: Report financial/business news of companies located in Ireland and notable companies abroad
 - Tactic: Offer a human interest/uplifting story at the conclusion of news broadcasts

Goal: To increase communication with audience

Situation: The goal is to present RTÉ's audience with additional ways and reasons to communicate with RTÉ's staff and vice-versa.

- Objective: To increase two-way communication with audiences by 20% by December 2016
 - Strategy: Increase communication with newsrooms
 - Tactic: Provide news reporters with Twitter handles and verified Facebook profiles
 - Tactic: Allow news reporters to comment on Facebook about stories they reported and to allow the news audience to talk about the stories
 - Tactic: Use social media channels to ask audiences what news stories they would like RTÉ to follow-up on

- Tactic: Create branded hashtags during & following news reports
- Tactic: Reply to news story comments, retweets, etc. on social media
- Tactic: Create an RTÉ social media account to show behind-the-scenes news reporting at RTÉ
- Strategy: Enhance current communications with audiences
 - Tactic: Insert statements such as “Your licence fee makes programs like this possible” at the introduction or conclusion of news programming, documentaries, or poignant stories.
 - Tactic: Show news reporters engaging in community service activities in their counties of residence
 - Tactic: Provide a phone number, web page or social media channels that audiences can use to provide news tips to RTÉ
 - Tactic: Thank audiences for engaging with RTÉ News on social media
 - Tactic: Invite audience opinions on high-profile news stories using social media
 - Tactic: Conduct social media chats between RTÉ talent, staff & news audiences

Goal: Promote news reporting globally

Situation: The goal is for RTÉ to expose itself to an international audience and take advantage of Irish emigration and to compete with programming from other media outlets and distribution channels.

- Objective: Increase global news audience by 10% by December 2017
 - Strategy: Reach out to the Irish population abroad

- Tactic: Promote RTÉ news programs to colleges & universities through faculty, Irish heritage affiliate groups, and study abroad offices
- Tactic: Promote RTÉ news programs to Irish-themed businesses, the Irish Chambers of Commerce and the Irish consulates abroad through event sponsorships and community relations
- Tactic: Sponsor sporting events abroad (e.g., soccer)

Discussion

Follow-up programming

There are various ways and reasons to keep a story alive in the news. When a story remains unresolved, it can be used to engage the audience in issues, enable the primary story and similar stories to be repeated, and keep the story newsworthy. Journalists use these tactics to maintain suspense (e.g., construct the story as a mystery), provide a supply of tangential events to the original story, resurrect the story on relevant anniversaries (e.g., victim's birthday) and present story developments as recent or exciting when the developments were known at the time the story was published. These reasons and tactics can provide newsrooms with an endless supply of stories that can focus on the original event (Weinblatt, 2008). Although this may be the standard procedure for journalism, the non-closure of news stories can present a dilemma to audiences.

Need for closure

News by definition provides the viewer secondary experiences of events whether they are across town or around the world. The pace of the news cycle and the essence of news is that media outlets cannot provide a complete picture of a news event (Lippman, 1922). Leaving an

issue unresolved, leads to anxiety. In order to reduce the anxiety, closure is sought. The Need for Cognitive Closure (NFCC) is the desire to have definite knowledge in response to an issue in order to avoid confusion and ambiguity (Webster & Kruglanski, 1998). This need varies along a continuum depending upon the situation and/or the individual (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994).

Those with a high need for closure tend to value tradition, stability and the status quo while those with a low need for closure value creativity, new experiences and independence. These findings remained true across gender and age (Calogero et. al, 2009). Closure can mean many things; it can signify justice, revenge, acknowledgement of pain and loss or simply knowing what happened (Gozzi, 2003).

Psychologically, people fill in missing information in order to provide closure to unfinished stories (Bruner, 1973) and they use cues to complete a picture about an event (Allport & Postman, 1947). When the media fails to predict story closure or complete a story, viewers make their own predictions (Graber, 1984).

For example, viewers erroneously concluded that recent rains caused the 1984 Ethiopian drought conditions to improve. Viewers no longer thought about the drought and concluded that the issue was resolved as it was no longer in the news. The true cause of the drought was the growing needs of a rapidly increasing population. A follow-up report showed that the drought remained and food needs grew. However, the problem was difficult to rekindle because Americans believed the problem no longer existed because the issue was no longer in the headlines (Metzger, 2000).

Further research possibilities

As this paper has shown, there is a plethora of research about journalism, news, and the state of affairs in the news media. There is also considerable research in the area of psychology

that explores the need for closure. However, there is little research that explores the interaction between news, the lack of closure in news stories (especially in the internet age), its affect on audiences' perception of news and general worldview, and how follow-up news programming would affect a news organization's finances. Further research into the effects of this type of programming would likely benefit the news industry, and the psychology and business communities.

Measurement

A limitation of this study is the lack of news ratings. This researcher was unable to access current news ratings for RTÉ. News ratings are proprietary and media outlets may choose not to share this information. Ratings would be helpful because they would provide a before and after picture of the effectiveness of the entire plan along with ratings for follow-up news programming. In spite of this, there are other ways to measure progress against the plan.

Social media tools can be used to track the amount of feedback between RTÉ and its audience on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The number of retweets, favorites and followers can be measured from Twitter. Likewise, on Facebook, the number of comments, shares, and likes can be readily analyzed. To aim for a 20% increase in the conversation between RTÉ and its audiences would be achievable and accommodate any learning curves the reporters' may have with the use of social media. As a very first step, RTÉ would need to review its social media policy to ensure it is up to date and news reporters are properly trained to interact with the audience. Any uptick in the two-way communication will further enhance how its news audience perceives RTÉ and engage the audience in the issues presented.

New programming risks

The cost to launch new news programming may be costly for some news outlets from the costs of the reporter to production costs. Experienced reporters may be better used to cover breaking local, national and international news stories. Less experienced reporters could handle the research and production of follow-up news stories. This would allow newer reporters to hone their research, fact-checking and news production skills in a lower stress environment.

To alleviate some financial concerns, RTÉ could launch the follow-up programming in phases and on certain platforms. Initially, the follow-up stories could be placed online. This would alleviate some of the heavy production costs associated with news programming while still providing the audience the news story conclusions they desire. Measurements such as views and website hits can be tracked to show the amount of audience attention stories are garnering. Along with that, RTÉ could sell ad space on the website to offset the costs of producing the online news story. As the segments become more popular, the stories could be launched on social media, RTÉ apps, and television. Stories that the audience has a special interest in could be aired on television.

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