

ISOJ 2020: Day 2, Keynote Session

How 2020 has profoundly changed the digital newsroom and journalism

Keynote speaker: [Catherine Kim](#), global head of digital news, NBC News & MSNBC

- Chair: [Robert Hernandez](#), Professor of professional practice, University of Southern California
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Rosental Alves Good Morning, America and Good Morning, World, because, we have more than four-thousand people registered for ISOJ online. It's really amazing. I mean, I did not expect that much. But anyway, we have people from all over the world and all over the country here. So thank you very much for joining me today as we come together virtually again.

And before we begin our keynote session of today, I would like to do a few housekeeping reminders. The panel's keynote sessions and workshops, except for the workshop of today, are all being interpreted to Spanish. And the reason we don't have the interpretation for the workshop today is because the Google workshop today has a sibling. It's one in Spanish and in the other in English. But the other sessions are being interpreted by an excellent team of interpreters. If you would like to join and watch in Spanish, you have to click the interpretation globe that is on the bottom of your Zoom screen. So you can do that.

If you if you are having any further tech issues, please contact our tech helpline via WhatsApp or text. The number is 1, for the United States, 817-526-0179. So our tech help line on WhatsApp or SMS is 817-526-0179.

Also, please remember to follow and and use #ISOJ2020. Normally when we do this in person here in Austin, I give prizes to people who tweet more, so I normally throw a football or any swag that I have for people who you see are tweeting a lot about our conference. So don't be shy, go to social media and tweet about us and use the the #ISOJ2020.

Now, I would like to to introduce you first to Robert Hernandez, who will be the chair and the moderator of Catherine Kim, a keynote session. Catherine Kim, as Robert is going to explain, is the global head of digital news at NBC and MSNBC. And Robert Hernandez is a professor of professional practice at the University of Southern California. So go, Robert.

Robert Hernandez Hola todos. Me llamo Robert Hernandez, I am a digital journalism professor at USC Annenberg here in Los Angeles, and en una tradición que comienzo mis charlas en ISOJ en español para recordarles que es una conferencia internacional y nunca digo a los que no hablan español lo que yo acabo de decir. Solo nos reímos y ni tienen idea de que hablamos. So it's a tradition for me to speak Spanish at ISOJ just to remind folks that it's an international conference, so just a hit tip to my colegas en todo el mundo en Latinoamérica. Thank you for joining us today for this particular session.

I am here as your moderator host with Catherine Kim, who I will do a very short bio introduction and then hand the stage off to her. We will have Catherine's presentation, followed by a short Q&A between she and I, and then we're going to open it up to the audience for a live Q&A. We'll do maybe a costume change and then do the live Q&A.

So let me tell you about Catherine. As you may have read in her bio, Catherine Kim is the global head of digital news for NBC News and MSNBC. She manages content, social, editorial strategy and publishing for all the news content, including general news, politics, tech and the verticals, verticals including NBCBLK, NBC OUT, NBC Latino, and NBC Asian America. She oversees digital properties like NBC Stay Tuned and NBC News digital documentaries. Prior to joining NBC, she's worked at CNN and CBS. And let's be frank, she is one of the few, I'll use the word "few" because we need more representation, of women in these leadership positions, let alone women of color. Catherine, thank you for joining us. I'm going to hand it to you and take it away.

Catherine Kim Thank you for that introduction, Robert. I feel like I should say hello in Korean since it is all about ISOJ. Yeboseyo. It's a pleasure to attend this conference and join you all virtually this year. I'm thrilled to be a part of it. It's one of my favorites. It's really a pleasure to speak to you about NBC News Digital and how we've been navigating through coverage during these past many months and the unprecedented times it feels like we're facing.

To begin with, I wanted to give you a sense of who is NBC News Digital? We are essentially three distinct brands in one. We are MSNBC, NBC News and Today. And of course, NBC News is our flagship brand. It's core to who we are. We bring you the biggest stories of the day, all the latest in breaking news and offer fresh, deep, original enterprise reporting. Today digital is very much built off the spirit of that juggernaut morning show Today, a place for news, lifestyle, parenting advice, trends, food, celebrity news, you name it. And then, of course, MSNBC is the third part of that pillar, and it is a place where super fans who currently can find the best of MSNBC Prime and dayside video.

