Day 1, April 21, 2017: Afternoon Session – 1:40-2:40p.m.

Research Panel: Creating, Producing, and Engaging:
Latest Journalism Practices Underway in Newsroom

Chair: Amy Schmitz Weiss, ISOJ Research Chair, Associate Professor at **San Diego State University**

- **Karin Assmann** and **Nicholas Diakopoulos,** University of Maryland
  -Audience Engagement Editors as Newsroom Intermediaries
- **Marcus Funk,** Sam Houston State University
  -Decoding the Podaissance: Identifying Community Journalism Practices in Newsroom and Avocational Podcasts
- **Cindy Royal,** Texas State University
  -Managing Digital Products in a Newsroom Context
- **John Wihbey** and **Mark Coddington,** Northeastern University and Washington and Lee University
  -Knowing the Numbers: Assessing Attitudes among Journalists and Educators about Using and Interpreting Data, Statistics, and Research

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Karin Assmann: My name is Karin Assman. My coauthor is Nick Diakopoulos. We're both at Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland. I'm a PhD candidate and during the course of an independent study that I did with him, we wrote a paper together about audience engagement editors. Your mic might need to be a little higher.

Rosenthal Alves: [inaudible]

Karin Assmann: You know, I work in television, so this is so embarrassing. And yet, I have beamed up a picture of a newspaper. I want to give you a little bit of background, my personal background, because I think the work that I'm engaging in as a journalist, who's sort of crossing over into the world of academia, has some deep-rooted, psychological reason. One of which is probably—probably started when I was about 17. I was an intern. It was my first job as a journalist after I graduated high school. I'm from Germany, by the way, which explains…. I was not at this paper, but at another German local paper. And they had these boxes out there where they displayed the newspaper of the day.

And I remember the first time that I had an article in the paper. And I walked to work in the morning, and I saw these people standing there reading my article, and I crept by them, because I didn't want them to recognize me. And I think that sort

of exemplifies the attitude that maybe I have or a lot of journalists have about their audience. It's like, "Oh, my god, don't recognize me. Don't criticize me. Don't call me on it."

This was a couple of years ago as you might imagine. Since then, I've worked in television. And you know the metrics and audience response in television is a very different beast. Every Monday morning…. We have a weekly news program. I worked for Spiegel TV, which is a German news magazine affiliated with Das Spiegel. Every Monday morning, we'd sit there, and we'd see the curve, and we'd know exactly which soundbite probably should have been a little bit shorter.

So, you know, my relationship with the audience has been during my professional career as a journalist. One that I understood to be somewhat difficult. And I think I recognize that with a lot of people. When I went to University of Maryland and they asked me, "What do you want to do your work on?" I said, "Well, I'm interested in metrics; how using metrics affects the way journalists do their work." Because I think we are affected by the love of the audience or the lack thereof.

During the course of my work, I've seen that I really want to look at the turn towards the audience, the need to actually take our audience seriously, [and] how that affects newsroom practice. So during my independent study, I asked—I wanted to ask myself, what actually happens in newsrooms as metrics become, really, a regular part of the journalist's job?

I looked at…. I figured there was something going on that was helping journalists change the way they felt about them. So from a theoretical point of view, I looked at, you know, what has changed? There has been a digital innovation. And leaning on convergence literature and diffusion of innovation literature, I looked at how metrics is both a technological change; meaning, there's a dashboard on some journalist's computers in some newsrooms, but it also means, really, that they have to, when they write or when they produce a story, think about who they are doing it for. So I wanted to look at the newsroom culture.

And as I was talking to people about it, they said, "Well, we have these editors now that take care of that, these audience engagement editors." But most people I talked to, when I said, "What exactly do [you] do?" they weren't really sure what they did. So, I figured if I'm going to write a dissertation about how all of this changes newsroom culture, I better look at, what are these editors doing in newsrooms?

And so my very, really, simple research questions were, what do they do? And how do they conceptualize journalism and their role in journalism? Are they journalists? Do they think of themselves as journalists? Or, are they sort of technical innovators that are just bringing a change to the newsroom? And how do they actually define audience engagement?

I did a very simple LinkedIn search in the United States [on], who calls themselves audience engagement editor in the following [industries]: online media, writing and

editing, newspapers, media production, and publishing? I found 55 people who actually call themselves audience engagement editors. I eliminated people who worked for organizations that were really highly specialized that already had sort of built into their job a very specific audience. And of the 30 I contacted, 17 agreed to an interview and 5 were added through their recommendations. So, I interviewed 22 people in 20 newsrooms, because there were two pairs that worked in the same newsroom with one person working in video only. Only 5 of them agreed not to be anonymized, so I decided to anonymize everyone.

And I do want to say without going too much into detail that of the 55 results, there were more women than men, but exactly 11 women and 11 men said yes. And I think that's really worthy of looking into, because that was a theme that went through my interviews is, how come there seem to be so many more women doing this job? But this is something we only have anecdotal non-evidence about. It would be great to maybe talk to some of you guys [about] what you think would be a good way of figuring out, how can we actually figure out how many men versus women work in social and how we can write a paper about that.

