

Audience Gatekeeping Via Social Media

by

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Abstract

Using networked gatekeeping theory, this study analyzes how social media is being integrated into morning news programming, allowing audience members an opportunity to play a role in the gatekeeping process. Traditional gatekeeping, along with the shift to networked gatekeeping, the levels of gatekeeping, and gatekeeping through social media is discussed. A content analysis of morning news programming found lower levels of social media integration than predicted and more discussions of specific posts than any other types of social media references. Social media references were also more specific to certain types of news segments. Implications for the future of networked gatekeeping as well as future research are also discussed.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As technology advances, computer-mediated communication is becoming increasingly pervasive in society and we must, in response, analyze the use of media in a networked society (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004). Although traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, and television still exist, they are rapidly being taken over by the Internet and more specifically, social media. Even though many still find traditional forms of media useful, it is undeniable that we have become an Internet-dependent society, constantly using our smartphones, laptops, and tablets to stay connected (Courtois & D'heer, 2012). Newspapers and television were previously primary sources for breaking news, but the speed of Internet communication is leading consumers to turn to it for current information. Although it is unlikely that the Internet will ever fully replace television, both producers and viewers are turning to social media to complement the viewing experience (Hunt, 2014).

With between 60 and 70% of people using a second screen device while watching television, social media is becoming an inevitable component of television viewing, even news (Prolux & Shepatin, 2012). Social media is being used simultaneously with live television programming, transforming “television into an active medium” by adding a social component (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014). Using social media as a second screen, viewers can express their opinion on television and news content in real time (Cameron & Geidner, 2014). Information is both released and found through social media, becoming an unavoidable factor for other news media like television. Often, major news outlets have moved toward releasing breaking news on sites like Twitter in order to disseminate information

more quickly. Television news reporters may even look to social media for insight into newsworthy situations, updates on current crises, and viewer insight on current events (Moon & Hadley, 2014).

This study will focus on the use of social media during morning television news programming, specifically *Today* and *Good Morning America (GMA)*. Popular morning television news programs use references to social media and social media posts in an effort to keep viewers engaged and encourage interaction with viewers (Hunt, 2014; Xu & Feng, 2014). By examining what types of news segments reference social media, what types of social media content are discussed, and the tone of social media content used, this study aims to analyze how users' social media posts are being integrated into morning television news program content (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014). Through the use of Network Gatekeeping Theory (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004; Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Coddington & Holton, 2014; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Riffe, Ellis, Rogers, Van Ommeren, & Woodman, 1986; Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001) this study will analyze how the audience becomes a part in the gatekeeping process by participating in social media conversations that are featured and discussed on morning television news programming.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Gatekeeping has developed through the years in the field of communication, where it is referred to as a selection process (Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005). The original concept of gatekeeping was developed by Kurt Lewin (1947; 1951) and was only considered to apply to traditional media, but over the years the concept has evolved and adapted to account for new media. Studies such as those of Lewin (1947; 1951), White (1950), and Breed (1955) provide a foundation for understanding the selection process of news and factors that may influence this selection.

Media sociology research has provided an explanation of the factors influencing the construction of news with a social and occupational setting (Reese & Ballinger, 2001). Lewin (1947) first pointed out that all news was dependent on the points through which it is travelling within all channels that function as “gates” (Lewin, 1947; 1951). These gates are controlled by “gate keepers” that determine which information gets “in” and “out.” Before a news story is released it goes through various phases of selection and discarding, to filter through information to be released (White, 1950). After the long process, the final product ultimately comes down to one person, one “gate keeper,” who will determine which news stories will make up both the front and proceeding pages (White, 1950).

Scholars have noted recent changes within news organizations with respect to social media, both with maintaining their own social media presence and incorporating social media into news dissemination (e.g. Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012; Paulussen & Harder, 2014; Thelwall, 2008). The original

notions of gatekeeping theory put editorial autonomy at the forefront, with journalists needing to protect their work from the government, advertisers, and audiences (Shoemaker & Voss, 2009). With the integration of social media into news practices, journalists are now contending with an influence of the audience on the construction of news (Tandoc & Vos, 2015), leading to implications on the link between role and behavior (see Donsbach, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Media sociology research focused on gatekeeping theory has identified crowdsourcing (e.g. Poell & Borra, 2012), audience members disseminating content (Thorson, 2008), and audiences tailoring content (Tandoc & Vos, 2015) as the main patterns of audiences becoming part of the news process, forcing journalists to adapt old and accommodate new routines.

The media landscape has changed significantly over the years, evolving and becoming larger and more complex. Media have transformed from basic newspapers and television into electronic newspapers accessible all over the world and hundreds of television channels offering a variety of content. With the expansion of media also come more options and therefore a need for more competitive news packages for every news outlet. The need to fill news holes and the intensity of competition have moved news content away from the traditional ideal of objectivity (Edgerly, 2015; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The sheer volume of media exposure calls for a drastic change in gatekeeping roles to select news to entice a larger number of audience members. Over the years gatekeeping has also evolved to take into account the networked nature of our society.