Of course, as Robert mentioned, we've also got a number of digital sub brands. When I came on board late 2016, our only digital sub brands, really, were the diversity verticals, BLK, Asian, America, and Latino. And we began adding soon after as we saw audience opportunity beginning with Stay Tuned, which is our GenZ news brand on Snapchat. We launched a vertical called Better, around wellness. An opinion section called Think. We created NBC News Now in 2018, our free news streaming service. And Today's e-commerce section started around then. And just in recent days, we announced Today All Day, which is an incredible addition to our streaming options. Today All Day is a digital extension of that terrific morning show.

Thankfully, along the way, our audience has grown with us as we expand our newsroom. Currently, our average monthly unique visitor is around 128-million visits. And the biggest driver of those visits comes from our core news brand, NBC News. About 80% of that traffic comes from NBC News. And that growth over recent years it has largely been driven by breaking news, national news and politics, though this year won't surprise you to learn that obviously with a pandemic, health news has surged in terms of popularity, engagement and consumption. And our diversity verticals in particular are seeing increasing audience and engagement, and in particular, BLK and Asian America are up about 150% in traffic, given the reckoning on race that is rippling throughout society and the rise of anti-Asian American attacks during the era of COVID.

We essentially sit among the top three news brands. We are obviously not comfortable being third, but we've climbed a long way up the rankings. And obviously, like everyone else, would be happier if we're number one. That's what we aspire to be.

And when we started out at the beginning of this year, I thought I would share a little bit of where our priorities were in January 2020. Like everyone else in news, we believed the biggest story we'd be covering would be the 2020 presidential election. We had a plan in place. We knew what the calendar would look like, and in fact already started enjoying some of those late nights in the newsroom on primary nights. In February, we had a sense of how we were going to cover the conventions, had our credentials requested, and had begun to build out what we thought we would want for election night from the product side and so forth. We also were planning to set out to expand coverage on climate, culture and trending news. We were planning to bolster our streaming efforts and namely NBC News Now. And as is true for all years, we were planning and made a priority to continue to invest in our people, nurture and grow talent and build that world-class organization that we all want to be a part of.

And then you can say, we say March 12 happened. March 12, 2020. And we even wrote a story about it, as you can see from this slide. It was within an hour of us learning that America's beloved Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, had contracted coronavirus, as you may recall, where you were when you heard that news. The NBA announced it was suspending the rest of the season, and President Trump had announced that he was banning foreign nationals from travel to the U.S. and many of those European countries, of course. And the story that had already been growing by the day, rapidly and intensely suddenly felt like it had exponentially expanded within one hour, and it really felt like a major turning point.

On this particular day, we were already stress testing whether we could take our newsroom remote on short notice. About a third of the newsroom was asked, "Please don't come in today. We want to see if we can actually do this remotely, if we have to with no notice." I remember talking to an editor as we started to roll out these plans, and an editor said, "There's so much going on right now in the news cycle. Can we do these stress tests next week?" And I kept on thinking, "If we don't do it now, we may not have the opportunity. Things are moving that quickly." Concerns around cases in New York City growing began to worry us as well. Schools began to announce possible closure plans.

And then all of a sudden. (Plays videos.)

"Hey, it's Savannah from NBC News, and welcome to day two of Stay Tuned from the cleanest corner of my New York City apartment. Now shelter in place could actually get real here, so we'll have to see if I have enough groceries."

"I'm Gadischwartz from NBC News. And if this looks a little bit different than our normal shows, that's because this is my living room. Savannah, Lawrence and I are trying to do our part in social distancing, so a lot of our show is going to look like this."

"Hey, it's Lawrence. I'm here social distancing from my apartment. As we do our best to stay in and keep coronavirus from spreading, I'll tell you some of the best ways to stay mentally healthy."

That was our Stay Tuned show, GenZ show, on Snapchat just days later. Looking back at those videos, it makes it seem like the transition was all so simple and that yet there was

utter chaos behind the scenes. We were going deep into our equipment closets to figure out what we could send home teams with, whether it was laptops and a lot better editing servers, hard drives, ring lights. We had sent the Stay Tuned host home with ring lights and lavalier mics that you can use with your iPhones. And we had to figure out how to produce what was essentially, we thought, a big studio show from home twice a day. And it turned out once we worked it all out, it was rather easy. They began to shoot the host selfie style, their on-camera work, and they downloaded their videos on online tools that we use and platforms. All our editing moved on to the cloud. All our graphics moved on to the cloud. And it seemed overnight we had created a virtual newsroom with no notice, really. Be it Microsoft Teams and WebEx and Slack Video and Zoom. It's dizzying. Every team and every group has a preference.