So, one thing…. What did I find? One thing they all had in common, of course, was using metrics. There was one audience engagement editor who was most interesting. He worked for an investigative non-profit organization. [He] said that he tries not to show the metrics to any of the journalists, because it incentivizes weird stuff in the newsroom. Another one actually said that he loved showing it to them, because it sometimes brings out interesting competition in the newsroom. So I think you have these two [opinions]. Obviously, it is making an impact. And it is something that I want to look at.

And what do they do, besides working with analytics? And I want to tell you, this is like cognitive background—my audio/visual cognitive background. It doesn't map on. But these are some…. I wanted to share with you some of the quotes that people gave me without actually reading them. So, what do they do?

There was a wide spectrum of activity. First of all, the people that I found were lone wolves. A woman in the Midwest who's the only one in her newsroom doing this work, hopelessly overworked. And then on the other side of the spectrum, somebody in a huge newsroom who's just one of many, many, many who had a system of embedding audience engagement editors with the journalists. So, you have to imagine one month-long. You have one audience engagement editor next to a journalist coaching them, telling them, "Look, what you just wrote, that would be great on Facebook. I'll make that snackable. Next time you write something, think about your audience in that Facebook group, if Facebook is your thing." So, you have this spectrum of really highly, I would say, well-funded, and therefore, very specialized work, and on the other hand, people are really struggling to get everything on social, to make sure that they can fulfill all the needs.

And at the same time, do the other thing that they all have in common, which is work at convincing journalists that what they needed to do in order to engage the audience was necessary. So, that's another common thread that I found that a lot

of people had to really do coaching and do a lot of convincing. Convincing of their…. (That means how many minutes I have left, correct? OK. Thank you. You're not making me do math.) They had to do a lot of convincing.

Another thing that I thought was striking was the question—the answer to the question that I asked, do you consider yourself journalists? Again, a wide spectrum. One person said, "My heart is bleeding. I am not. I wish I was. I used to be. I wish I was." Another person said she wanted to hang up, because she thought that question was so insulting—of course she's a journalist. So, this shows that the field is really wide open and that…. And I think I did [show] in this slide, you can see some other things that they said their identity is: story sellers, trading in stories. They really define journalism in new and interesting ways.

So, when I asked them, "Who is your audience?" they really answered in a lot of interesting ways. That's the next slide. They said, "Anyone with a digital device." It went from "Anyone I can get" to "Everyone we already have" to "Well, I just look at the numbers," to "I go out and find them. I go out and research where they're at."

The question about engagement, I thought, was also—it was the one that solicited the most laughter with a little bit of frustration, because nobody could agree on what it really was.

So, my goal in this paper was to really set out kind of topography of audience engagement in American newsrooms. It's influx. It's changing as we speak. But I think what is very clear is that the audience engagement editors are translators and they are change agents who are explaining to the journalists what they need to do. The language that they use—and this is one of the most important points—I think really is—and I don't think it's a secret to anyone—it's the language of marketing. It's teaching journalists how to brand themselves and hopefully the journalism, which kind of ties into some of the things we've heard earlier. Branding themselves. Branding their outfit. Branding the journalism that they're doing.

And I leave you with this wonderful network graph of the different outlets. I once did a paper about Bill Cosby and how people were talking about him. And to tell you that it is a network society. Newsrooms are understanding it. And they are using these audience engagement editors as intermediaries between the world of marketing and the world of journalism.

And my caution would be to take a really close look at how we're defining journalism and promotions, and make sure that where these audience engagement editors are taking us is really where we want to go. Thank you.

Marcus Funk: I'm stoked to be here. Usually at academic conferences, there are about six people in the audience, and you've known them all for years, because you're all doing the same kind of research. So, this is really encouraging and also mildly terrifying. So, we're going to charge ahead. I'm Dr. Marcus Funk. I'm Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at Sam Houston State University, not too far from here.

And we live in a curious time in media history, as you all know too well, because last year faith in mainstream media plummeted to its lowest recorded point in modern history. By a variety of data from Pew and Gallop, credibility and faith and trust in traditional news is in the toilet. And this contributed—dare I say it—bigly to the election of President Trump, [laughter], contributed to an active shooter in Washington, D.C. at Comet Ping Pong last year, and to the creation of, quote, "alternative facts," earlier this year, whatever that means.

Now, this would be noteworthy and important in any year, particularly, after a presidential election, but it's an especially curious this year, because as the majority of mainstream media credibility tanks, interest and popularity and profitability of podcasting is spiking dramatically. In April the Economist declared it "The Year the Podcast Came of Age," which is curious, since podcasts first debuted in 2001. You would expect media to, you know, kind of wander off after that long, not suddenly find their footing. And it was so dramatic that later in that year, Nieman posed itself a rhetorical question, "How hot is podcasting? Stupid venture capital money hot." Which is bold for any media format these days.