Networked Gatekeeping

Network Gatekeeping Theory (NGT) (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004) was developed to adapt the concepts of gatekeeping and gatekeepers to a networked society (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005). Also known as networked gatekeeping (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), NGT occurs when the majority work together, not necessarily intentionally, becoming the gatekeeper of a particular outlet by collectively deciding and filtering what information gets through and what does not (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). The concept of network gatekeeping can be defined as “the process through which actors are crowd sourced to prominence through the use of conversational, social practices that symbiotically connect elite and crowd in the determination of information relevancy” (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013, pp. 21). This means that any individual or group, working separately or together, regardless of their status or credibility, can influence what information is relevant and play a role in determining who and what rises to prominence in a networked society.

Although the concepts of gatekeeping were simply adapted for new media, there are important differences between the traditional concept of gatekeeping and network gatekeeping. In the case of networks, gatekeeping should be thought of as “a type of control exercised on information as it moves in and out of virtual gates” (Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005, pp. 7). Unlike before, information is now moving in and out of virtual gates rather than directly flowing in one direction from media to audience. The many-to-many model of communication that has developed as a result of the developments in technology and computer-mediated communication has also changed the model of gatekeeping (Coddington & Holton, 2014). The most

significant difference in gatekeeping within a network is that the roles of gatekeepers and the gated are repeatedly exchanged, eliminating the traditional sender-receiver relationship (Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005). The gated is another term for the audience, or those to whom the message was intended. Traditional gatekeeping indicated that the gated have no control, but NGT says that both the gatekeeper and the gated can have power over the flow of information (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Network Gatekeeping Theory acknowledges the significance of the gated in a continually negotiated relationship because, within the network context, the audience can now produce and disseminate information as well (Coddington & Holton, 2014).

Network Gatekeeping Theory (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004) was developed as a lens through which we may examine power relations on the Internet, in order to conceptualize “the distribution of information and processes of information control” (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004, p. 1). The modification of gatekeeping to accommodate a networked society has enabled researchers to analyze and better understand the flow of information on the Internet, socially and technically (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Network Gatekeeping presents a model that is applicable beyond the relatively narrow editorial gatekeeping concept of mass communication research (Coddington & Holton, 2010). This allows the impact of ordinary users to be measured just as the agenda setting affects of journalists can be measured (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013).

Within the Internet, the crowdsourcing of information leads to the sending, receiving, and remixing of information rendering a networked flow of information and activity (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Although there may be different

designated gatekeepers for different outlets and media ultimately their collaborative decisions will have the greatest impact on the audience (Riffe et. al., 1986). Network gatekeeping has also changed the way that prominence is achieved; elite status now emerges based on popularity that is determined by the crowd (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). A need for power outside of the Internet is not necessary for an individual or their message to rise to prominence within a networked society.

Gatekeeping Levels

The many levels of network gatekeeping provide insight into the selection process for news. News goes through many people, or gatekeepers, before it is published or aired. Gatekeepers are the forces that either facilitate or constrain items as they attempt to pass through the gatekeeping process (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). In the simplest form of network gatekeeping, information is first provided by the news source, then it is given to the reporter, and then an editor amends content before it is released, passing through many gatekeepers before reaching the general public (Applegate, 2008). Network gatekeeping involves many individuals revising and recirculating information to the public. There are many levels of network gatekeeping that influence the selection of information in the gatekeeping process, including individual forces, routines, organizational and institutional influences, and the audience (Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005; Shoemaker, 1996; Shoemaker et. al., 2001). White (1950) and Breed (1955) pioneered the ideas of gatekeeping levels by establishing two different influences that affect the news selection, or gatekeeping, process. By calling news

production into question, news moves from being a manufactured product to being a carefully constructed, systematic product developed by a communicator or “gatekeeper” (Reese & Ballinger, 2001).

Individual

The first level or factor that influences network gatekeeping is the individual from which the content or information originates. Journalists, or any producers of information, may select information that promotes their own views and is thus biased in some way, therefore becoming the first filter in a chain of gatekeeping agents (Applegate, 2008). By studying comments of a wire editor on rejected stories, White (1950) was able to determine that gatekeeping is a subjective process that requires value judgment. The individual level of gatekeeping is important to examine because many believe that journalist bias occurs at this level based on the journalist’s attitudes, values, and beliefs (Cassidy, 2006). The individual’s reasons for selecting certain information are likely to be influenced by their own preferences among other things. Previous studies of gatekeeping state that gatekeepers primarily reject information for three reasons: personal feelings, insufficient space, and whether the story has appeared before (Barzilai-Nahon & Neumann, 2005). While factors like space and repetitive coverage also have influence, personal attitudes and beliefs are typically the focus of the individual level of gatekeeping.

