Experiments in Location-Based Content:
A Case Study of Postmedia's Use of Foursquare

Timothy Currie
Assistant Professor
School of Journalism
University of King's College
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada
tim.currie@ukings.ca

Abstract

In 2010, a number of North American news organizations began integrating editorial content with Foursquare, the mobile service that builds social communities around physical locations. Canada's Postmedia Network, the company that owns many big-city dailies in the country, including the National Post, was one of the most active adopters. This paper examines Postmedia's integration of its editorial content with the location-based service. It takes a case study approach, using in-depth interviews with staff at Postmedia news outlets to explore roles, tasks and strategies for pairing content with location. The results provide insight for other news organizations looking to tailor content for the growing audience of smartphone-equipped news consumers.

Introduction

The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, Metro — and Canada's Postmedia Network — were among the major news outlets to begin experimenting with the location-based social media service Foursquare in early 2010. In January, Metro Canada became the first news organization to partner with Foursquare (Metro Canada, 2010). In March, the Wall Street Journal issued its "check-in heard round the world" that broke news of a Times Square evacuation (Garber, 2010).

These newspapers have been part of a growing number of news outlets trying to crack the triumvirate of journalism, location and social media. The three elements should be a natural fit: News organizations produce a stream of content filled with geographic addresses. Mobile phone users are increasingly buying smartphones and using them to access news (Pew Research Center, 2011). In addition, news consumption is increasingly becoming a shared social experience (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Journalists have noted that Foursquare can be an important tool for news organizations. The social media service offers the promise of targeting news distribution, finding on-the-scene human sources to interview during breaking news events, finding story ideas and building social capital with users (Snow & Lavrusik, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Bradshaw, 2010).

However, the number of Americans who use a location-based service with their mobile phone remains low at 4% (Zickuhr & Smith, 2010). Further, while mobile users have heard of Foursquare, they tend to view the service as a fun experience more than a source of useful information (Invoke, 2010).

Yet news organizations continue to experiment with the service. Most of those that do, use the service to publish restaurant reviews as tips at Foursquare venues. Some have also left news stories as tips. Still, all of them put only a tiny sliver of the content they publish daily into Foursquare.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the criteria online editors use to select content for this location-based social media service. The study also seeks to uncover the tasks editors undertake to

integrate their content with Foursquare. The research is exploratory in nature, as existing research into news organizations' use of Foursquare is scant.

This study focuses on Foursquare use within Canada's Postmedia Network. Postmedia is a chain of 12 big-city dailies operating in most of Canada's major urban markets. The study involved interviews with online editors at the three member newspapers that were placing content into Foursquare in early 2011 — the National Post, the Vancouver Sun and the Edmonton Journal.

It uses the theoretical framework of gatekeeping, which offers a model for understanding how news editors choose some stories for publication and reject others.

RQ1: What criteria have Postmedia editors used to select content for Foursquare?

RQ2: How have editors managed their editorial workflow to produce this content?

Figure 1

About Foursquare

Foursquare is a relative newcomer to the social media big leagues. It was launched in March 2009 and had more than 6.5 million users in February 2011 (Foursquare, 2011).

Users can download the Foursquare app for their smartphone and use it to explore the world around them. They check in at virtual locations called venues, where they can leave a 140-character note to friends in their network. They can also leave 200-character tips for others that suggest things to do at that location. The smartphone's GPS acquires

nearby venues and presents tips from the user's friends automatically as the user travels (Figure 1).
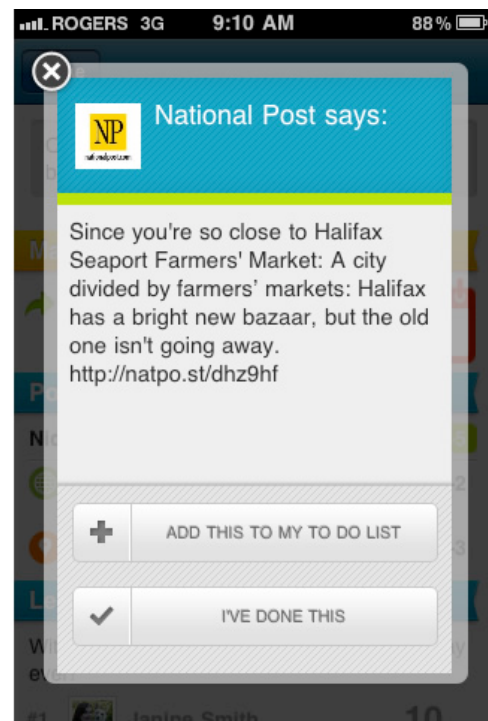
The social media service offers a game-like experience whereby users collect points and virtual badges as they explore. Users can bookmark the things they have done and create lists of things to do in the future. Merchants can use Foursquare to offer deals to users who check in frequently.

News organizations have typically used the service to post tips at venues and provide links to articles on their websites.

Literature Review

Gatekeeping theory is a useful framework for understanding how online editors choose certain content to put into a location-based service such as Foursquare. As smartphone use grows, news audiences are likely to shift their consumption to mobile channels. If a traditional gatekeeping function governs editors' selection of news generally, there are strong indications separate gates have evolved for content in specific delivery platforms.

Gatekeeping theory was proposed by psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1947 and first applied to news processes by David Manning White (1950). White conducted a case study involving a wire editor from a small morning newspaper in the U.S. midwest and examined the editor's reasons for rejecting news stories for publication. White concluded that the decisions made by this "Mr. Gates" were "highly subjective value-judgments" — ones "based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations."

Snider (1967) duplicated White's study with the same Mr. Gates and found the editor "still picks the stories he likes and believes his readers want" (p. 427). Bleske (1991) repeated White's study with a Ms. Gates from a southern U.S. daily and found she and White's Mr. Gates classified news stories in "predictable ways" with gender playing no discernable role.