So, my question in pursuing this paper was, is this a coincidence, or is there something innate, something interesting or curious or weird about podcasting that's letting it go up while everyone else goes…[makes noise]? So, I want to back up to answer that, and I want to ask, what is podcasting on a more basic level? Now, both in the field and the academy—this is actually supposed to be vertical—vertical comparisons are much more common.

What we'll find is, how is new radio different than old radio? There are some key distinctions there. We know for one thing that time shifting is very easy to manage in podcasting. Podcasting is succeeding for many of the same reasons that Netflix and Hulu are succeeding. But, too, fewer gatekeepers, fewer barriers to entry, lower cost to entry, and a variety of reasons why you can, you know, right now, you can go home and you can start a podcast. You probably can't go home and start your own conventional radio station. So, that's all true and that scholarship is worthwhile, but at the same time, there are limitations to those ceaseless vertical contrasts. It doesn't really answer, what is radio? It just tells us how new radio is different than old radio.

So, I made a better comparison or what I perceived might be a better comparison to old school, traditional, community journalism. These hyperlocal, rural, and suburban papers that have a real clear, fundamental connection between readers and producers, where there's a clear connection between the community, what the paper reports as community news, and what the community wants and hopes, imagines as their own community. A big part of that is the accessible nature of community journalism. Everyone in town knows who is writing the community newspaper. Everyone knows how to contact them. And as many of y'all can attest—I certainly can from personal experience—if somebody walks into the Elgin Courier or the [Texas] Tribune and says, "Hey, I have a problem with a story you wrote," you drop everything and you go deal with it. If you're at, say, the New York Times

or the Houston Chronicle, eh, maybe not so much. There's a bigger gap there, a bigger distance, the bigger the medium. Accessibility and personal affiliation between the reporters and the community and the product are absolutely key.

So, my methodology for this paper. I looked at 12 podcasts over most of last year—the year the podcast, quote, "came of age." I tried to keep it fairly broad and fairly diverse. Looked at six newsroom podcasts [that were] run/hosted by conventional journalists of different types and then six avocational podcasts. Everyone from Dan Savage all the way down to, you know, some guys making fun of bad nineties movies on the weekends. I also wanted to look at male-hosted podcasts versus female-hosted podcasts. And I rotated through them throughout the year until rhetorical themes began to repeat themselves.

So, let's break this term down a little bit. What is community? And then, what is journalism? Well, community is defined by a couple of things. One, niche focus on a particular topic or identity. Now, this is not necessarily geographic. Media imagine community independent of the nature of that community. So, arguably, a Reddit, you know, sub-Reddit, Reddit conversation about, say, the San Antonio Spurs, who are going to win it all, by the way. Watch. It's gonna happen. But that fundamentally is not a structurally or functionally different community than the Elgin Courier, a little out of town, imagining what is and is not Elgin. The fact that one is a digital community and one is a terrestrial community doesn't change the community nature. It certainly doesn't change the role that the media play in shaping and designing that community.

Another one, what I coin external community. How much conversation between podcast hosts and guests and listeners is there? How much community is there between the podcasters and the people listening to the podcast? So, how often are emails or tweets read on the air? How often are social media conversations cited? That sort of thing.

Conversely, we have internal community, which is community within the podcast. So, frank, congenial conversation between the hosts. Personal disclosures. Personal sidebars. How often are they people, versus, how often are they professional standup hosts?

Well, going through here, newsroom podcasts, fantastic focus on a niche. Podcast was about what the podcast was about. Ditto [on] avocational podcasts. This we expect. External community? Newsroom? How do you think we did? Not great. Not great. Avocational broadcasters did a better job, but still not what I would consider a passing grade. So, feedback, tweets, that sort of thing, were not really given the priority that I felt like they should be. They weren't necessarily ignored, but they also were a lackluster priority at best. Typically, emails and feedback were saved to the tail-end of the podcast, if at all. And usually, there were, in very many podcasts, guests, where people would call in, you know, that sort of thing. But at the same time, typically, those were curated guests. They were people that were invited by the podcast host, by the journalist, and so it's hard to consider them average listeners. They've got some celebrity or notoriety of some sort.

Internal community. Little better. Little better, but still not a ton. What did happen in newsroom environments quite a bit was a candid personal discussion. You know, tone communicates a great deal. Cadence is incredibly evocative in a lot of ways. So, there was never any effort to sound robotic or sound stilted. You know, they would say what they were going to say as they were going to say it. The difference was what they were going to say. There was a sense that the journalists had to be professional journalists and not have any personal opinions of any kind whatsoever until they were giving a sidebar about high school, or about how they're workaholics, or how they thought it was pronounced Kane West instead of Kanye.

There was a sense that the avocational hosts, meanwhile, could be very personally connected to their subject, very innately fused with their subject matter, to the point that it almost felt like journalists couldn't be people. They had to be journalists; whereas, the avocational hosts, they could be themselves. No big deal.

And then the journalism, we talked about this briefly earlier, but sort of the hallmarks of the academy and the field identify as journalism. Is it current? Is there conflict? Is there timeliness? Is it new and shiny? Across the board, that was all there. That was all there.