Routines

Routines, the next level of the gatekeeping process, can be defined as “patterned, routinized, and repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 105). The repetitive process reporters

and journalists follow often has influence over the news and information selected for dissemination (Cassidy, 2006). Among the many routines that journalists are programmed to follow, the pattern of composing a news package is one of the most prominent. Breed (1955) examined how news reporters began to make decisions about the news they were reporting based on previous and anticipated comments by editors. This study concluded that editors make comments and adjustments that intentionally teach reporters how to construct an ideal news package, thus developing a routine for them to follow when selecting news (Breed, 1955). News selection is often a result of gatekeepers making decisions based on their mental image of the “ideal” news package (Riffe et. al., 1986). Certain values are required of events to be newsworthy: conflict, progress or disaster, consequence, eminence or prominence, novelty, timeliness or proximity, and sex. These values make an event newsworthy because they interrupt the status quo or appeal to readers, and the ideal mix of them composes an attractive news package (Applegate, 2008). Of all the levels of gatekeeping, researchers have concluded that routine forces are better predictors of what will become news than other factors (Shoemaker et. al., 2001).

Organizational & Institutional

Some larger levels of network gatekeeping include both the organizational and institutional levels. The organizational level refers to internal factors of an organization along with a group’s decision-making patterns (Bantz, 1990), while the institutional level focuses on characteristics such as market forces and political alliances (Donohue, Olien, & Tichenor, 1989). These levels are basically controlled by the values and goals of the organization coupled with those of outside

stakeholders. Advertisers may demand to provide money only if certain stories are or aren't aired (Applegate, 2008). Large media outlets still rule the agenda of worldwide news and local media outlets are still largely driven or predisposed to the agenda of major news outlets (Bui, 2010). Many outlets may disseminate information, but the few large media conglomerates and their advertisers have a significant impact on the selection of information.

Audience

The audience that information is targeted at is another level of network gatekeeping. Gramsci (1971) called this level the social system level because it encompasses the impact of ideology and culture on gatekeeping. Because ideology and culture are reflected in the population, the audience is the social system. Diakopoulos and Zubiaga (2014) point out that a strong social presence by news publishers will allow them to engage the community and recruit readers as network gatekeepers who will further promote and share their news. User-to-user communication that recirculates information is considered an important part of this step of the gatekeeping process (Kwon et. al., 2012). With new media advances, journalists and reporters are selecting information based on its likelihood to be "retweeted" and re-circulated on the Internet by their audience, primarily through social media sites (Moon and Hadley, 2014).

Social Media & NGT

According to Network Gatekeeping Theory, every social media user is a gatekeeper with the authority to decide which information they will share

(Diakopoulos & Zubiaga, 2014). Many researchers have analyzed Twitter as an audience gatekeeping channel (Coddington & Holton, 2014; Diakopoulos & Zubiaga, 2014; Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Hermida, 2015; Kwon et. al., 2012; e.g.). Social media allows all audience members to filter information by sharing and promoting only certain pieces of information (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Network gatekeeping researchers have made a distinction between two types of social media users, elite and non-elite users. The idea of an elite social media user occurs when an individual's ideas and opinions are crowdsourced to prominence or the user holds some power outside of just the Internet, while non-elite users are largely unnoticed by the rest of a site's users (Hermida, 2015).

Media platforms like Twitter allow news stations to provide viewers with information in real time and increase loyalty to the station (Geer & Ferguson, 2011). However, although traditional news organizations have taken to social media, researchers have found that Twitter and other social media audiences are more likely to rely on user-generated information (Kwon et. al., 2012). Individuals who inherit power from outside structures may not remain influential on social media (Hermida, 2015). Power on social media is always changing, being assigned and reassigned constantly. Journalists may or may not be considered elite users based on whether or not the crowd moves them to prominence, not based on outside power (Hermida, 2015).

Social Media as News

Power is no longer in the hands of media monopoly following the rise of social media and active audiences- "users of digital media who interact through

participatory mechanisms made available to them by news companies (Masip, Gullar, Suasu, Ruiz-Caballero, & Peralta, 2015). With news viewing via the Internet growing, consumers are developing a more fluid pattern of viewing across platforms, causing news networks to adapt methods that take advantage of this cross-viewership (Layfayette, 2015). News stations are choosing to gather information based on trending topics on social media in order to better adapt to audience preferences; however, 40% of news affiliates do not have procedures in place to regulate information retrieved through social media, despite issues with reliability of information (Marzalek, 2016). Eck (2015) reported that NBC affiliate KGET even developed special segments based only on viewers' social media posts and responses.