But we had become the first NBC News team to go fully remote within a moment's notice. Many people left the newsroom thinking they were going home to test out work from home for the day and come back on that Friday. And I was one of those individuals who thought I was testing this out on Friday not to have returned to the office since.

Immediately after a wave of adjustments, I think we could start to see how this was changing other aspects of how we worked. It sounds boring, but working from home and all being somewhat cut off from each other at times has really optimized our workflow and processes. We have much better communications. Some of those communications one on one and personalized communications. All our meetings have taken on a sharper focus as we all realize this is our time to convene with this particular group of individuals, and walking by our colleagues desk to ask a follow-up question was no longer such an easy option. And because more of those conversations have been moving onto, we use Slack a lot like many newsrooms, moving on to Slack and public channels on Slack, I think there was a new level of transparency within our newsroom. There's always more. I'm sure there are ways we've become siloed in some ways. But a lot of the discussions about coverage and stories and who's doing what moved into public chat rooms, and I think in public Slack channels, I think in a way that's brought in a level of transparency that I've enjoyed. And I think it's flattened our team structure even more.

We within our digital group aren't very hierarchical. I don't like hierarchy. And in general, we felt like we had a pretty flat structure. But I think and have observed more and more senior managers and editors trusting in their teams, sharing more responsibility, allowing for individuals to be and feel more empowered and to own more the decision making. And we've certainly seen with a number of folks the expression of their learning curves really going up and the feeling of independence they have as we moved into this remote setting.

And remarkably working under these conditions has also sparked innovation. I think we knew that in sustained work-from home set up would change how the audience reacted and audience behavior as it relates to our digital products and would accelerate some of that audience behavior, which we've all seen. I don't think we thought it would make us more innovative and creative necessarily, but in fact it has, which has been a nice outcome of what's been a challenging situation for all of us. We reconceived what our digital video teams were doing. We have field teams. Normally we're all producing long form and sometimes documentary work. They're now producing shorter, more timely videos around the news cycle. Many of them, of course, obeying stay at home orders in various states and taking care of our own health and safety. Many of them are working from home, producing stories largely dependent on Zoom interviews.

We've done things that we would never have conceived of if we were all in the office. We've produced pop-up virtual town halls. We ran on our streaming platform, NBC News Now co-produced with our diversity verticals as we saw biased crimes against Asian-Americans, for instance, beginning to surge in the era of COVID. We proposed doing a town hall with Asian America and News Now and got that on our platforms fairly quickly. We produced a town hall following the George Floyd killing and protests. We produced a town hall for Pride Month on being Black and queer.

And these things, again, like prior to working from home town halls, were really considered within the world and realms of live producers with access to studios and crews and big teams. In a world where everyone works remote, we produced a version of a town hall, a virtual town hall, with a team of as little as four. It wasn't easy, but it is pretty remarkable that we could do things like this and continue to do things like this, given the current working environment. And I will give you a sample of some of those town halls. (Plays videos.)

"This is Can You Hear Us Now, a conversation about race, justice and the way forward. We are in a pivotal moment where we can address this head on, where we can say no more, not again. If you benefit from the systems of white supremacy and white privilege, if you benefit from systems of anti-blackness, that is your primary responsibility to dismantle it. From the ashes of this conflict can come great change, but it's not going to happen if we rest. It's not going to happen if we don't get behind the people that have been doing the work. If you hear or see discrimination or injustice of any kind, you have to speak up because we cannot get through this without each other. I know that this is a time of great fear and anxiety, but this is a time when everyone should be uniting. You are not alone. There are so many people that want to help you. This is Pride and Protest, a conversation for a turning point in American history. When our lived experiences are in these spaces, the conversation shifts, and we need more of that shifting to attack and ultimately dismantle the structures of oppression. We are supposed to be a part of this. We are Black and we are brown. Many people of the LGBTQIA+ community have always been a part of Black Lives Matter. Every generation has that movement that defines who they are, and this is yours."

We've also found ways to develop and build editorial widgets that may have taken six or eight weeks in the office or longer. After we went remote, we began to find a need as cases began to spike not just globally, but in the U.S. We wanted to find a way to provide our readers and our audience an at-a-glance tracker to capture the scale and scope of the pandemic.