So, the takeaway here, as journalists, you need to share. And I don't want to be the journalist or that academic that gets up here and says, "You're not doing your job right." We've all heard that academic say, "You need to share more. You need to devote more time to your audience." But what does that look like?

Well, first, if you don't have a podcast, make one. Now is the time. There are a ton of resources out there for it. Two, there is something about…. I go into…. This is true of academics and journalists, but more importantly, it's especially important given the community nature of podcasting. There is a lot that you can tell by listening to someone. That even if you read those same exact words, you would feel a much more personal affinity for the individual if you're hearing them. You know, that old saying, talk is cheap? No, talk is great. Words are cheap.

So instead, double-down on podcasts. And two, there's a sense that I, on the one hand, I get why many newsrooms don't have a ton of listener feedback on the air, because you don't want to water down the product that you spent so much time developing. You don't want to stop talking about the election or stop talking about immigration so that you can read a whole bunch of tweets or emails, that sort of thing. I get that. But at the same time, that community sense is really important.

So, what I would do is just create a new episode format. Don't tinker with the format you already have, but once a week, once every other week, I would just sit down, gather your regular podcast hosts together and spend an hour just reading emails, just reading tweets. It's probably the most efficient use of your time. [It] would do a great deal to build a community relationship and be fairly easy. You don't have to prepare that much for it. You just show up and read emails.

And then real quick, go there, you know. I understand completely that journalists feel they need to be objective about all things, but I promise you, the line between professional journalists and unprofessional journalists is farther away than you think. You can share more of yourself than you realize. And you can go into more feedback, more personal ideas, more perspective than you think. And even if you think, "OK, well, this egghead from Sam [Houston], he doesn't know what he's talking about," OK, that I get, but if you just want to retain that, "I can only be a person when I'm talking about personal stuff. When I'm talking about the news, have to be super professional," then fine, detour into the personal stuff more often. Give more little sidebars about what you did over the weekend or what your kids are up to or what happened the last time this issue came up. Don't be afraid to be people, because that makes a huge difference, and that ultimately makes audiences much more open to your work and your journalism.

Oh, and then, real quick, I would say, let's all think about this: If avocational podcasters present the same community journalism principles, they're building community, and they're occupying those same journalistic troves, then are they journalists? That's something that I think both the academy and the field could think about more.

Cindy Royal: I'm so happy to be here with all of you today. So many old friends that I've met over the years coming to this wonderful event and the opportunity to meet so many new ones. I teach at Texas State University, which is just 30 miles south down the road. And we have a number of Texas State students and faculty here, so if you—[applause]—you can hear them, if you have a chance to meet them, definitely say hello to them.

So, I'm really happy to talk with you today—OK, I'm loud, I don't really need a microphone—but about managing digital products in a newsroom context. And I should say I lead our Media Innovation Lab, brand new opportunity that we started this year, as well as a brand new program in digital media innovation, in our program at Texas State.

And so, I started thinking about this topic almost two years ago. I started having students who would go out into the world and become product managers, in some cases, at technology companies. And then I started seeing digital products coming up across media organizations. And as I started talking to these former students about what they did, I began to realize that these were skills that media organizations need to have, with some adjustments. Because how are we going to ensure that the journalistic ethics get into the digital products that are created if people with technology backgrounds are the ones that are creating them? How do the journalistic ethics, the values, and the sensibilities get built into media products?

So, for 2016, I projected…. In the Nieman Lab predictions that they do—so shout out to Josh Benton and the Nieman Lab—product management is the new journalism. And I really love those predictions, because it really gives a chance for some new provocative ideas to get out there. And that is exactly what I posited is,

if we have these digital media products, how are we going to make them journalistic? And how are we going to assure that the technology resources are responsible for what they are creating? And now that we've gotten sort of fake news and authenticity issue in the environment, it becomes all the more important.

In that same issue of predictions, unbeknownst to me, we did not collaborate on this, but Burt Herman, who's the founder of Storify and Hacks/Hackers, and now he's the founder of One Fest, he also said the new hot job was going to be product management. And he defined it as the editorial and business coming together to create better products, stealing a page from Silicon Valley's handbook. So, technology meets journalism.

And just as Karen was saying that marketing—there's a marketing language, there's a technology language now that we have to understand in journalism. So shortly after that, the American Press Institute put out a report where they interviewed a lot of people that were in this product management role. And they defined the role as one of control and creating projects that are specifically targeted to succeed, so they need to have strategy associated with them, and they need to deliver a satisfying experience to the users.

And then also, a bow to January of last year, the new school in CUNY convened a group of product managers, and there was an online version that they had a talk with several people, one of which is Aron Pilhofer. Is Aron here yet? He's coming. He'll be here tomorrow. Oh, he's up there. Hey, hey, Aron! So in that talk, he said, "It was a few years in that it dawned on me that I was actually running a product development team," as he was running the New York Times Interactive news technology group that was making all these really cool digital journalism projects. "I'm running a product development team. I need to figure out, you know, what the aspects of that are for a media organization."