Early in the Internet age, Singer (1997) surveyed journalists in three newsrooms that were involved in publishing online and concluded that journalists saw specific value in their roles as selectors and interpreters. Further, "the gatekeeping function continues to gain strength as a vital part of journalists'

self-perception (p. 87)." Singer (1998) suggested readers' increasing preference for interactive content could affect the gatekeeping role of journalists who work online. She cited limited evidence that journalists were re-evaluating their gatekeeping function as they increased the volume of their online work. Singer (2003) saw little change in journalists' roles as they increased their online publishing. However, Singer (2006) found an "evolution in online journalists' thinking" that had them "reconceptualizing their gatekeeping role … toward a partnership between users and journalists (p. 275)," a view shared by Robinson (2005).

It is important to note that much of this newer gatekeeping research focused on journalists working with audience members in a "citizen journalism" function. This is not the exact role of the Foursquare editors in this study. However, the research sheds valuable light on the change in online journalists' conception of their roles over all.

Cassidy (2005), in his survey of role perceptions of newspaper and online journalists, found that online journalists ascribed a lesser importance to "traditional" news values of interpretation and investigation. Reflecting on Boczkowski (2004), he suggested this could be due to the greater role played by the audience in online news practices. Online journalists, he stated, "may place greater importance on [audience] goals and values" when assessing newsworthiness (p. 273).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) conceived of a hierarchy of influences on media content — individual, routine, organizational, extra-media and ideological as concentric circles. The influence at the centre is the individual one, with the suggestion that others are progressively weaker (Keith, 2011). Scholars in recent years have begun combining gatekeeping theory with this hierarchy, focusing specifically on individual and routine influences as factors in gatekeeping (Cassidy, 2006; Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010).

Routines are what Shoemaker and Reese (1991) called the "patterned, repeated practices and forms media workers use to do their jobs (p. 85)." One of routines pointed to by Shoemaker & Vos (2009) is "journalists' reliance on 'news values' as an abstraction of what the audience values (p. 53)."

The determination of newsworthiness in the age of mobile is a key area for research. Researchers have conceptualized different dimensions of newsworthiness (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), including proximity — which is likely to play a significant role for mobile — and Foursquare — editors.

Keith (2011) has suggested "routines remain so unsolidified" for online journalists that it "allows individuals to have greater influence on newer media than was originally foreseen." She has re-envisioned the model of concentric circles, imagining instead: "a dynamic system of layers, any one of which can be 'breached' by (individual) forces bubbling up from below."

The literature suggests a gatekeeping function that is evolving with the changing roles of online journalists.

Method

This paper takes a case study approach to investigate the practices of a small group of people doing a very specific task. The research involved telephone interviews with six employees at four newspapers within Canada's Postmedia Network.

Telephone interviews were chosen over participant observation for two reasons: the distance between participants, who were spread across the country, and the narrow task being studied, which was expected to be only a minor part of the participant's daily job function.

Postmedia was selected because it was one of the most active news organizations using Foursquare at the end of 2010. The author made a list of major North American news organizations reported on blogs and websites to be active on Foursquare. The author also conducted specific searches within Foursquare for major North American news organizations. Postmedia was, by far, the most active news organization using Foursquare, measured by numbers of tips created. In addition, four different Postmedia newspapers were found to have a presence in Foursquare. This offered the prospect of interviewing the largest number of individuals, resulting in the most diverse range of perspectives.

Participants were identified by phoning each of the four organizations and asking for the names of people either overseeing or producing Foursquare content. These people were then contacted by email and invited to participate in the study. All of the people contacted agreed to participate in the study. All were granted anonymity in order to ensure candid responses. All of the participants were male.

The interviews took place between January 31 and March 9, 2011. Each interview lasted between 30 and 55 minutes. In one case, a followup query was made via email.

Participants were asked 12 questions about their roles, tasks and goals regarding Foursquare use. They were asked to talk about their own experiences at the news organization, not to represent the views of their employer.

The interviews were then transcribed and coded. In the process of analysis, one interview was excluded, as the news organization was not using Foursquare for news distribution, which was the focus of this study. The resulting data source was five participants from three different newspapers — the National Post, the Vancouver Sun and the Edmonton Journal.

All Foursquare screenshots that appear as images in this paper were taken using the iPhone Foursquare app.

Bulleted responses in sequence represent comments from different participants.

Findings

Participants

Participants described themselves using the terms "digital producer," "online producer," "social media strategist" and "community newsroom editor". Two identified themselves as managers overseeing digital content. All of them were responsible for maintaining their organization's presence in other social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. One said he also edited website news content.

Three of the five participants said they worked in the newsroom. The other two said they worked in a department that straddled the newsroom and marketing departments. Three identified themselves as journalists. Of the remaining two, one cited a background of journalistic work at a college newspaper.

The interview subjects are referred in this paper as participants or editors. While all five identified themselves as online editors distributing news content, only three considered themselves newsroom editors.

Overview of Foursquare Content & Audience

The three news organizations were all involved in creating Foursquare content relating to restaurant reviews. In all cases, these reviews appeared originally in the newspaper. Editors posted the reviews to their website usually the same day the review appeared in the paper. Following that, they synthesized the reviews into tips they posted to the Foursquare venues for those eateries. A typical tip looks like Figure 2, authored by the Edmonton Journal.