And I remember distinctly we had a meeting on a Thursday afternoon with editorial and product teams. We discussed this need. We knew going into this meeting or this phone call, rather, that we had to come out with a goal and a focus for this and rightsize it according to a timeline, which we said we needed within two weeks. At that time, we were concerned that we would have this kind of tracker available as we started to flatten the curve. And so we really wanted to get this out there, not only because we really wanted it for our readers, but we also wanted to stay in the news cycle and have it be fresh when it was ready. That tracker was ready and available for us two weeks and two days, perhaps after we had that initial conversation. And it was an embeddable tracker. You see it on the bottom of this slide. There are all sorts of things we can do with it, but it's embeddable on a homepage, in articles with our partners. It went into widespread use that Monday when it was first there and available for us to use. And we did that a number of times since then. But it just gave us this ability to create editorial products with agility, speed, real focus. And

I think some of the blue skying of "What could we do? What should this look like?" seemed like luxuries to discuss at the time and therefore actually forced us to have a real focus. This is essentially what we need, outcome and goal.

The other thing that has happened, and we've all felt it, I'm sure, is that the story is also pushing us and forcing us and sparking more creativity in the storytelling. You saw some of the video already that we've been producing. How do you produce compelling videos when you're working with Zoom interviews, and there isn't a lot of what we would call action shots or or Broll to work with? We really lean into graphics and developing interesting animations and other flourishes. How do you tell the story of hospitals in crises? COVID reaches daily highs in the sunbelt? Fills ICU's in Phenix, for instance. I think one of our after, by the way, after covering those crises and those scenarios play out horrifically in Washington state, in Italy, for instance, in New York City. And one of those ways when we tried to push creative storytelling is recently a standout example, is working with a publisher of comics, AWA. We partnered with them and produced, and we've got the series running currently called COVID Chronicles. And they are essentially telling the story of the pandemic in graphic, comic form.

We were fortunate enough to be approached by a freelance writer who was offering these and reporting these stories out for AWA with this idea. And we really recognized the power in breaking through with this kind of form, and they really hit you on a different plane. And we're proud to have them as a part of our coverage.

It's been a surprising outcome over the last few months working on these incredibly challenging circumstances to see innovation, creativity. Forget about producing, or not to mention the core of what we do, producing some of the best journalism we've ever done as a team before the biggest audiences we've ever had. And of course, I think that incredible journalism being produced extends to all of you across the board. All of this, all of us, are living through this pandemic together. Many of us personally touched by COVID, grieving the loss of loved ones, experiencing the pain and anguish and outrage over George Floyd's killing, witnessing the protests that followed and continue to this day. And we still have a presidential election ahead to cover, one we intensely are focused on covering and planning for as we speak.

And I think this is really an extraordinary time, as we've all shared with each other every day nearly, to be a journalist, to be a part of journalism. I think this kind of effort really reflects how important it is to all of us individually to report on this story and to bear witness to the times. Many of my colleagues and I have discussed, when are we finally going to get back together? When are we ever going to see each other again? When will we be reunited? And how delighted we will be to see each other again, and we all feel that we will all be closer to each other than ever before because of what we have gone through together.

And until then, we can all imagine the stories we have yet to tell. Thank you.

Robert Hernandez Thank you for that presentation. We're going to open up the questions for the attendees a little bit, but I get to flex my host, moderator muscle and be selfish and ask you a couple of questions before we do that. This one does count. I'm just curious. When was the last time you were in the office? Have you gone back since?

Catherine Kim No, the last time was March 12. And I think many of us thought we were either working remotely on Friday, that was a Thursday, working remotely on a Friday,

potentially coming back on a Monday. In fact, I thought I was and had planned on that. And then we were strongly encouraged by Friday evening, I believe, it would be safest for everyone to work from home.

And so we scrambled. How do we how do we have our editorial meetings? How do we move all our meetings online? How do we communicate? I think the toughest thing is missing those spontaneous conversations, you know, by the coffee machine, or in the kitchen, or in the hallway, and the ideas that would come out of that. I think we really miss that in the community, of course.

And our early days were really about setting up processes, and systems, and communications, and meetings. I think the one thing that's been very hard to capture and try to replicate are those obviously spontaneous conversations. They're really hard, but I miss those. And I think there are so many stories that come out of those chance encounters.