So, in my research, I talked to 14 different people who were in product management roles, kept everybody anonymous. They come from places like The New York Times, BuzzFeed, ProPublica, NPR, here in Austin, The Texas Tribune, the Statesman. So they cover a wide range of media organizations. And they were all doing some form of product development. And so, in terms of defining, what is a media product? One of the comments was, "We used to know what a media product was. It was a newspaper or it was a TV broadcast. Now it's much broader." And so, I've kind of put together this idea that in most cases it's an audience-centric mission that provides opportunities for a number of constituents to participate, contribute, and interact with the media. And it often comprises now the primary platform that people engage with and consume journalism.

And so, here are some examples. We have Dollars for Docs from ProPublica. Texas Tribune has their Schools Explorer and many other really great projects. New York Times did that cool quiz that you would take about your language patterns, and then it mapped it on a chart. So, these are more sort of data-visualization, data-journalism projects. But then there are also lots of other tools and digital products that are being made across all types of organizations. The cooking app at New York

Times. The Statesman does the Hookem app that [is] specifically for sports around the University of Texas, so Hook 'em, because I did my PhD here. And then we have things like the Purple Politics Bot and Quartz. I mean, there's any number of things that you can go online and see that they are very interactive projects.

So, then I looked at the process. And these are quotes that came from the people who I interviewed. And there are a lot more quotes in the final paper if you go online. But the process, like many things, it depends. It depends on the size and the scope. But it really boils down to what company leadership thinks and how it goes across product, editorial, and revenue. All these different areas have to be represented. And then it also depends on, is this like a backend infrastructure type thing or an audience-facing product? If it's primarily editorial, then all the people associated with editorial have to be responsible for it. And quite often, the editor and the publisher make decisions that are based on strategic priorities. So, strategy is something that kept coming up in the discussions that I had.

Problem solving. I mean, this is something that we try to teach students in our program. If you're going to go out into the world, your job is going to be to solve problems. And that's mainly what a product manager does. They have to figure out solutions to problems [and] how to iterate and move fast in a digital environment.

Collaboration is also a very key role that a product manager has to demonstrate. They have to work across a lot of different teams. They have to facilitate the conversations across the team and then reconcile, again, across all these different functions—business, marketing, strategy, editorial—but also be very user-focused. And that brings up this idea of empathy.

Obviously, data and analytics are very important in a digital product environment. "Everything we do is data informed," said one of my respondents. And they looked very closely at analytics platforms. They also…. One of the subjects even said [that] beyond just data-based analytics, they want to see real outcomes of their products. Did it change some sort of legislation? Did people's lives change because they were able to use this product? So, this gets into a much more specific area of data and analytics and proving the value of digital products. That is something that has to be catered to in this environment where we're making them in journalistic organizations.

Obviously, storytelling can be a very important part, so there's still a story. In many cases, these products have leads. They are visual stories, but they want the user to be able to use their own examples to be able to help them make the story more meaningful and personal for them.

So, in terms of the skills that people identified that a product manager needs, you have to be a great communicator. You have to have empathy and understand your audience. You have to be a good leader, because you have to lead a lot of different organizations and lead people from those organizations. You have to be able to collaborate across them. And then the last one was technical proficiency.

So, quite often we think of product development people as technologists, but really you do have to have tech savvy, you do have to understand the tech environment, but the technical proficiency is the last on this list. It says, you know, "We hire people that have strong user focus. They understand business, collaborations. They are leaders. They make decisions." None of that really says anything about technology skills specifically.

So if we talk about technology proficiency, it's a broad range of what people need: technology proficiency, design aesthetic, user interface. But one person said, "I think there's a much closer fit with entrepreneurship, business, and design, than there even is with computer science." So, we have to really think about the backgrounds of the people that we bring into these roles.

And then finally, my interest in this is I want students to go into the world and get these jobs. I want them to become product managers. Maybe not necessarily a first job out of college, but I want them to kind of envision themselves moving into these roles where they have strong communication skills, leadership, and strategic emphasis, and some attention to being able to understand technological proficiency. And then one of the things that the respondents said was the importance of experiential learning. Making sure that you would put students in a situation as they would be on a professional team. That they would be actually working in an environment very much like our SX-TX-State project, which for the past ten years we've sent students to South By Southwest. The students have run an entire digital product and a social media strategy around it that gives them actual experience in doing these kind of things.

So to wrap things up, just in time, as digital products mature, I think, product management is going to need to become more central to the organization and become a core process and not be considered a sideline, a technological sideline. I think it, again, it's what we do. Product management is the new journalism. And this is a career opportunity for students in our field to be able to integrate tech savvy leadership and their strong communication skills.

There are a lot more anecdotes and quotes in the paper. And I'll be happy to take your questions during the Q&A. Thank you very much.