News stations are increasingly turning to social media for information and even viewer content and opinions (Masip, et. al., 2015). Professional journalists are turning social media friends into news gatekeepers by inviting the public to share and develop their own opinions and content (Masip, Gullar, Suasu, Ruiz-Caballero, & Peralta, 2015). Greeley (2016) reports that news brands are no longer in control but are now owned by the audience; they are who the audience says they are. Some networks are turning to social media to monitor viewers' emotional reactions to particular television shows (Sameraro, 2016). By allowing viewers to express their opinions and share original content, participation is shifted from media-controlled platforms to open platforms, indicating a shift in power (Masip, et. al., 2015).

Morning News Programming

NBC's the *Today* show paved the way for morning news programming, but is now competitively rivaled daily by ABC's *Good Morning America (GMA)* (Ariens, 2016; Steinberg, 2014; Stelter, 2015; Stelter, 2016; Tennant, 2015). *Today* first aired in 1952 and was developed by Pat Weaver to be an "electronic newspaper" (Stelter, 2016). In an effort to challenge viewership of NBC, ABC also developed a morning news program that eventually launched as *Good Morning America* in 1975 (Steleter, 2015). Because *GMA* was developed after *Today*, its structure and segments mirror that of *Today*, which made it difficult for *GMA* to establish its own identity early on (Stelter, 2015). According to IMDB (n.d) both shows feature a panel of co-anchors reporting news live from New York City covering a spectrum of topics including breaking news, live interviews, weather, and special lifestyle segments.

Since its invention, *Today* has aired at seven o'clock Eastern Standard Time each morning, but eventually expanded from two hours to four. Each show started with a segment Weaver, producer of *Today*, called "*Today* in Two Minutes" that gave a brief synopsis of the news for the day and repeated every half hour (Stelter, 2016). *GMA* followed this pattern, also airing from seven to nine in the morning and operating on half-hour news increments (Stelter, 2015). Likewise, *Today* and *GMA* have special segments dedicated to the same types of information. *Today* has a segment known as "Pop Start" and *GMA* calls theirs "Pop Fix," but both are dedicated to discussing news regarding celebrities and pop culture. The two also share special segments dedicated to discussions on and of social media; *Today* calls their segment the "Orange Room" and *GMA* referring to theirs as "Social Square."

Perhaps as a result of their likeness, *Today* and *GMA* dominate the ratings of morning news programming, frequently trading number one finishes (Tennant, 2015).

Sweeps Programming

Sweeps programming occurs during the times of the year when Nielsen Media Research surveys television-viewing habits (Fletcher, 2009; Kenneally, 2014; Fletcher, 2009). Four times of year for four-week periods Neilson sends out “diaries” for viewers to record what they watch on television during that period of time (Trex, 2011). These four periods take place during the months of February, May, July, and November, and provide data that will determine advertising rates for local television stations (Kenneally, 2014). Because advertising dollars depend so heavily on viewership ratings during this time, shows save their best content for these periods (Fletcher, 2009). Although this is a time typically associated with the most dramatic plot twists of your favorite weekly shows, sweeps periods also affect news programs and their need to get more viewers. Although *GMA* and *Today* have been trading off first place finishes in the morning news category, *Today* still remains the revenue leader of morning programming (Matsa, 2015; Tennant, 2015).

The gatekeeping process has evolved over the years, adapting for technology and changes in communication flow. Network gatekeeping states that in a networked society with high access to Internet and technology, information is no longer being sent one way but is instead constantly exchanged. Now that the gated, or audience members, can also produce information gatekeeping is no longer a one-way process. By allowing audience members to participate in the news selection

process through social media, reporters and producers are integrating the audience into the gatekeeping process. Populous television news programming can provide a foundation for studying the idea of the audience participating in gatekeeping through social media. Based on previous research of Network Gatekeeping and social media, in addition to the observation of *GMA* and *Today*, this study will be based on the following hypotheses:

H1: At least half of news segments on morning television contain some type of reference to social media.

H2: Pictures and/or videos posted to social media will be discussed or displayed more frequently on air than the opinions of viewers or plain text posts.

H3: Popular or pop culture news and political news are more likely to contain social media references than breaking news and local or regional news.

H4: Celebrity social media posts are more likely to be displayed on air during news segments than posts of non-celebrity users.

H5: Sweeps programming will feature significantly more social media references than non-sweeps programming.

H6: Sweeps programming will feature significantly more discussion about social media postings.

Chapter 3: Method

Utilizing Network Gatekeeping Theory (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004; Barzilai-Nahon & Nuemann, 2005; Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; Barzilai-Nahon, 2008; Meraz & Papacharissi; 2005), this study sought to investigate how the popular television news shows *Today* and *Good Morning America (GMA)* incorporate social media content by expressing opinions or ideas of social media users and sharing content via social media. Given the methodology of previous research (Arceneaux, Noah, & Weiss; Fox, Angelini, & Goble, 2005; Hester & Dougall, 2007; McElroy, 2013; Riffe, et. al. 1986), a quantitative analysis of morning news content was conducted to test the hypotheses (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014). Over the course of two weeks both *Today* and *Good Morning America (GMA)* have been examined and coded for references to social media engagement (Connolly-Ahern, Ahern, & Bortree, 2009; Dixon, Azocar, & Casas, 2003). References to social media include hosts mentioning posts already made to social media, news spread through social media outlets, and requests for viewers to participate in social media engagement events as part of the broadcast. McElroy (2013) found that producers are selective in determining which user content the network may use, which may provide insight into the potential differences in networks.

