Name Brand: The Rise of the Independent Reporter through Social Media

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Abstract

A theory of branding was applied to news reporters to assess if conditions are right for them to create a personal brand, as opposed to the news brand of their outlet. Attitudinal data were collected through a purposive survey of television and newspaper reporters across the U.S. Results suggested that while reporters are not actively trying to brand themselves, the conditions are ripe for personal branding to take place. Several environmental factors would need to change before such change could occur.

One of the hallmarks of modern society is the concept of celebrity, which has become "an omnipresent feature of contemporary society, blazing lasting impressions in the memories of all who cross its path" (Kurzman, Anderson, Key, Lee, Moloney, Silver & Van Ryn, 2007, 347). Celebrity includes the concepts of privilege and status, but goes beyond them. Sociologists argue that today, "Celebrity is status on speed. It confers honor in days, not generations; it decays over time, rather than accumulating; and it demands a constant supply of new recruits, rather than erecting barriers to entry" (Kurzman, et al., 2007, 347).

The emphasis on speed, supply and low barriers to entry have made the social media ideal for the celebrity culture. Actors, entertainers and athletes have turned to Facebook, Twitter and blogging to reach audiences and thus increase their celebrity status. Twitter, the social media platform that limits communication to 140 words or less, has become a favorite of those seeking to establish or maintain celebrity status. In the fall of 2011, singer Lady Gaga was ranked number one with 15.9 million Twitter followers; she was closely followed by singers Justin Bieber (14.5 million) and Katy Perry (12.0 million) ("The top 100," 2011).

Interestingly, several journalists made the Twitter list, including Rachel Maddow of MSNBC (ranked #197 with 1.97 million followers), Anderson Cooper of CNN (ranked #233 with 1.78 million followers) and George Stephanopoulos of ABC News (ranked #247 with 1.73 million followers). There were nine journalists ranked in the list's top 500 ("The top 100," 2011). Obviously, the popularity and audiences of entertainers dwarf those of professional journalists, but it appears that a culture has emerged in which journalists can attract large personal followings. The social media play a key role in this process, as journalists are increasingly taking advantage of their speed, supply and low barriers to entry to amass large followings. In 2009, *New York Times* technology writer David Pogue had 300,000 Twitter followers; two years later the number had grown to 1.4 million (Farhi, 2009).

Reporters have typically worked within the framework of the brand created by their media outlet. Such outlets work very hard to create an impression for the viewers that the outlet and reporter are inseparable, leading to such promotional efforts as, "News 5's Jason Jones," or "Bill Johnson of the *Times*." Formats such as "Action News" and "Eyewitness News" are common ways for television stations to brand the outlet rather than the reporter. But the social media may allow journalists to create their own distinct, powerful brand. News anchor

and personality Glenn Beck announced in 2011 that he was leaving his popular afternoon show on Fox News to create and produce his own programming. Beck transcended Fox's brand by becoming a "spectacle" according to media analysts (Feldmann, 2011). Also in 2011, reporter Laura Kuenssberg left her job as chief political correspondent at the BBC to take a similar position with rival ITV News. When Kuenssberg migrated to ITV she took with her 60,000 followers on Twitter. "The fact that Laura has a substantial following on Twitter is certainly an additional benefit for us and an important way of reaching out to our audience through social media," said an ITV representative (Bradshaw, 2011, 3).

This study investigated this possible shift from the perspective of the news reporter. Reporters from around the U.S. were surveyed to assess how they are using social media in a reporting context, how that use might be related to the development of a personal reporter brand, and the consequences of such developments. All of these issues represent emerging areas of research with little established literature.

Literature Review

Social Media and Reporting

Social media refers to the interactive media technologies that allow media consumers to create and disseminate their own content, connect with media outlets and other networked users, and voice their opinions on any number of topics. More than two billion people, roughly one out of every three on the planet, are now using the Internet, and social media usage has exploded ("Internet usage," 2011). In June of 2011, Facebook reported 683 million users while Twitter, the social-networking site that lets people share 140-character messages, is now used by 13% of all online adults in the U.S. ("Facebook users," 2011). Use of Twitter by people in the 25-34 age group has doubled since 2010 (Womack & Pulley, 2010). According to Solis (2009), "Twitter and social media represent a new, powerful platform to broadcast news, crowd source leads and stories, and expand the media's role and earned relevance in the new age of media."