Figure 2
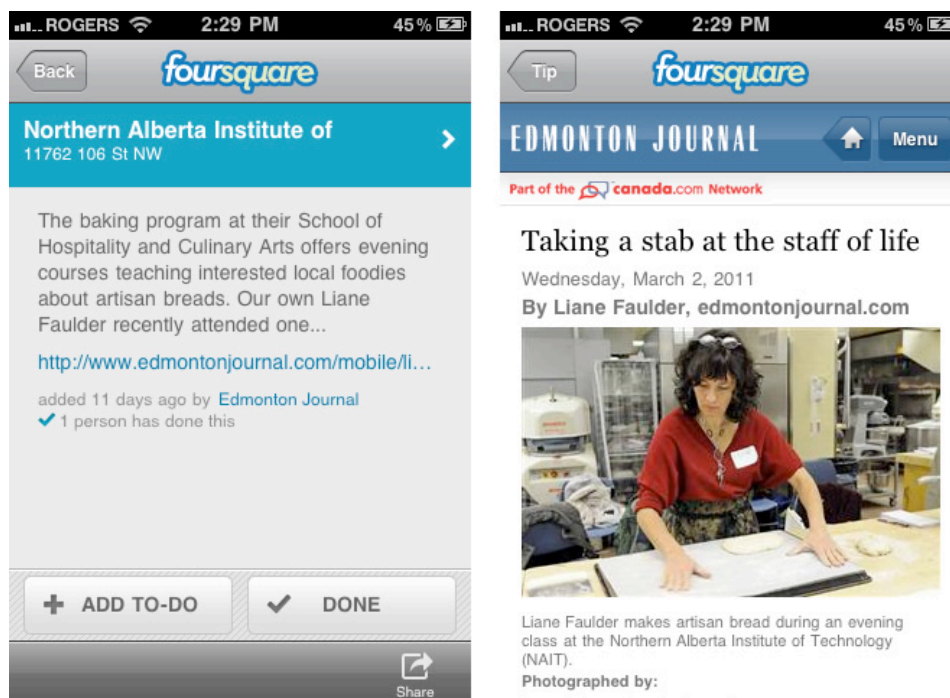
In this instance, smartphone users who had friended the Edmonton Journal and launched their Foursquare app at or near 11762 106 St. NW in Edmonton, Alberta, were immediately shown a tip on the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology venue (see Figure 1 for a representation). This tip contained a teaser to an article about the institute's School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts program. If users chose to click on the link at the bottom of the tip, they were taken via Foursquare's built-in web browser to Journal food columnist Liane Faulder's account (at right) of a bread-making class she attended there. Users could also add the tip to their Foursquare To-Do list, indicate they had Done the action mentioned in the tip or share the tip via email.

In addition to creating tips directing users to restaurant reviews, two Postmedia outlets also posted tips related to events. Editors left these tips at existing Foursquare venues or they created new venues to represent the event. The National Post, for example, created a venue called Toronto Blackout! as a "location" for a tip pointing to the Post's coverage of a major downtown power outage. The use of events, which lack GPS co-ordinates, as venues expands on Foursquare's original conception of a social network tied to physical locations.

Number of Tips Posted

As of March 13, 2011 the number of tips left by each news organization was as follows:

- National Post: 1,704
- Edmonton Journal: 165
- Vancouver Sun: 31

These figures, however, do not necessarily represent the total number of tips left by each Postmedia outlet. Foursquare allows users to delete their tips; editors at three outlets said they do this occasionally (see Workflow below).

Frequency of Postings

The frequency with which each news organization posted tips to Foursquare varied. In the month leading up to March 13, 2011 (beginning February 13, 2011), the number of tips left by each news organization was, by week:

	Feb. 13-19	Feb. 20-26	Feb. 27-March 6	March 7-13	Total
National Post	29	26	16	10	**81**
Edmonton Journal	4	1	9	2	**16**
Vancouver Sun	0	2	3	1	**6**

Popularity

A simple overview of the most popular tips on March 13, 2011, as determined by Foursquare based on users' Done mentions, are represented in Figure 3, showing left to right, the Edmonton Journal, Vancouver Sun and National Post.

Figure 3
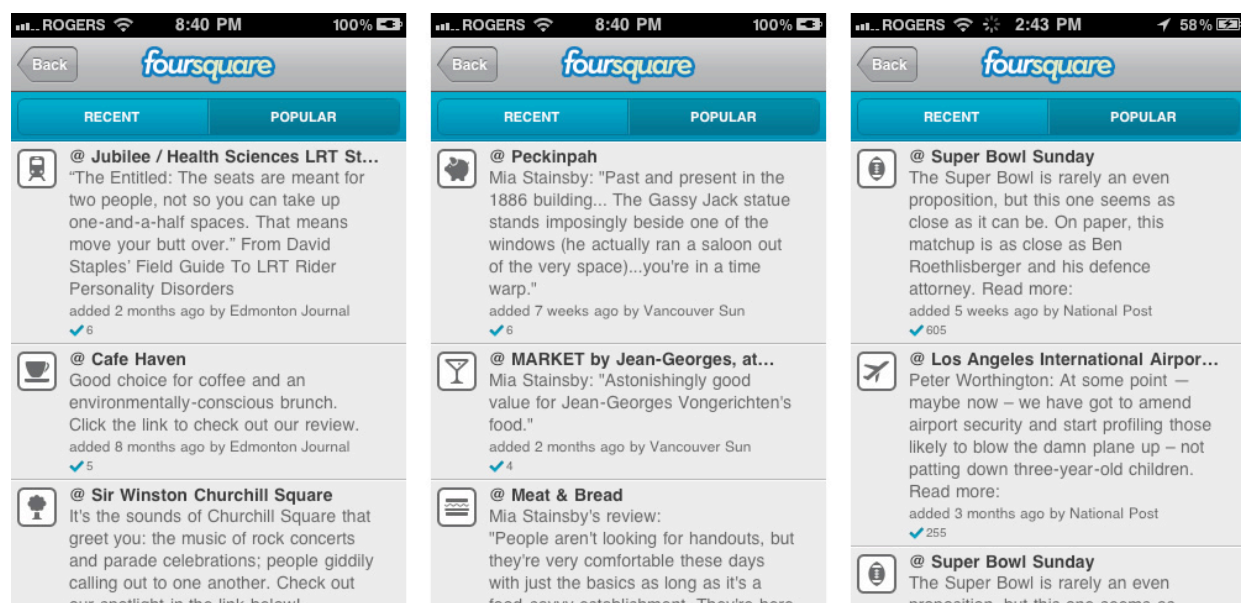
The Edmonton Journal had 6 on its most popular story, Vancouver Sun also had 6 and the National Post had 605.