Sample

The popular morning television news shows *Today* and *GMA* were analyzed for the sake of this study due to common structure, audiences, and air times. Other shows such as *CBS This Morning* were not included due to limited time. According to *Variety Magazine* and *The Daily Beast*, *GMA* and *Today* are the two most popular

morning television news shows (Hod, 2012; Steinberg, 2014). A sample of two five-day weeks will be used for the purposes of this study, one week occurring during a sweeps period and one during a non-sweeps period. Weekend programming was not included due to different content, staff, hosts, and structure. The shows used in this sample aired April 11-15 2016, and May 2-6 2016. During coding, shows were not viewed live, but played back using Hulu and On Demand.

Only the first two of the four hours of *Today* were coded along with the full two-hour *GMA* shows. The last two hours of *Today* stand as separate shows known as “Today’s Take” and “Kathie Lee Gifford and Hoda.” The first two hours of *Today* were also selected due to their similarity with *GMA* in content and structure. The unit of analysis for this study is each news segment or clip of *Today* and *GMA*. Each segment of every show in the selected time frame has been coded individually, segments being divided based on every topic change. The title of each news segment is also displayed at the bottom of the screen during each show; therefore a segment change can also be determined based on the title change.

Coding Procedures

This study examines the number of social media references made in regard to *Today* and *GMA*, which social media outlets are referenced, whether any specific individual social media accounts are repeatedly referenced, the types of posts and references, and which social media users’ posts get selected on air. The unit of analysis is individual news segments, separated by topic. Each segment has been coded based on 12 variables starting with a simple distinction of coder, air date, and show.

The next two variables categorize the topics for each news segment. For each segment, coders have written out the title of the news segment displayed on screen (e.g. "Clinton Bounces Back in Nevada"). All segments have also been categorized and coded according to the category in which the topic fits (e.g. breaking news, political news, local or regional news, popular news, special segment, or weather). The categorization of topics allows for insight into the types of news segments that are more likely to reference social media.

Segments referencing social media were further coded in order to determine exactly how social media is referenced. It is important to determine how social media is referenced in order to understand why it was mentioned. Networks primarily use social media as a means to keeping viewers engaged, so observing how they use social media to do this will provide insight into viewer participation (Cameron & Geidner, 2014). First, coders simply coded for whether or not a social media site was referenced during the news segment. If no social media site was referenced, the coding for that segment will end here.

Next, coders have indicated the exact social media site that is referenced or indicated that there was no specific site mentioned (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit, other, or not specified). If social media was referenced, coders also coded whether the reference was to a specific post, requesting social media participation, or directing viewers to the network's social media account(s).

If a specific individual content post was displayed on screen, the post was coded for the following: Any hashtags, words with # in front of them used for grouping (e.g. #GMAonSafari), included in the on-air reference were written out

during the coding process. Hashtags are often assigned by the network and either announced or displayed on air to group viewer feedback (Buschow & Scheider, 2014). When a segment includes a reference to specific social media post, it has also been coded for what type of account posted it. Accounts were categorized into the categories based on the type of account and whom the account belongs to (personal viewer account, personal celebrity account, organization or business account, network's account, or other not specified account). The content of the posts displayed were coded based on whether it contains simple text, picture or meme, video, hyperlink, or other. Likewise, if the reference requested social media participation, participation type has been coded for opinion, pictures or videos, or contest entry. Assessing the content of the posts will determine what type of content the network is looking for or focusing on.

Intercoder Reliability

This study utilized two coders to ensure that bias does not influence results. Intercoder reliability was tested to find the Kappa, having each coder code 20% of the sample and using those results for comparison. Only one coder coded the entire sample. Overall reliability for the sample was $\kappa = .84$, an acceptable level of reliability. Individual levels of kappa include show ($\kappa = 1.00$), news type ($\kappa = .81$), social media referenced ($\kappa = .96$), social media site referenced ($\kappa = .89$), type of social media reference ($\kappa = .86$), hastags used ($\kappa = .85$), social media account type posted ($\kappa = .84$), type of content posted ($\kappa = .90$), and type of participation requested ($\kappa = .88$).

Chapter 4: Results

Throughout 20 episodes of *Today* and *GMA*, a total of 575 news segments were recorded, an average of approximately 29 segments per episode. Within each episode, news segments are considered a change in the news topic, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. Each individual news segment was coded for if and how social media was referenced. The sample consists of 10 episodes of each show, *Today* and *GMA*, five of which aired during a non-sweeps season and five from a sweeps season.

