

New study reveals television newsroom social media practices policies lag behind

July 1 2016, by Dan Verderosa

Social media is changing the way journalists do their jobs, but policies for television journalists haven't caught up with the practice, increasing the chances that they report false information. That's one result from a study conducted by Anthony Adornato, assistant professor of journalism at Ithaca College.

According to Adornato's nationwide [survey](#) of television newsroom directors – recently published in the journal "*Electronic News*" – about 40% of newsroom directors said they had no policies in place to verify information from [social media](#), even though they use social media as a major source of news.

"While it's an everyday practice in most newsrooms to turn to social media to find stories or to get content, newsroom policies don't include procedures for verifying content from social media, which is problematic," said Adornato.

Without policies in place, a full third of those questioned indicated that their stations had aired information gained from social media that later proved to be inaccurate or false.

Social media allows [journalists](#) to keep a finger on the pulse of the communities they cover and can be a source of real-time information, Adornato says. However, he explains that social media also makes audiences expect to get information quickly, which can pressure journalists to share information before it is properly vetted.

"In the fast-paced social media world, there's a rush by news outlets to get out new information," said Adornato. "And in that there's the risk of spreading misinformation."

Adornato says a textbook example of such reporting is the initial coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013, during which much "news" from social media was reported as fact but turned out to be incorrect.

To maximize the benefits of social media and reduce the potential for inaccurate reporting, Adornato recommends that newsrooms develop clear policies for vetting [information](#) from social media sources, and that journalists do not become over-dependent on social media as a source for stories.

Adornato is currently working on a practical guide on social media for journalism students and instructors, as well as working reporters. It is due out from Sage Publications next year.

Provided by Ithaca College

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