The number of people who click Done in Foursquare after having viewed the tip is listed at the bottom of each tip, beside the checkmark. This number may differ from the number of people who actually click the link and read the article; this metric is usually counted independently as unique page views by each news organization's website analytics software. It is also likely significantly lower than the number of people who view the tip in the first place. Foursquare users who view the tip can click Done, view the full story, do both or do neither.

Followers

The number of users ("Friends" in Foursquare) following each news organization on March 13, 2011 was:
- National Post: 44,948
- Vancouver Sun: 2,828
- Edmonton Journal: 2,701

Friends in Foursquare, like most social networks, are users who joined a network at some point in time. Being a Friend doesn't necessarily mean a user reads a Friend's tips, checks Foursquare regularly or uses Foursquare at all anymore.

All of the editors interviewed said they considered the data reported by Foursquare to be only a broad measure of user activity. Most said they were more interested in the interaction carried over from Foursquare to other social networks such as Twitter or Facebook (see Goals below).

Successful Content

Editors at the three news organizations were asked to describe one or two examples of their Foursquare content that they viewed as successful. The responses showed a range of applications:

National Post:

- "One that has done exceedingly well is: We had one of our columnists write about airport screening. His line was: 'At some point — maybe now — we have got to amend airport security and start profiling those likely to blow the damn plane up — not patting down three-year-old children'. I took that line and I dropped it onto all of the top 20 major U.S. airports. We're pretty much the top tip at all of those airports. People are checking in, they see that and they go 'Yeah!'"

Figure 4
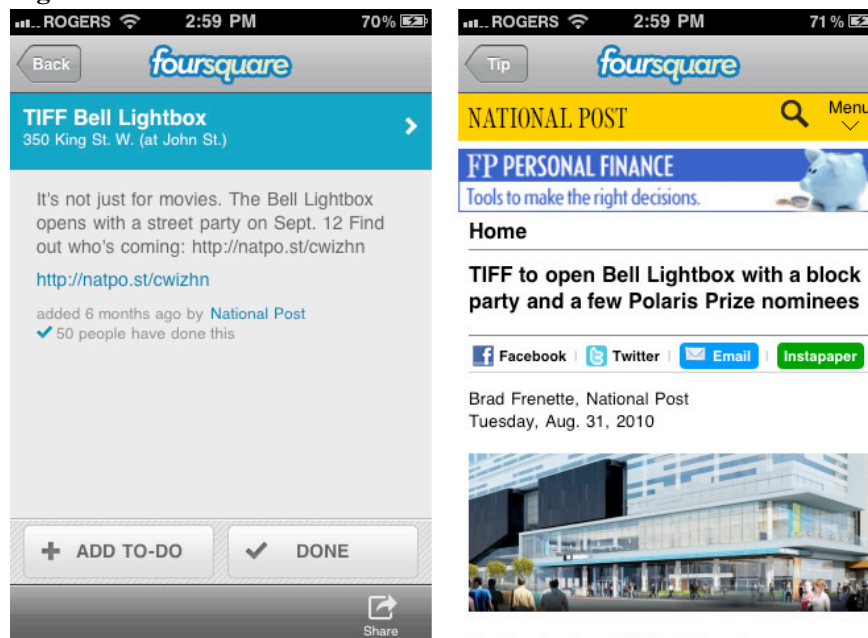
- "Our big coming out party was really TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), where we had a very specific event. We wanted to cover it in a different way. So we got reporters and editors to submit (to us) their insider guide to TIFF. Then we planted this information at the most relevant locations — the places where we thought it would be most likely to be seen and used by people who were checking in." (Figure 4)

Edmonton Journal:

- "What we noticed is that when we have major events — people coming in from out of town, for example the Grey Cup (Canadian football championship) — there's a lot of people coming in from places like Toronto, Vancouver and the U.S. who are used to that location-based platform. We thought: let's see what the uptake is and start putting up more Foursquare posts during these events. Our Foursquare click-through and interactivity rates went up 1500%. That just means it went from, you know, 5 to 50. But the potential is there."

Figure 5
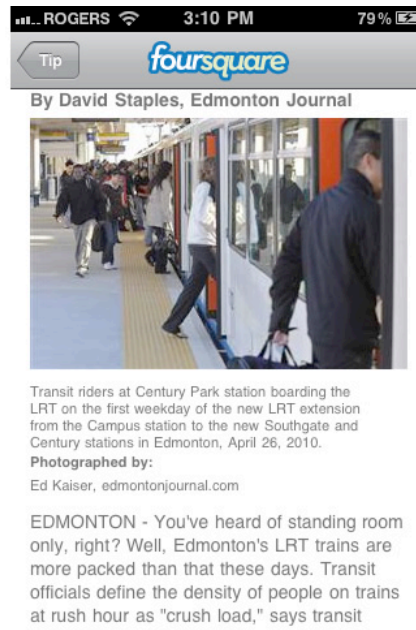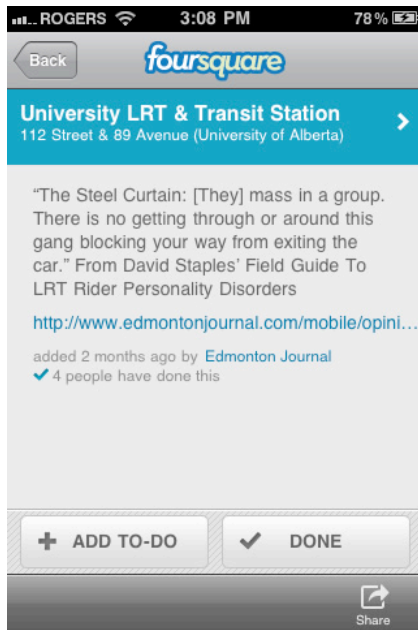
- "One that actually worked out really well was David Staples' guide for LRT (light rapid transit) riders, which was humorous and bullet-form enough that it would be an interesting read. It was also eye-catching enough that it would work for Foursquare coverage. We tagged that at every LRT station and it's gotten a surprising number of people pinging back on it. They see a quick-humourous quote, they click through, they read the rest." (Figure 5)