Robert Hernandez Yeah, if it's not on the Zoom, it's in the Slack. But that doesn't really capture that as well. Lots of questions to ask you, but I won't be too selfish. But one question is, there's been a lot of innovation that's happened, right. What's the saying? "Necessity is the mother of invention." There will be a post-COVID time. We will make it to the other side. Everyone take a deep breath. This will pass. Out of all the things that you've learned during this process, building new communication styles, figuring out that you can do some things with a phone and a lavalier mic, what are one or two things that you're going to carry over to post-COVID times? What lessons learned are you going to bring over to the new era of journalism?

Catherine Kim I think that the, you know, it is a trend as well, but I think the transparency with which we operate and conduct business, I think that's going to continue and should. I think it's the video conferencing. It's going to be interesting, but I do think for our regional reporters and some of our bureaus, they feel more connected than ever to the organization. And I think that we have to find a way to keep that connectivity and that personalization. I certainly think the empowerment that we've been handing down and spreading out, I think that will continue and should continue. And my sense is that the agility, and I hope that doesn't go away, I think the agility that we have gained in this kind of setting will continue. And that belief that we don't have to do all things, we can just do this one thing really well and get it up in two days or get it up in two weeks. I think that kind of quick turn of spirit, again with some focus and right sizing scope and scale of mission, I think those kinds of things have been great lessons out of this particular period for us. And I think that will continue to be a part of the culture.

Robert Hernandez Yeah, we hear often, I'm a digital journalism professor focusing on emerging tech, and so I've come against a culture of, "Oh, well, this is how we do it. This is legacy media. It takes us a while to turn the ship." Right. But NBC is in fact the oldest broadcasting station in the U.S. It was the first one out there. And to see it change and pivot so quickly, hopefully it's a reminder that that culture can scale to any size.

One question I have for you is what's happening in the industry in terms of the reckoning? Right, representation of diversity. We're seeing the reckoning manifest in a variety of different ways, whether in police speaking up via social or people resigning for some bad choices that they've made in their career. How is diversity at NBC News? How is the representation? What are some strengths? You have some verticals. What are some weaknesses and rooms to improve? I'm curious to hear your thoughts on that.

Catherine Kim Sure. I mean, we are really proud of our diversity verticals. They have seen, as I had mentioned, extraordinary engagement in recent months. Some of the stories are single stories, reaching millions of readers, which I'm incredibly encouraged by. I think we look at our diversity verticals as expert reporters and editors in the subject matter, serving their community and serving beyond. And those stories to us are fully integrated in our newsroom. They're on the cover. They're part of our push alert system. They're socialized by our main accounts. We try to keep them as upfront and forward facing as possible and amplifying their expertise, but also trying to emphasize the integration to the newsroom. They are core to what we do.

I think that obviously there's always a lot more we can be doing. We had a lot of painful, and challenging, and difficult conversations internally, some one on one, some in group settings, across NBC News. And we had just some really wonderful news in the last few weeks from our chairman, who has presented something and announced something called the "50% Challenge," which is the goal to be 50% women and 50% people of color within the NBC News Group. And I think that to me is an ambitious goal. It's an exciting goal. I think it's a real signal to those inside and outside that this is a big priority for us. And we're going out there and putting a stake down. I think that there is a lot of self-examination that at least I've explored in terms of decisions I've made, how we operate, but a lot of very open discussions about where we want to go from here. And I think you've heard this from so many others. But if we don't make change now, when will we?

Robert Hernandez Exactly. NBC, the oldest broadcasting station, could pivot to do the quick turnaround productions of Stay Tuned. There should be no excuse to pivot to really genuinely include the representation of our diverse country. So I'm looking forward to see how that manifests.

OK, let's open up the questions with the audience. We might magically do a costume change, and I might have some more questions. So let's open up to the audience. Any questions there?

And we are back from our costume change. And we are live. Obviously, we recorded last week, and we're live now. But I was going to run in and be like, so we're getting a lot of questions via the chat, please feel free. Todos ponen las preguntas en ingles o español in the chat. Or in Korean. Put your questions in the chat, and we'll try to answer as many as we can.