H1 predicted that at least half of news segments on morning television would contain some type of reference to social media. Only 19% of the news segments in the sample contained a reference to social media. References were counted as any mention of social media or a specific social media site during a news segment. Table 1 shows the frequencies of social media references in news segments (H1) on *Today* and *GMA*.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

H2 predicted that pictures and/or videos posted to social media would be discussed or displayed more frequently on air than the opinions of viewers or plain text posts. A chi-square did not find a statistically significance difference between pictures and videos versus opinions and plain text posts $\chi^2 (2, N = 76) = 2.654 p = 0.265$.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

H3 predicted that popular or pop culture news and political news are more likely to contain social media references than breaking news and local or regional

news. Table three shows how the occurrence of social media references according to the type of news discussed during the segment. A chi square found a statistically significant difference between the types of news segments and references to social media $\chi^2 (5, N = 578) 17.001 p < .0045$. Popular and political news had a greater number of social media references than other types of news.

<Insert Table 3 about here>

H4 predicted that social media posts of celebrities are more likely to be displayed and/or discussed on air than those of other users. A chi square found a statistically significance difference between the social media posts discussed on air and the type of account that posted them $\chi^2 (6, N = 77) 78.027 p < .0001$. Of the specific posts discussed, the majority was from celebrity accounts.

<Insert Table 4 about here>

H5 predicted that sweeps programming would feature significantly more social media references than non-sweeps programming. A chi square did not find a statistically significance difference between the date an episode aired and references to social media $\chi^2 (9, N = 578) 9.121 p < .4264$.

<Insert Table 5 about here>

H6 predicted that sweeps programming would feature significantly more discussion about social media postings. A chi square did not find a statistically significance difference between the date an episode aired and references to social media $\chi^2 (36, N = 578) 35.255 p < .5038$.

<Insert Table 6 about here>

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study sought to explore the presence of social media posts and references on popular morning television news through the lens of Networked Gatekeeping Theory. By focusing on the frequency and types of social media posts and activity that are discussed on air, insight can be gained into how morning news outlets are incorporating audience social media usage, potentially altering traditional gatekeeping roles. The results of this study demonstrate how social media is beginning to be integrated into morning news programming.

The first hypothesis predicted that at least half of the news segments on popular morning television contain a reference to social media. Data did not confirm this hypothesis, but the presence of social media existed in small measure in morning news programming. Nearly 20% of the news segments coded contained some type of reference to social media. This result could suggest that activity on social media is beginning to change the way that news is selected and discussed. When the audiences of these morning news programs crowdsource information to prominence, gatekeepers of these programs seem to be taking notice. Some segments, like those occurring in "Pop Start"-- segment dedicated to Popular figures and celebrities- during *Today*, may not have otherwise been considered "news" but were included in morning programming due to their popularity on social media.

These results could also indicate an increasing number of viewers participating in discussion while watching. Prolux and Shepatin (2012) found that around 65% of viewers engage social media while watching television, giving producers and reporters an opportunity to gather feedback in real time. However,

as Masip et. al., (2015) have indicated, social media is now a tool that allows audiences to participate in news selection prior to the airing of programs. The small-scale integration of social media news could indicate that this is exactly what is happening; reporters may be looking to social media to decide what they should discuss on air.

Although the results of the chi-square were not statistically significant, 56% of specific posts displayed were photo and video rather than posts containing on text. With the invention of Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, and other visual social media sites, society may be growing accustomed to having visuals part of every discussion (Lafayette, 2016). Visuals are often preferred to words or text, hence the reason for their popularity on and off the Internet and television. According to NGT, social media posts and ideas rise to prominence by being “liked” and shared by other users. This is an example of how social media users work together to function as a collective gatekeeper of information. Because photos and videos are most “liked,” shared, and discussed on social media, this may also make them more likely to be discussed through other mediums like television.

Results showed that whether or not social media was referenced depended on the type of news discussed in each segment. News about politics or popular culture was more likely to contain a reference to social media than breaking news or local and regional news. Political and pop culture news segments may contain more social media references because they are most discussed on social media. Social media is often where the general population goes to share their opinions about what is happening in the world, and the presidential election currently plays a huge role

on what is being discussed. Likewise, news that becomes mainstream or popular is frequently shared and discussed on social media, providing new details to be discussed on air. Also it may be suggested that breaking news contains fewer references to social media due to credibility issues. As Farhi (2013) discussed, reporting information from social media too quickly can lead to the reporting of misinformation. Discussing social media conversation about breaking news may be difficult due to the inability to confirm the accuracy of information so quickly. For example, in 2013 coverage of a Navy yard shooting was aired by many news stations all reporting different and inaccurate details based on unconfirmed reports from various sources (Farhi, 2013; Sudduth, 2013). Breaking news often dominates social media, but it can be difficult to evaluate the validity of the information with so much being disseminated at once. After instances such as the Navy yard shooting, news outlets may be more mindful of the sources they select during breaking news events.