Vancouver Sun:

Figure 6
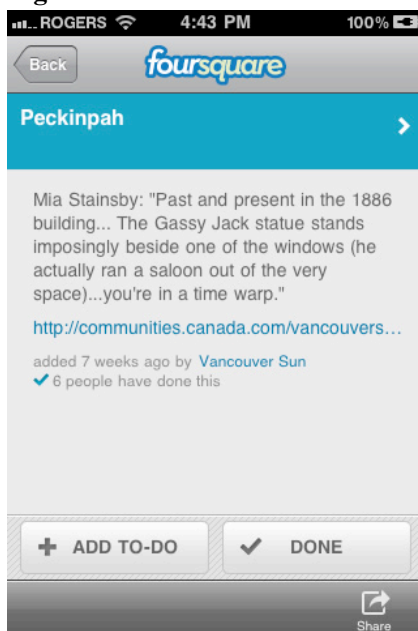
- (Describing a tip pointing to a review at a hip downtown restaurant): "The clientele is generally plugged in. So the information that comes into that channel will be more engaged. Of the things we do on Foursquare, that one has been our biggest referral, I think. But getting into numbers isn't necessarily what it's all about. It's more the interaction and the feedback." (Figure 6)

Roles

Asked to describe their role in the organization, most editors classified themselves broadly as social media editors, whose job is to engage the audience, keep abreast of new technology and help colleagues use it effectively:

- "My role is to assess emerging technology and to find best practices. And to work with the newsroom to use them."

- "I provide editorial and development direction for our web, mobile and social media products."

- "We have pockets of individuals who are very smart in social media but we didn't have any departments that were moving in the right direction. That's kind of what my role is."

- "It's just been to, initially, learn about it, figure out how it works and then find the pieces in the paper to put up."

- "A lot of what we're doing is drawing in new readers — people who wouldn't necessarily pick up a newspaper, but who are nevertheless interested in our news, our sources and our accuracy."

Only one participant classified himself as an online news editor. None of the participants mentioned Foursquare specifically, likely indicating the relatively minor function Foursquare updates play in their job duties. Many of the respondents said their job was to experiment with Foursquare and social media generally. They described their jobs with phrases such as "throwing things to the wall and seeing what sticks," "being active and trying new things," and finding out "what works and what doesn't."

None of the editors called their job function newsgathering or reporting. They framed their role as being part of the process of news delivery or news distribution. Most said their role was to foster engagement or further a conversation with readers through other social media channels.

All of the participants acknowledged a marketing function inherent in their role — to spread the brand of the news organization in different social media channels and build readership (see Goals below). Asked to characterize the relationship between this function and the news organization's journalistic function, respondents cited new means of distribution, presentation and engagement:

- "I try really hard not blur the line between marketing and news. I'm a newsroom staffer and my background is in journalism … I try not to bring any marketing into what I do, so my impetus for getting information out there is: what I would want to know as a reader."

- "I think in a lot of ways it's an extension of journalism in that it's presenting news at a different access point. We're not selling the paper so much as we're selling the content. We're selling a reliable source of information that you can't get anywhere else."

- "It's a certain level of marketing of the news. It's always interesting — that (issue). It's not directly like you're creating a story. I mean it's taking something that has already been written. But it's taking what we have on the website and dicing it up and sending it out into the different venues or places that people are online."

- "With us, it's always been an editorial focus. It's always been about creating something people find useful, not trying to sell them stuff or get them to enter contests. It's really about having meaningful things to say to them and for them to interact with."

- "I'm not a journalist by background. I don't try to dictate the content or say what were putting out through social media. It's more a way of how we're using it or what audience we're trying to reach."

Goals

Respondents phrased their goals variously as "brand exposure," "getting our stories out there" and "showing that we're out in these places." One participant likened his organization's use of Fourquare to street corner newspaper boxes in the virtual sphere.

Others referred to an organizational mission to be active in emerging social media channels or spaces. Two said they were specifically looking to find new audiences on mobile devices.

Three respondents mentioned attracting readers who haven't traditionally read the newspaper. Most talked about simply being present in social spaces where young and technologically savvy people are active.

- "People who use social media generally have an ear to the ground. So we want to be in that space and make sure people know that we're trying to tell stories in a lot of different ways."

- "What we want to do is to create an information layer based on the vast amount of content we create every day as part of our job as a news organization. Part of our mandate has been to stop relying on the concept of creating a great website that everybody will come to and start thinking more about how can we deliver what we want to the places where people already are."

- "It's a sense that your homepage is not going to be the place where everyone comes to. It's still by far the main source of our traffic, but we need to get out where people are using their computers or their mobile phones."

- "It's trying to put our content where our audience is or where we think it's going to be. So our ultimate goal is just to get people reading our stuff and engaging with us in whatever medium they choose."

None talked about specific targets for readership. While it's likely that competitive companies would be reluctant to share such targets, none of the respondents mentioned that these targets even existed. "The ROI (return on investment) on this stuff is going to be five or 10 years," said one.

Participants frequently mentioned the terms "engagement" and "conversation" as goals for their Foursquare posts. However, such activity is difficult to track, given Foursquare's relatively weak functionality for sharing or conversing. For example, users can't comment on a tip or post it simultaneously to Twitter. Respondents said they looked for Foursquare use to spark engagement in other social media channels:

- "A lot of the time we get feedback on Twitter, saying 'I was at this restaurant. Thanks, Vancouver Sun for putting a tip on there — it helped me order,' or whatever. Time permitting, there's a conversation to be had around that: How did you use it? Was it helpful?"