One of the first ones that came in asked the question, how do you balance the sort of escapism of the Today Show with huge stories of COVID, Black Lives Matter, the election and even the use of federal forces in in Portland? How do those things match up? What's the approach for something like the Today Show?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I don't oversee the Today digital team directly, that's Ashley Parrish, my lovely colleague on that side. But it is a challenge. I mean, they do news and lifestyle. They do both, and certainly very much guided by the hard news that's in the broadcast every day, and looking at the big national news stories. I think that all of us would agree the news cycle is about as intense as many of us have ever experienced it. In that context, we can all use some escapism. And of course, life hums along in other areas, in the arts, culture, social.

And, you know, the one thing I would say certainly, which is played to Today's digital strengths, especially early on in the pandemic, and certainly still do, they're a real destination for advice, whether it's parenting advice, advice on products to buy, advice on your health and wellness. In that kind of coverage, there has been a bit of escapism, but also certainly service journalism. And I think that they are incredibly trusted in that area, so they've been able to balance that pretty well. And certainly, I think, that's what their audience wants.

Robert Hernandez Yeah, you know, news comes in different forms and different flavors, and our goal is to inform our diverse audience. And so if, it's for me, I use Snapchat filters. Whatever it takes to get to the community to get them to engage. So if it's the Today Show, which for other journalists may feel very light, if it's getting the message across in a way that's getting them to pay attention to the news, which often a lot of people, I'm sure you are, I am, we all are tempted to turn it off because it's the dumpster fire of 2020. If we can get people to engage somehow, even in that escapism approach, I think it's worthwhile.

This question asks how does the media reduce the gap between the information that the audience requires versus the information that the media believes the audience needs? So what's the editorial approach of what the audience really needs and the decision you think it needs with the limited space, perhaps?

Catherine Kim Yeah, it's a toughie. I don't know if we frame our story selection quite that way. I mean, we're looking for the big stories and how to tell them in a deeply compelling, provocative manner, if it may be a topic we think that is less accessible. But I think that generally we hope that there isn't a gap. Just like the old fashioned way of opening up a newspaper and being attracted to the story on the left side that you might not have intended to read, I think that we know that we are looking for a balance and a mix of stories on any given day. Our job is to make them deeply interesting, accessible, provocative, compelling, and when they need to be, shorter, if it's just the information.

Robert Hernandez Well, let me do my own follow up on that. There is a segment of our community in the U.S., but it's globally as well, that is by default distrusting of news organizations. That if not distrusting, is openly combative. Is there an internal editorial strategy on how to deal with that type of viewer? Are you trying to convince them, or have you decided, you know what, the vast majority of folks do want to be informed? Or are you dedicating resources to try to convince the people that news is actually, it's in the Constitution, and a valuable institution?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I mean, I think we do it every day, trying to make sure and ensure that we are doing fact-based journalism, that we offer deeply reported stories. Occasionally, and sometimes not occasionally, sometimes daily, we are doing stories, looking at rumors, claims. And as you well know, I mean, fact-checking reports claims, you know, separating fact from fiction is a regular part of the daily mix in a lot of places. And sometimes those fact checks are some of the most popular pieces on the site. And certainly I've heard anecdotally and been surprised over and over again, but people really do appreciate the fact-checks, straight out, is this true or not?

Robert Hernandez I am an active news consumer. I believe I'm a critical thinker, and I'm still stunned to find out, like, did that really happen? And so if we in the news business, in the core of it, are questioning things, we need these institutions to really trust and believe in that credibility is so important.

A question. I'll ask in Spanish, then translate. ¿Entonces ustedes creen que a partir de este pandemia los medios van a seguir transformandose? Do you guys believe that after this pandemic, will the media, will NBC News continue to transform actively and evolve?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I do. I certainly think we're already showing it. As you saw in the presentation, we launched a new streaming service, Today All Day, just about a week and change ago. And that innovation continues to happen. In fact, I think it's more important than ever as we see consumer behavior and consumption of news and video, live or recorded, change across the board during this pandemic. I think that that's, in digital, that is a part of the every day, thinking about ways to innovate, thinking of different ways of storytelling, thinking of ways to catch attention where we need to be. You know, this new platform, that new platform, as we see it. And so, you know, reinvention, I think, and staying ahead of that trend is always a part of the culture. But, yeah, I think that that continues and that will remain more relevant than ever.