The number of social media references present in each type of news segment is indicative of the interests of social media users. Because there are more references to social media during political and popular news, it may be assumed that there are more social media posts on these subjects. Although they are not always reliable, reporters often look to trending topics on social media to gather information to cover on air (Marzalek, 2016). According to the results of this study, over the course of two weeks, there were nearly three times as many segments regarding popular culture and politics than those referring to breaking news or local news. Audience members, or social media users, discuss and share information they

find most important, therefore moving particular topics or ideas to prominence making them more likely to be discussed during those television news segments.

As predicted, there was more celebrity posts discussed or displayed on air than posts of non-celebrity social media users. Although the results of this test were statistically significant, three posts is not a large difference. A logical deduction from this result could be that celebrities have more social media followers and are therefore more likely to have their social media posts rise to prominence. According to Network Gatekeeping Theory, the audience moves messages to prominence by collectively sharing, re-sharing, and discussing the same stories and ideas (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Since celebrities have a large volume of followers and therefore have more users viewing their content when it is posted, it is much more likely that their ideas, stories, and photos get moved to prominence. However, we also live in a society that is celebrity obsessed and no matter how insignificant an event in their life may seem, it still has the ability to “break the internet.” Because so many people are concerned with the lives and social media posts of celebrities, these stories become prominent and start infiltrating other media such as television news.

Television programming is often selected based on the time of year it is, or whether the date falls within a sweeps or non-sweeps period. Because ratings and advertising dollars are determined during sweeps periods, networks usually try to put their best content out during these periods (Fletcher, 2009). Within the two weeks examined, there were no significant differences in the amount of social media between the sweeps period and non-sweeps period. Results did show that the sweeps period contained a slightly higher percentage of social media references, but

the difference between sweeps and non-sweeps programming was only 1%. This is surprising because television shows usually do more to increase viewing during sweeps periods, which may suggest that social media posts are not as inviting as predicted. Instead, these results may suggest that morning news programming looks to social media to fill left over airtime, rather than as a tool to gain more viewers. This could indicate that traditional gatekeeping is still more prevalent than networked gatekeeping and audience news selection is limited when it comes to increasing viewership.

Although sweeps periods did not contain significantly more social media references, they were more likely to contain discussion of specific social media posts than requests for participation or references to the network's social media page. This result may be because social media posts that are displayed and discussed on air have already reached a high level of prominence and may therefore draw more viewers. By choosing posts that have already been selected by social media users, television programming is discussing stories that the audience has already expressed an interest in. These are stories, posts, pictures, and videos that have already been selected by the audience and are only being discussed because the audience selected them. In this way, social media users become a network of gatekeepers selecting which stories they would like to hear about and therefore playing a role in the gatekeeping process for morning news programming. This could suggest that although traditional gatekeeping appears more prevalent in news selection for sweeps programming, networked gatekeeping is still at work. Users are still moving certain posts to prominence and making them part of news discussions.

This study sought to determine how social media posts of audience members are being integrated into morning television news program content. Results found that the integration of social media posts is actually pretty minimal, despite predictions. The minimal findings of social media integration may suggest that this is just the beginning of social media entering television programming. Although social media is not yet prominent among morning news programming, it is present which could imply that its presence may increase over time. This study uses Networked Gatekeeping to understand how social media users are crowdsourcing stories to prominence, and those stories are beginning to become integrated into morning news programming.

This study found that social media has not yet made its way into all news segments, but may be on its way to becoming an integral part of news discussion. Although social media references primarily occurred in political or popular news segments, they were not completely void of breaking news, local news, or even weather. It seems as though there may be a social media post about every topic up for discussion. The fact that social media posts are even being displayed and discussed on air could indicate that social media activity itself could even be working toward becoming news. As society becomes more dependent on the Internet and social media for communication, it seems as though other mediums may also become more dependent on them. Even if social media only made up 20% of the news segments studied, you have to wonder what would have filled that 20% otherwise? It is difficult to imagine many parts of our every day life existing without social media in today's society.

The Internet, and specifically social media, is changing how we access and discuss news. The findings of this study may suggest a shift in the gatekeeping process for television news programming. Instead of going through the traditional levels of gatekeeping, such as individual, routines, organizational, and institutional gatekeeping, information may also be filtered by viewers using social media. By expressing their interests, audience members are starting to play a role in how news is selected for programming. Utilizing platforms like social media to make personal opinions available to the world, viewers have the ability to push stories and information to prominence and ultimately change the larger conversation.