- "I'm not so concerned about how many check-ins we get at a certain story or click-throughs, as I am about whether people are leaving good quality tips and quality content. That's gold. Because that's interactivity."

- "There are some statistics we get (from Foursquare), but very few. We have to see it within the rest of our web traffic."

Two respondents also pointed to what they saw as awkward nomenclature within Foursquare for encouraging engagement. Users can't signal agreement with a piece of content, as they can by clicking the Like button in Facebook. They can only indicate they have Done a tip. Users might choose to "do" a

restaurant reviewer's suggestion to try the burger. However, it is less clear how they would "do" a tip that

pointed users to a story about the federal government's legislative agenda, as was left by the National Post

on Ottawa's Parliament Hill on September 20, 2010.

Similarly, a user clicking Done might mean only that they intended to take a piece of advice

offered in an article, but didn't actually accomplish it. Labels on buttons for social media services can

pose confusion for users wanting to act on journalistic content (Benton, 2011).

One editor said a goal was also to use Foursquare as a possible means of finding sources for

stories, although he hadn't done this yet.

- "If someone is going to write a story about the emerging cool factor of (a restaurant), then we
  would use Fourquare to find who the Mayors are of each restaurant and possibly contact them to
  say 'You basically eat here a lot' — what do you like or not like about this place? And then we
  could find out where else they eat and basically, use it to find sources."

Workflow

Asked to describe their workflow, editors said they selected stories from either the print version

of their newspaper or the online database of stories on the same day it was originally published. Then they

located the story on the news organization's website — usually the mobile site — to get its URL. The

editors said they read the story and then selected text for the content of the tip, which Foursquare limits to

200 characters.

Two participants said they occasionally sought out the editors or authors involved in the creation

of the article in the process of crafting the tip.

All of the editors said they frequently used either the headline or the deck that was included with

the original story. As one participant put it: "We've got a whole room full of talented people whose whole

job is to distill stories down to their essence." Occasionally, however, they pulled a specific quote from

the article to highlight a lively sentiment. Two editors said they looked for a humorous phrase.

One editor also said he looked for vivid descriptions of a physical location in the article that would highlight a sense of place to the mobile user. Another said he looked for powerful descriptions of flavour in a restaurant review that would appeal to mobile users with a menu in hand. The same editor said he tried to support the action-inviting nature inherent in Foursquare (with its enticement to click Done): "What is going to be the language that I can use that's action-generating for the reader?" He added:

- "I put up one (tip) for (a cafe) last month and mentioned that the owners post the menu to Twitter every day — which is something that not many other places do. But it's something people connected to social media might be a little more interested in."

Another editor said he had recently asked the travel editor at the paper to draft content specifically for Foursquare users. He wanted the editor to work with the writer to draft five short pieces of advice for getting the best experience at the place profiled in the story. The purpose was to create content the user could take action on — either by clicking the Done or To-Do buttons. For example, users might click the Done button if they bought a croissant at a bakery recommended in a tip at the Eiffel Tower venue in Paris. Alternatively, they might click the To-Do button as they planned their trip itinerary from home. One editor explained it as: "We add Foursquare buttons onto the website. And then we can send that out on Twitter saying, 'Going to Africa? Here, add these to your Foursquare.'"

Editors said another major aspect of their routine was to place the tip on an appropriate venue in Foursquare. Frequently, they said, the choice was clear, given a specific geographic location mentioned in the article, such as the street address of a restaurant. However, one editor said he also left tips pointing to general feature stories that mobile users, checking in at a relevant venue, might find interesting. For example, one editor left tips at venues for Apple stores in Canada that linked to a story about a war of words between Apple CEO Steve Jobs and Research In Motion CEO Jim Balsillie: "They've all been very popular."

Regarding the crafting of tips for these types of stories, two editors responded:

- "It's 'What's the most popular real-world relevant place I could put this where it would be seen by people who would care?' There's a little bit of mental gymnastics there."

- "It's not always obvious what the location is, so sometimes you just have to think about it."

All of the editors said effective tips were simply good journalistic form — not a new form of writing. They described their crafting of these 200-character tips using phrases such as "an extension of good editing" and "headline writing for a different format."

A final consideration was how long to leave a tip within Foursquare. Four editors said the user experience was a key concern for them. One said he had put numerous tips on a major performing arts venue in town, however, his organization was "starting to clog it up." The effect, he said, "wasn't starting to look so good for us anymore."

News organizations are generally reluctant to "unpublish" online news content (Tenore, 2010). However, three editors said they occasionally deleted older tips to make their Foursquare content appear fresh. The immediacy of the mobile experience demands it, said one. Another said:

- "You have to. For example, if you have a music festival and you're putting in tips about a lineup (of scheduled performers) by the time the next music festival comes around, well, you'd better have a lot of that stuff cleaned up. Otherwise, that makes for a bad user experience."

One editor made the argument that transparency in publishing is better suited to the web, where the user experience has a longer tail:

- "It makes a lot more sense to put your archival efforts on web right now than mobile, where you really need to think about: What will people need to know when they check in here?"

Story Choice

The editors placed only a tiny fraction of the daily content produced by their news organization into Foursquare. Asked how they chose this content, the editors described a range of criteria.

One editor responded first by describing the stories that don't succeed in Foursquare:

- "I know which ones don't (work). We're not going to put anything in that's crime. We're not going to put anything that is a fire — anything that is destructive. Foursquare is not your hard-core news."

The same editor said the content must support the social nature of Foursquare, specifically the fun or happy mood of the people who use it. He explained further:

- "Crime would just be very jarring. The way that Foursquare has been built — it's about going out. I think indicating where there have been shootings and where there are robberies would be indicating why you should stay in. It's not that we're boosters (of positive news stories) — it just doesn't seem to be the spot for it."

The editor suggested that being upset or shocked would dissuade users from wanting to "do" the tip or share their experience in other ways. The same observation is offered in early research suggesting that that positive emotion spawns greater amounts of social media activity than negative emotion (Benton, 2011; Gruzd, Doiron, & Mai, 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2010).