John Wihbey: So, first of all, I'm really honored to be here, and thanks, Amy, for everything you did. And it's my first ISOJ, so, and I'm just so impressed. So, our paper is a little bit, you might think of it kind of like the state of data skills both in the practice of journalism and journalism education. And I'll show you some findings and some of the survey data that we [were] working off of. I suspect some of you actually filled out our survey, so thank you.

It's a really, I think, auspicious and interesting moment to talk about data and statistics and research in journalism. By the way, first of all, I should say, Mark Coddington is my co-author, and he's an absolutely brilliant researcher at Washington and Lee University, so shout out to him.

You know, I see Tableau and Facebook and Google are all either talking about or have rolled out new data journalism curricula and platforms, and that's an absolutely terrific thing. So, what I want to do is just set the context a little bit. I think we've talked a little bit about post-truth today and alternative facts, and that table has been set, so I won't get into the political context, but it obviously helps frame what we're doing, and it frames our literature review.

So, one thing is, in the journalism business, there's been this longstanding conversation about math phobia, about statistical incompetence in journalism, and there's sort of nothing new under the sun. As Mark and I kind of went back into the literature, you know, we're talking about at least 50 years of conversation in journalism and in journalism education circles about, you know, how do we make journalists sort of math literate? How do we ensure that the right educators are in the classroom to make that happen? And, you know, we think of data journalism as something [that's] somewhat brand new with the rise of open data sets on the web, the rise of data science, but really, you go back to the sixties and the seventies, and there are these great sort of founders, like, Phillip Myer, who were talking about precision journalism and computer-assisted reporting. You know, [it] has been going for a really long time. So, I want to acknowledge that there's a whole kind of pre-history to this.

You know, one thing I'm pretty interested in is the rise of other forms of knowledge that can complement our work as journalists. And that includes the massive amount of research data and research studies that are now available online. There was a study in POS that estimated there are at least 25-million open-access studies now online in English, which is a huge resource for us. And then also, all of the explosion of blogs by academics and other experts and all the Twitter feeds that provide expert commentary and analysis, data-informed analysis, that really can help us as journalists, but is also a form of competition. And then finally, just the fall in price and the availability of software.

So when we think about kind of the new-new data journalism, we think about 538 and we think about Upshot. And if you kind of boil it down, in my view, as to, what are they doing? They are doing, you know, very sophisticated data analysis in some instances. In other instances, what they are doing is unpacking really sophisticated research and putting it in context so that people can understand it.

OK. So, back to the paper and the data. So, we, through Harvard Shorenstein Center and the Journalist Resource Project—which if you don't know about it, go to JournalistResource.org. It's a project that tries to bridge mass media and social science. But through that project, we conducted an online survey and got a pretty good response rate from both journalists and educators. And let me just show you some top level, kind of, descriptive findings.

So, when we asked journalists, how do you assess your own ability to do statistical analysis? We didn't define it. I think further research could follow up and be more granular on this. But about 11% said they were very well equipped, about half said somewhat equipped, and then about 40-43% said not well equipped. And then you

can compare this to educators, who are on the whole a little more confident, as you would expect in the academy, but still not wholly sanguine about their own abilities. And I think it was a really good moment for reflection by us all. Like, I'm not a math whiz. I've done a lot of self-study, and I'm trying to get better, and I think, you know, probably all of us could say the same.

So, the heart of the paper was sort of two things. One was, we wanted to compare journalism educators and journalists on their views about statistics, data, and research, and then we wanted to look at educators in particular. So, I'll break these out. And this is a little wonky in terms of the charts, but….

So, the one statistically significant finding that we had—and this may surprise you—is that journalists actually that that research, research studies, research reports are much more important for the practice of journalism than do educators. I suspect that—you know, Mark and I have talked about this—that to some extent, I think, a lot of journalism educators who have PhDs, who are very sophisticated social scientists in their own right, kind of segment out their own research from when they teach the practice of journalism. But I think that journalists increasingly see real advantages and this huge, huge trove of knowledge that's sort of now available to us. We can find experts who are much more, you know, who have much specific expertise in what we're reporting on.

In the other categories, you know, how much do you think it's important to do statistical analysis for the practice of journalism? About the same, you know, 35-40% journalists and journalism educators. And then, how important is it to interpret statistics? To be able to interpret statistics in a newsroom? You know, 78-80% for both. And interpret research studies is about the same thing. So, no real differences except on this use of research metric.

How am I doing on time? Four? OK. I'm going to skip ahead a little bit.

So, here's one thing. Actually, this graph isn't in the paper, but I wanted to pull it out because I thought it was significant. I want to talk about journalism educators specifically for a second. So, we asked about the level of student preparation and journalism programs for working with numbers and statistics. And the percentage reporting that there's extensive preparation for students going to newsrooms [was] really, really low. Can they do statistical analysis on their own? You know, very, very low. Can they interpret statistics from other sources? Is there extensive preparation for that? Not necessarily; though, 63% of educators say that there's some preparation. And then finally, on interpreting research studies, on being able to really, you know, bring a skeptical eye to a lot of the data that's being produced out there, you know, again, a kind of mixed picture.