The ability of the audience to change the conversation of worldwide news is the very essence of Network Gatekeeping Theory. Instead of information moving in only one direction it is now being moved in and out of multiple gates by multiple gatekeepers simultaneously (Barzilai-Nahon, 2004). Instead of the audience passively accepting what is heard on the news programming, they now have the power to join and potentially change news programming content (Coddington & Holton, 2014). By promoting and sharing only certain pieces of information, audience members are able to help filter which news rises to prominence (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Social media platforms allow news station to release news in real time, giving viewers the opportunity to access and respond to information before it airs on television (Greer & Ferguson, 2011).

With digital technology constantly advancing, it is unlikely that social media will fade any time soon. Therefore, it is likely that social media will only continue on the path of integration with television news programming. We already have shows

like American Idol, Dancing with the Stars, and even the Miss USA Pageant that allow viewers to vote for their choice through social media, which indicates that producers may be trying to shape programming to include viewer opinions. It is probable that audiences are gradually becoming the driving force in shaping program content.

Chapter 6: Future Research & Limitations

This study offers a glimpse into how social media is becoming integrated into other news outlets, like television, through the lens of Networked Gatekeeping Theory. The crowdsourcing of information to prominence allows audience members to play a role in the gatekeeping process. Now, information, pictures, and videos can become news on television based on their popularity on social media.

The primary limitations of this study include both sample size and time restrictions. Due to limited coders, time, and resources the sample was limited to only two shows aired over the course of two weeks. Given more resources, the sample could have been expanded to include more shows over a greater length of time. Also, due to time restrictions, this study was limited to only exploring how social media is discussed on television news but not the actual social media activity itself.

Future research should seek to extend this study by including more news programs and cross referencing social media with posts, hashtags, and social media trends discussed on air. Nightly news shows and daily news programming could be studied using the same coding scheme to determine the prevalence of social media across all news programming. By also looking at how hashtags, user accounts, and other social media trends discussed on air are being discussed online, the way these trends rise to prominence may also be discovered.

Table 1: Frequency of Social Media References

Social Media References

<u>Valid</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Valid Percent</u>	<u>Cumulative Percent</u>
Yes	112	19.4	19.4	19.4
No	466	80.6	80.6	100.0
Total	578	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Content in References

Type of Reference

<u>Content</u>	<u>Specific Post</u>	<u>Request Participation</u>	<u>Totals</u>
Text	33 100%	0 0.0%	33 100%
Photo	20 95.2%	1 4.8%	21 100%
Video	22 100%	0 0.0%	22 100%
Totals	75 98.7%	1 1.3%	76 100%

$\chi^2=2.654$, $df= 2$, $p=0.265$

Table 3: Topic Types with Social Media References

Social Media Reference

<u>Topic Type</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
Breaking	9 18%	41 82%	50 100%
Political	14 13.9%	87 86.1%	101 100%
Local/Regional	3 7.3%	38 92.7%	41 100%
Popular	57 25%	171 75%	228 100%
Special Segment	27 23.1%	90 76.9%	117 100%
Weather	2 4.9%	39 95.1%	41 100%
Total	112 19.4%	466 80.6%	578 100%

$\chi^2=17.001$; $df= 5$; $p=0.004$

Table 4: User Posts On Air

<u>Account Type</u>					
<u>Type of Reference</u>	<u>Viewer</u>	<u>Celebrity</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Network</u>	<u>Total</u>
Specific Post	34 45.3%	37 49.3%	4 5.3%	0 0.0%	75 100%
Request Participation	0 0.0%	1 100%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 100%
Other	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 100%	1 100%
Total	34 44.2%	38 49.4%	4 5.2%	1 1.3%	77 100%

$\chi^2=78.027$; $df= 6$; $p<0.01$

Table 5: Social Media References during Sweeps and Non Sweeps Periods

Social Media Reference

<u>Date</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Total</u>
11-APR-16	10	64	74
12-APR-16	16	48	64
13-APR-16	13	61	74
14-APR-16	14	41	55
15-APR-16	8	47	55
02-MAY-16	9	56	65
03-MAY-16	10	50	60
04-MAY-16	11	37	48
05-MAY-16	13	36	49
06-MAY-16	8	26	34
Total	112	466	578

Table 6: Types of References during Sweeps and Non Sweeps Periods

Types of Social Media References

<u>Date</u>	<u>Specific Post</u>	<u>Participation</u>	<u>Direct to Account</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>NA</u>	<u>Total</u>
11-APR-16	6	1	2	1	64	74
12-APR-16	8	0	1	2	53	64
13-APR-16	9	0	1	3	61	74
14-APR-16	13	0	0	0	42	55
15-APR-16	5	0	1	1	48	55
02-MAY-16	7	0	0	2	56	65
03-MAY-16	7	2	1	2	48	60
04-MAY-16	5	2	1	1	39	48
05-MAY-16	12	0	1	0	36	49
06-MAY-16	6	0	1	1	26	34
Total	78	5	9	13	473	578

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