Another editor expressed a similar opinion, saying:

- "If I put up something up there every time there was a decision made about the city centre airport or every time someone at (city hall) reported budget numbers it wouldn't be interesting. It wouldn't be something people on Foursquare would go to look at."

Four of the five editors said the content that worked best in Foursquare referenced articles that did not have a specific time element. The editors used phrases such as "evergreen," "feature-y," "archival," "slow burn" and "useful to people over a longer period of time." They cited these qualities as the reasons they posted restaurant reviews and travel stories:

- "The restaurant reviews are the easiest. It's about a location; nothing is really going to change about that."

- "Evergreen content is best. You can put up a restaurant review; the restaurant is not going to go out of business. You can keep it up there forever."

The editors all suggested that opinion pieces work well in Foursquare. Foursquare is itself a social recommendation network and one editor said it's little surprise users are attracted to tips that provide

recommendations themselves. As well, some suggested, opinions are more likely to encourage the user to click Done in agreement.

Two editors said that while mobile users have immediate information needs, there aren't enough Foursquare users to make the effort of posting frequent updates at various venues — such as clubs and concert halls — worthwhile. As a result, they have altered their approach over time:

- "(We had thought) it was going to be constant check-ins to places … (Now) if something is going to be at an art gallery for two months, then we can provide a review. But we're getting away from trying to be so date-specific."

- "When we first started, we threw up a lot of social calendar stuff: There's a band playing here — check them out. It may have been to our advantage to keep it up there because it's popular, but the value diminishes very quickly on those types of things."

Three of the editors, however, said they had experienced considerable success with events such as festivals or sporting events that operate within a specific timeframe for a least a couple of days. One editor said that's enough time to use other social media such as Facebook and Twitter to drive traffic to Foursquare: "Then people have a direct call to action that makes sense to them. There's a start and a finish date. It's something they can get excited about."

Another editor said tips relating to music festivals work well — as long as they are deleted after the event is done: "The last thing you want is to have a presence on Foursquare where someone is checking in eight months after (an event) and seeing 15 tips about it." Older content poses a glaring conflict with mobile users' desire for immediacy, he suggested.

Being present where — and when — people talk online is crucial, said another editor. If people are at a certain location physically, a news organization should be present there in Foursquare.

- "It's got to be current ... We're going to put more time getting information out there about a hot restaurant or a new restaurant or a movie that's coming out with a lot of buzz rather than something that's been out a while. So I think you have to know your audience on the platform and cater news content to it."

The editors were divided over whether they saw a practical application of news content in Foursquare. Three saw possibilities, two didn't. Only one editor said his organization had experimented with placing news content in Foursquare.

One editor said he made an effort to place content into Foursquare that wasn't published elsewhere by the news organization. He cited a project in which he worked with a reporter to geo-locate the best Christmas light displays in town.

Two editors said they worked to make the format of linked stories easier for people to read on small mobile screens through the use of bullet lists.

Discussion

This study involved a specific social media service and involved a very small number of participants. Much further research is needed to draw conclusions relating to other social media services or to news organizations' use of location-based services generally.

Recent studies investigating gatekeeping have focused on journalists' interaction with the audience and the creation of user-generated content. The role of the editors in this study is more akin to the role of the wire editor in White's original study, who was making selections from a collection of existing stories authored by journalists — not working to create content with audience members.

White's wire editor operated as single gate. However, as the editors in this study mentioned, they are increasingly operating in multiple delivery channels — increasing the number of gates.

Editors at these Postmedia outlets were choosing articles to post as Foursquare tips that aligned with fairly specific criteria — even if these criteria weren't explicitly defined. The editors looked for articles that contained strong opinions likely to inspire agreement and activity, either by clicking the Done or To-Do buttons in Foursquare or beginning a conversation in other social networks. They looked for articles that referenced a specific location — but not every article about every location. They were interested in articles that could be placed on venues where people gathered socially. Editors indicated they

favoured articles that concerned restaurants, music and theatre festivals, sports events, transportation hubs and educational classes.

Editors were choosing stories and then finding venues on which to place them. But some were also choosing specific venues where people gathered socially and searching out relevant articles to place as tips.

Workload and concern for the user experience also factored in editors' choice of content. They saw articles about events as being attractive to social media users. However, they had concerns about keeping this content fresh and usable to Foursquare users. The implication was that they preferred to post tips referencing stories that lacked a specific time element and, consequently, stayed relevant for users over long periods of time.

There was also an indication that editors were looking for stories about people — not things or institutions — to align with the social nature of the service, and the emotional disposition of people who are out on the town.

In crafting the tips, editors were spending effort finding flavourful descriptions — concerning the location itself and also the meal reviews that formed the bulk of the tip content. Editors also expressed considerable interest in writing tips aimed at inspiring action.

Many of the respondents said their job was to experiment with social media and try new things — some evidence of weak routines and support for the framework provided by Keith (2011). The emphasis the editors placed on proximity as a news value also suggested that the influence of routines in the gatekeeping function might be weaker than for other journalists.

The results suggest there are avenues for more research in the gatekeeping function of online journalists, especially concerning whether individual and extra-medial (audience) influences play a greater role. As well, it is likely that proximity will be a much more important area of study for the assessment of newsworthiness as editors create more content for mobile devices.

Ultimately, the relevance of Foursquare itself is likely to be challenged in the wake of the Fall 2010 launch of Facebook Places, a similar service. The competition in this space is an indication that

news organizations are likely to continue to diversify their channels for distribution. Consequently, the study of gatekeeping in these channels is even more important.