There has been a long-running kind of fight in education, in journalism education, between what are loosely called the academic high squares, the people with PhDs, and the professional green-eye shades, which refers to the visor that used to be worn by like typographers back when. And the debate has been about, who should be educating these students? How should they be educated? And so, one thing that

we found…. And we thought this was pretty powerful for those of us who believe that there shouldn't be a fight [and that] we should actually all move forward together in a common cause of kind of upping the level of statistical efficacy and fluency. We found that in terms of valuing statistics in journalism, there was no significant differences between those with and without doctoral degrees. And then, rather than education, it was actually people's own ability to do statistics which predicted how much they would value academic research in the practice of journalism and statistical literacy among educators.

So, the takeaway finding was really that the facility with and then the passion for statistics and research in journalism can emerge from both academic and professional settings and find distinct applications in both the academy and in the newsroom.

So, I'll wrap up, but I think, you know, one thing we can all do, practically speaking, is, as I said, Tableau and Facebook and Google are all rolling out these new data journalism programs. Cindy, actually, I think took one and was talking about it last night. I think we should all take these online kind of tutorials and programs and see how they work for us. Maybe we learn something. Maybe we can give feedback to these companies that are trying to elevate. So, thank you.

Q&A Session:

Amy Schmitz Weiss: We have a question already to start. Fantastic. Go ahead.

Man: I'll keep it less racy than the last one. I have a question about the audience engagement research. Did you find that audience engagement folks felt pressure from the business side to sort of explain their value? How did that sort of conversation go?

Karin Assman: You know, they didn't express it as pressure. It sort of, again, it depended on the size of the outfit and how much weight they put on audience engagement. But there were clearly some that had more meetings with the marketing side and did have to explain certain things. But most of them were saying it was a topic, but there was not really pressure. But it was just clear that that was an expectation, that that's why they were doing it. Because if people read your product, then money comes in.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: I've got a question for Marcus. So, you were mentioning tips and advice on how news organizations should just jump into doing the podcasting.

Marcus Funk: Mm-hmm.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: And so, one of my questions is to you, and maybe someone might feel this way in the crowd is, perhaps some reporters/journalists might want to do this, but management might be preventing them from doing so. So, how do you work around that potential issue as well, if from a top/down approach, it may

not be as welcomed, [and] if they are interested in doing it, nonetheless? So, how do you address that?

Marcus Funk: Well, I would say, you know, most executives and most top folks I know are pretty profit-driven. And so, I would just show them the money. You know? Show them all the articles and all the argument saying, "Hey, this is actually really profitable." And there are a ton of resources and books and podcasts out there for launching a podcast and getting your voice out there. So, from a market perspective, it actually makes a ton of sense, I think. You *can* make that argument, I think, with most editors and most publishers. And I think that would probably get you quite a ways.

But I would also say, you know, no media, no publication is immune from this, you know, lack of faith that people have in mainstream media, you know. That's pretty much across the board. And you can pitch and say, "Hey, this is one easy way that we can help our readers, help our listeners, our viewers get to know us personally." And the truth is, if they know you personally or feel like they do, then they are going to have a much higher appreciation and affection and opinion of your product. You know, and that's part—I didn't get it—it's more in the paper than in the presentation—but part of it relates to media format. Because, you know, that expression that talk is cheap, well, no, talk is actually great. Because by listening to people's voices and hearing their intonation and everything, you get to know them far better than you realize. It's kind of a mind trick. It's tripping different circuits in your brain.

So, I would, you know, make the profit argument, and I would also make the, "Hey, people want to get to know us, and this is an easy way to do that," [argument].

Amy Schmitz Weiss: Looks like we have a question.

Man: Following up on the podcast, I was just wondering when you were talking about you have the six local podcasts or the local newsrooms of journalism podcasts that you were looking at, what was the most popular one? What were the topics? Did there seem to be anything related to the area they were focused on, rather than the way they delivered it?

John Wihbey: Well, so, I tried to be fairly diverse about it. So, the 538 Elections podcast was on there. The Voice of San Diego podcast was on there. Recode/Decode was on there. So, I tried to, subject-wise, I tried to spread it out quite a bit. Typically, subject-wise, I found they stuck to those traditional journalism tropes. You know, it's what is current, what is new in high tech or news or San Diego, whatever it happens to be. And then, what has conflict, and what has notoriety? It felt like whatever they set out to say, "This is our podcast; this is our niche," for the most part, they stuck to it, you know. And everybody talked about the election the closer you got to November, because, you know, it was on

everybody's mind. But it was still the election and whatever the topic happens to be, [and] you know, whatever the audience happens to be.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: Question for Karen. So, in terms of your research and what you've been doing, do you believe that there is a shift that is yet to happen in the newsroom, in terms of the culture of looking at audience engagement editors? If you could, talk a little bit more about that.

Karin Assman: Well, I think that the shift has already happened, in that every newsroom, I believe—I mean, I don't have empirical evidence—but I think most newsrooms have someone who's on a social team or audience engagement team. But I do think that a lot of journalists are still struggling to be onboard. And one person I talked to said, you know, "The problem will fix itself through attrition." That the people who don't…. You know, it's an aging population, [chuckles], and if you're not onboard and don't want to brand yourself, then, you know, your time will come sooner rather than later.