Robert Hernandez A question asks have you seen drops in traffic during the pandemic on content related to COVID? I'm assuming are people having too much COVID news? Have you perceived any loss of interest from the audience about the pandemic at some point of it?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I would say our peak audience was sort of March, April across the board, I mean, the audience sizes that we've not seen ever, record audience, but we right now are above where we were. You can't even compare to last year at this time. But I would say we had pretty high January, February audiences, and they remain at that level.

I think that what we're seeing with COVID in particular is still a lot of interest in the story, of course, but the onus is on us as journalists to push the narrative forward, to push the framing forward, to think about new angles, fresh angles. And I think that at times, if a story seems too familiar or more of what we've seen, but just somewhere else in the country, I think those are the stories I think we're seeing a little bit less interest in. But no, I mean, we're still at really high audience levels.

Robert Hernandez Let me ask you this question, seeing that the COVID briefings are going to happen again and likely President Trump is going to take the podium. There was a pattern of I'm going to call it "liar, liar." So he has had the habit of lying. What is NBC News's approach to covering that and offering that feed live and or fact-checking during a press briefing about COVID in these important science-based, fact-based sources? How and what's the strategy for that approach?

Catherine Kim We generally have had the our resident fact-checker, we have two, Jane Timm and Adam Edelman on our politics team. But we've regularly had one or two reporters fact-check during these press conferences. And whether if we were live blogging it, for instance, as we were when we had a coronavirus live blog going for many months early on. Those fact checks would fill into the blog, and then we would pull them all together into one single article and post that as well. So it's become a regular part of our coverage of Trump. And I think in terms of, I can only speak for the streams, we tend to stream almost everything. And sometimes we've certainly, during the pandemic, had two or three streams running at the same time. So we make them available, and I think the fact that you have to click into them to watch helps someone decide whether they want to watch it or not.

Robert Hernandez Yeah, yeah. A question from a fellow Korean American journalist, she asks, how do you bring your intersectional identity, being a woman, a person of color to your workplace, to your work, while keeping as much as objective standpoint as possible, while still relating and empathizing to issues that relate to your identity?

Catherine Kim You know, I think that it may play more in the background than anything. It may make me a little bit more open to certain stories because I have a connection to them or a shared experience with some of the folks in the stories. I mean, we have, because we have our diversity verticals and they are such a big part of our newsroom and core to our coverage, I would say many times I'm surprised and captivated by the stories they're coming up with all on their own. And there aren't that many times where I'm like actively thinking about being a woman, or being a woman of color, or an Asian-American and thinking of a story application. But when there are those moments, certainly the rise in COVID and anti-bias attacks, and slurs, and incidents against Asian-Americans. I think during that period, it's still happening of course, and some Asian-Americans will say it's never been worse, of course, I would pitch those stories and encourage us to pursue those stories. But often because we've got these verticals dedicated to these beats, they're right there with me, if not ahead of me.

Robert Hernandez A question I want to ask is, is two parts. As a manager, how are you managing and leading a newsroom remotely? And as a manager, being concerned about their employees burning out? I'm supposed to be as a professor, this fantasy of a summer vacation. I'm supposed to be working less and having boundaries. I do not have boundaries. I'm working more over the summer. And I'm sure you and everyone on this call as a working journalists is blurring those things. As a manager, how are you leading remotely, and how are you protecting your staff from burning out? From having those boundaries when a Zoom, or a text, or a Slack is essentially 24 hours?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I think that we have meetings really set up to check in with people explicitly and specifically. They're all video conference meetings, for the most part, so that we can sort of see each other. We've had a rolling happy hour with smaller groups and teams. We've had lunch on via WebX, or teams, or Slack video. There have been some one on ones that I've set up with greater frequency because we're all remote. It's not easy. But I do think in some ways like there is a personalization to our one on ones and our meetings. And there is a renewed effort to try to stay connected. It's hard to do it. I mean, everyone's burnt out on video conferences by the end of a typical day. And you're right, there are no boundaries. But we try to encourage people to take time off. It's the summer time. We're trying to get people to take vacation. And I think that we have tried to extend whatever we can in terms of giving people breaks from the news cycle, asking them to take a day off when we think they're burnt out, asking them to raise their hand. We've had sessions around sort of self care, and burnout and the signs. It's an ongoing process. It's hard. It's hard, but I am amazed at how our teams have really pulled through. And we'll see where, you know, we still have the fall to get through, likely working remote, right?

Robert Hernandez Yeah, yeah, yeah. Thinking of all the things that are ahead, including school for my kids, for my wife, who is a special-ed teacher.