References

Foursquare. (2011). *About Foursquare.* Retrieved March 10, 2011 from http://foursquare.com/about

Benton, J. (2011). "Like," "share," and "recommend": How the warring verbs of social media will influence the news' future. Retrieved March 9, 2011 from http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/02/like-share-and-recommend-how-the-warring-verbs-of-social-media-will-influence-the-news-future/

Berger, J. & Milkman, K.L. (2010). Social Transmission, Emotion, and the Virality of Online Content. Retrieved March 9, 2011 from http://opimweb.wharton.upenn.edu/documents/research/Virality.pdf

Bleske, G. (1991). Ms. Gates takes over: An updated version of a 1949 case study. *Newspaper Research Journal, 12(*4), 88-97.

Boczkowski, P.J. (2004). Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bradshaw, P. (2010). 4 uses for Foursquare for journalists. Retrieved December 7, 2010 from http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2010/04/26/foursquare-for-journalists/

Cassidy, W.P. (2005). Variations on a theme: The professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 82*(2), 264-280.

Cassidy, W.P. (2006). Gatekeeping similar for online, print journalists. *Newspaper Research Journal, 27*(2), 6-23.

Deuze, M. (2003). The Web and its Journalisms: Considering the Consequences of Different Types of Newsmedia Online. *New Media Society, 5*(2), 203-230.

Garber, M. (2010). Location, location, etc: What does the WSJ's Foursquare check-in say about the future of location in news? Retrieved March 9, 2011 from http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/05/location-location-etc-what-does-the-wsj%E2%80%99s-foursquare-check-in-say-about-the-future-of-location-in-news/

Gruzd, A., Doiron, S. & Mai, P. (2011). *Is happiness contagious online? A case of Twitter and the 2010 Winter Olympics*. Paper presented at the 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Kauai, Hawaii. Retrieved March 4, 2011 from http://anatoliygruzd.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/HICSS44_Gruzd_Twitter_Happiness.pdf

Ingram, M. (2010). Will Foursquare badges really help newspapers? Retrieved December 3, 2010 from http://gigaom.com/2010/04/26/will-foursquare-badges-really-help-newspapers/

Invoke Solutions. (2010). Social Commerce Report. Retrieved December 7, 2010 from http://www.slideshare.net/invokesolutions/invoke-live-social-commerce-report.

Jenkins, M. (2010). Uses for Foursquare in news reporting. Retrieved February 15, 2011 from http://zombiejournalism.com/2010/07/uses-for-foursquare-in-news-reporting/

Keith, S. (2011). Shifting Circles: Reconceptualizing Shoemaker and Reese's theory of a hierarchy of influences on media content for a newer media era. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research, 29*. Retrieved February 27, 2011 from http://wjmcr.org/vol29

Lewis, S.C., Kaufhold, K. & Lasorsa, D.L. (2010). Thinking about citizen journalism. *Journalism Practice, 4*(2), 163-179. doi: 10.1080/14616700903156919

Metro Canada. (2010). Metro and Foursquare announce groundbreaking partnership. Retrieved December 22, 2010 from http://www.metronews.ca/toronto/canada/article/430567--metro-and-foursquare-announce-groundbreaking-partnership

Mitchelstein, E. & Boczkowski, P.J. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism, 10*(5); 562-586. doi: 10.1177/1464884909106533

Neuberger, C. & Nuernbergk, C. (2010). Competition, complementarity or integration? *Journalism Practice, 4*(3), 319-332. doi: 10.1080/17512781003642923

Pew Research Center. (2010). Understanding the participatory news consumer. Retrieved December 8, 2010 from http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1508/internet-cell-phone-users-news-social-experience?src=prc-latest&proj=peoplepress

Pew Research Center. (2011). State of the News Media Report. Retrieved March 14, 2011 from http://stateofthemedia.org/2011/overview-2/

Redman, E. (2010). What does Foursquare mean for newspapers? Retrieved December 22, 2011 from http://www.editorsweblog.org/analysis/2010/02/what_does_foursquare_mean_for_newspapers.php

Robinson, S. (2006). *Gateway or Gatekeeper: The institutionalization of online news in creating an altered technological authority.* Paper delivered at the International Symposium on Online Journalism, Austin, Texas. Retrieved from http://online.journalism.utexas.edu/2006/papers/SueRobinson.pdf

Snider, P.B. (1967). Mr. Gates revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949 case study. *Journalism Quarterly 44*(3), 419-427.

Shoemaker, P.J. & Reese, S.D. (1991). Mediating the message. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Shoemaker, P.J. & Vos T.P. (2009). Gatekeeping Theory. New York: Routledge.

Shoemaker, P., Eichholz, M., Kim, E. & Wrigley, B. (2001). Individual and routine forces in gatekeeping. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, 78*(2), 233-247.

Singer, J.B. (1997). Still guarding the gate?: The newspaper journalist's role in an on-line world. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 3*(1), 72-89. doi: 10.1177/135485659700300106

Singer, J.B. (1998). Online journalists: Foundations for research into their changing roles. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 4*(1). doi: 10.1111/j.1083-6101.1998.tb00088.x.

Singer, J.B. (2003). Campaign contributions: Online newspaper coverage of election 2000, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly,* 80(1), 39-56.

Snider, P.B. (1967). Mr. Gates revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949 case study. *Journalism Quarterly, 44*(3), 419-427.

Snow, S. & Lavrusik, V. (2010). 7 ways journalists can use Foursquare. Retrieved December 9, 2010 from http://mashable.com/2010/05/14/journalists-foursquare/

Tenore, M.J. (2010). 5 ways news organizations respond to 'unpublishing' requests. Retrieved March 7, 2011 from http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/104414/5-ways-news-organizations-respond-to-unpublishing-requests/

White, D.M. (1950). The 'Gate Keeper': A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly, 27*, 383-396.

Williams, B. A. & Carpini, M.X.D. (2004). Monica and Bill all the time and everywhere: The collapse of gatekeeping and agenda setting in the new media environment. *American Behavioral Scientist, 47*(9), 1208–1230.

Zickuhr, K. & Smith, A. (2010). 4% of online Americans use location-based services. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved December 6, 2010 from http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Location-based-services.aspx