And I did, you know, I did find that a lot of the people who were doing this job, they were either—they all talked a little bit about how it had come about through the restructuring of the newsroom itself. A lot of them had been copy editors. There were no longer copy editors, so they got the job of audience engagement. Some of them were long-time members of the editorial board, who had always said, "We need to be closer to our audience." So, they took the lead in this.

And so now, I think the third wave is sort of not the people who were coerced into doing it and not the people who said, you know, "I'm leading the way," but people are hired to do it with intention. So I think the fact that they are working in the newsroom, that's something that's established. Whether or not journalists are all really onboard and really believe that the ultimate goal, which is supposedly that they will be their own audience engagement editors eventually, I think that's still something that's very much in the works.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: And this might be a question for both Cindy and Karen. I mean, how do you see, in terms of product management as well as audience engagement, coming down to aspects of culture…. We talked a lot about this all the time in journalism scholarship, but how much do you think we are at a point now where there may be a cultural shift happening in the newsrooms? Or, are we getting close to moving in that direction? Or, what more needs to happen in order for those things to be embraced?

Cindy Royal: I think in the case of my research, the fact that so many of them had "it depends on this," you know, there were a lot of variables associated with it, it sort of demonstrates that these are not necessarily techniques that are mature yet and that there's a lot of experimentation in the environment. And that's good. You know, I think that signifies that there's some understanding that this is important—the fact that a lot of different organizations are trying it. But I think we still have a ways to go to get a broader understanding that journalism isn't just for what we traditionally defined as journalists. And that there are a lot of people in the

organization that contribute to the journalistic product, whether it's the audience engagement people [or] the product development people, who maybe more traditionally were considered technology support and resources. They all have to be more central to the processes. And so, I mean, that was sort of the outcome I had of this. But in general, I think that's where the culture is going toward at this point. It's not there yet.

Karin Assman: Isn't that a part of most j-schools' curriculum already? I know that at Merrill, we have now someone teaching audience engagement. So if you're growing up to be a journalist in the framework of a journalism school, that's part of what you learn, just as much as you learn multimedia and all the other things [like] data journalism. You know, it's all part of what we all expect upcoming journalists to have in their toolbox.

Cindy Royal: That's good.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: Which may be coming in the future, within the next three, five years when they're entering into these newsrooms and graduating.

Karin Assman: Actually, I think it's already something that's expected in the newsroom. Some of the people that I talked to, they said, you know, "Either I have somebody who knows how to tell a story but doesn't know anything about social media, or somebody who knows social media but doesn't know how to tell the story." So, I think you're right [about] the next generation, but I think the expectation is there that you can do both.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: Well, I think it goes beyond the skillset, right? I think both what you are addressing, as well as what you're addressing, too, John, is a mindset. It's going beyond just the functions of how, but really looking at a mindset of approaching different aspects of journalism in particular. And I thought perhaps you could also jump in a little bit and talk about that more, too, John, from work that you and Mark were doing as well.

John Wihbey: Yeah. I mean, just to try to connect it with some of the other panelists, I guess, you know, analytics is a really interesting case. Because a lot of the analytics packages that are available, whether it's Google or NewsWhip or others, you know, they are generating insights according to their own algorithms and their own ways of doing data collection and presenting data. And, you know, to really interrogate, you know, how we're seeing what's important, there has to be some basic, I think, understanding of statistics and having a basic sort of numeracy. So I think, actually, the skills that Mark and I were talking about are pretty integral to a lot of what you guys were talking about in terms of engagement and product management, too. So, there's sort of a food chain.

And I guess, you know, what we would argue is that, you know…. And I neglected to mention this, but IRE and NICAR have been, you know, so huge in our field in terms of trying to advance this, so I just hope that…. It's hard, actually, to build a

journalism education curriculum around analytics. We were talking about that last night. Because there aren't great tools. Yeah.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: We have a question, and then we'll wrap it up.

Man: About analytics and audience engagement. So, what are the kind of topics that people whom you interviewed kind of discussed about people who are seeking to derail or divert the conversation? More commonly known as like trolls.

Karin Assman: What do you mean?

Man: Like, what were the techniques that they were using to kind of keep the audience engagement on track?

Karin Assman: You mean to make sure that, for example, comment sections were not…?

Man: Correct.

Karin Assman: Yeah. You know, that's interesting, because almost all of them said, "I hate the comment section. We closed our comment section down. That's why we like doing this on Facebook or other platforms." And they are only starting. I mean, you know, the Coral Project out of D.C., there's a way—I mean, everybody's looking for a way to make sure that they can sort of control their comment sections a little bit better. So, they were all sort of happy that it was happening on Facebook and [that] it was more out of their hands than on their own site.

Amy Schmitz Weiss: OK. Let's give a round of applause for our research panel.

[Applause.]