Catherine Kim Yeah. Very hard. For parents of young children, you know, and they're worried about is school going to be in or out in the fall? And I think just as overall the country hasn't figured out how to handle that. Employers have to figure out how to help those folks.

Robert Hernandez A question on a different topic is where do you find the balance between to be first to drive traffic, but also trying to make sure your story is right? To have the story right?

Catherine Kim Yeah, we sort of operate with three different teams on big national news stories. We've got a breaking news team that jumps on the news and gets it out fast. And we're fortunate enough to have a group of national reporters and enterprise reporters, and those two groups the national reporters and enterprise reporters are often thinking about the story that lands four hours later, after the big news event. And the enterprise team, the story that lands two days later, three days later, but looking at sort of a deeper look at an ongoing, emerging breaking topic.

And so we tend to, I mean, our teams are fairly tight and robust, but we tend to have this nice choreography between the breaking news team, the national team and the enterprise team on those big stories.

Robert Hernandez Going back a little bit about mental health, and we talk about staff. But the audience is also having anxiety. This question asks that many people have been experiencing anxiety after watching the reality of the news and the world around them. How do you and your team make sure your reporting on this difficult reality doesn't add to people's mental distress?

Catherine Kim Yeah, I think that's really important. We certainly, on video that could be graphic or disturbing, we always put a warning. We're very careful with any video that shows up on any platforms, that's not ours, that might auto play. I'm certainly very concerned about any kind of video that auto plays that might be graphic, and we discourage that with our social media editors. Warnings, I think, have become a fairly common practice now. Warning the audience that language might be graphic, the story may be graphic and disturbing, the video may be graphic. And, you know, it's something we're doing more and more of, and I think we're certainly aware of.

Robert Hernandez Yeah, and we've got time for one last question, and I apologize for everyone else who I couldn't get your question to. But this question comes from someone, but for those who are pivoting into this innovative space and trying to produce during times of COVID, trying to produce journalism, what advice do you have to media outlets, especially small and freelancers, on how to do journalism and reporting in this era? What could they do? What tips? What lessons have you guys learned that you would like to share with the industry in that regard?

Catherine Kim I think, you know, in some ways I would say the goal is really obviously to stand out and to play to your own individual strengths. And I think that there are times when you go really narrow, intense and deep on a particular topic, and you think it may not have mass appeal. But those are ways to stick out, and you don't need a lot of resources. It might be this incredibly compelling story about one individual. But this is the beauty of the internet and digital, a story that's deep and might appear to some as niche, can be widely read, and consumed and shared. But I think the goal is really to stand out.

Robert Hernandez Thank you, Catherine, for taking the time, all the questions that have come in, and folks who've joined us around the world. Thanks. I will hand this off to Rosental. Thank you for having me be part of ISOJ.

Catherine Kim Thanks so much. Pleasure to be with you.

Rosental Alves Wow, this was great. Thank you so much, Catherine. Thank you, Robert. Actually, I am doing wrong because I was not supposed to do start in English. I was supposed to start saying (speaks in Portuguese). So I just wanted to follow up on Robert's great tradition of using Spanish in the beginning of ISOJ to scare people who don't understand it, and how nicely Catherine mentioned that she should say a few words in Korean. Yes. I mean, this is a diverse and really global conference. That's part of the uniqueness of ISOJ. As I mentioned in the beginning, we have more than four-thousand people who registered with us at Eventbrite, and they are from dozens of countries from around the world. So, Catherine Robert, huge, thank you for being with us at ISOJ.

And stay tuned. We we have other excellent sessions coming up today, starting just in a few minutes with Google News Initiative workshops, one in English and another one in Spanish. The topic is so important, artificial intelligence and machine learning in the newsroom. So in just half an hour, this is going to start. And this afternoon, two other fascinating panels, Journalism in the Pandemic: Covering COVID now and in the Future, because it's not going to be over soon. And followed later by Disinformation and Misinformation: What Can be Done Beyond the Traditional Fact-Checking, another fascinating panel.

I also finally want to take a moment to give an incredibly huge thank you to our sponsors. Thanks to the Knight Foundation, Google News Initiative, Microsoft, Univision, the JSK fellowships at Stanford University, Trust Project, and the Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin, where we do this to celebrate the hook'em horns. All right. So thank you very much. Bye.