Much of the attraction of social media is that they give audiences an outlet for personal interaction and a media platform to favorably promote and manage self-image through these interactions (Mehdizadeh, 2010). This empowerment includes how audiences interact with traditional media such as newspapers and television. Papper (2006) reported that more than

40% of the public has an interest in creating its own newscast and more than 60% want more interaction with television news. Recent information from the Pew Research Center ("New media," 2010) shows that half of Americans say they rely on the people around them to find out at least some of the news they need to know, while 44% of online news users get news at least a few times a week through emails, automatic updates or posts from social networking sites. In many cases, audiences are using these technologies to bypass the mainstream media and disseminate their own content to the public (Lehmann, 2006). Some research suggests this content rivals the traditional news media (Park, 2004).

The social media present an economic challenge to established media outlets in a fragmented and changing media marketplace. Younger news audiences are consistently turning away from traditional media and toward online news sources, including social media. Research suggests that while television remains the number one source for news, almost all audiences access online news on a daily basis. *Integrators*—those who get news from both traditional and online sources—"are a more engaged, sophisticated and demographically sought-after audience than those who rely on mostly traditional news sources" ("Key news," 2008).

All of these developments present powerful reasons for the traditional media to incorporate the social media as part of their news content. Harper (2010) calls it the social media revolution and notes, "Simply making information available is not enough for today's public. Today's audiences expect to be able to choose what they (consume) and most believe they should be able to contribute content and opinions, too." Media organizations have recognized this shift and have begun to incorporate social media as part of their journalism content. Gillmor (2004, 237) observed, "The collision of journalism and technology is having major consequences for three constituencies: journalists, newsmakers and the audience."

There is no definitive list of what media outlets are using social media in their reporting, but the use of social media by local televisions stations has increased sharply. In 2008, just more than a third of news directors said they were doing nothing with social media; a year later, more than 90% said they were using it at least in some way ("TV and radio," 2010). A somewhat typical example occurred in 2010 in Nashville, Tennessee when a series of violent storms hit the area and caused $1.5 billion in damage. According to Tompkins (2010), "Newspapers and TV stations made expansive use of websites and social media to help the

public understand what was unfolding." WKRN news director Matthew Zelkind said, "Twitter was huge. We did a ton of it. We got first-hand accounts and we were able to answer people's questions and sooth fears. Part of what surprised me was how much just talking and providing basic information reassured people" (Tompkins, 2010).

Branding

The concept of a personal brand has only recently gained attention (Jurgensen, 2011), and thus most branding literature relates to organizations or companies. The investigation of consumers' preference, satisfaction, and purchase behavior guides brand management (Keller, 2003). The accompanying management strategies offer companies and organizations differentiation in a cluttered marketplace (Aaker, 1991) and also gives businesses a way to stay relevant in an increasingly complex marketplace by "participating in the emerging market niches that represent future growth" (Aaker, 2004, 91). Online brand activity influences the way audiences interact and perceive the brand (Muntinga, Morreman & Smit, 2011), thus online brand management must carefully promote brand-building qualities while also targeting preferences of consumers (McGlone & Martin, 2006; Stonehouse & Minocha, 2008).

The product and non-product related attributes, benefits of consumption and attitudes towards consumption contribute to brand associations (Kaynak, Salmon & Tatoglu, 2008). The intangible qualities such as social status or identification create brand specific attributes and differentiation (Friedmann, 1986). This competitive advantage is harder to duplicate and unique to the given brand, and thus, very valuable (Miloch, 2010). Brand awareness and association create loyal consumers with identifiable preferences in behaviors and attitudes (Ross, 2007). The loyalty characteristics are rooted in the consumers, whose trust leads to involvement with a particular brand (Bowden, 2009). This involvement represents a deeper dynamic of self-image, identification, and general interest or connection with consumption (Pritchard & Funk, 2010).

Dozens of theories exist in the branding literature, but one particular model has gained widespread use. It comes from the advertiser Young & Rubicam, which developed the Brand Asset Valuator (2011). The BAV measures brand value through four broad measures: differentiation (the ability of the brand to stand apart from its competition), relevance

(appropriateness to the consumer), esteem (perceived quality) and knowledge (awareness of the brand and its identity). Taken together, differentiation and relevance create brand vitality, while esteem and knowledge lead to brand stature. Vitality and stature create brand value (Figure 1).
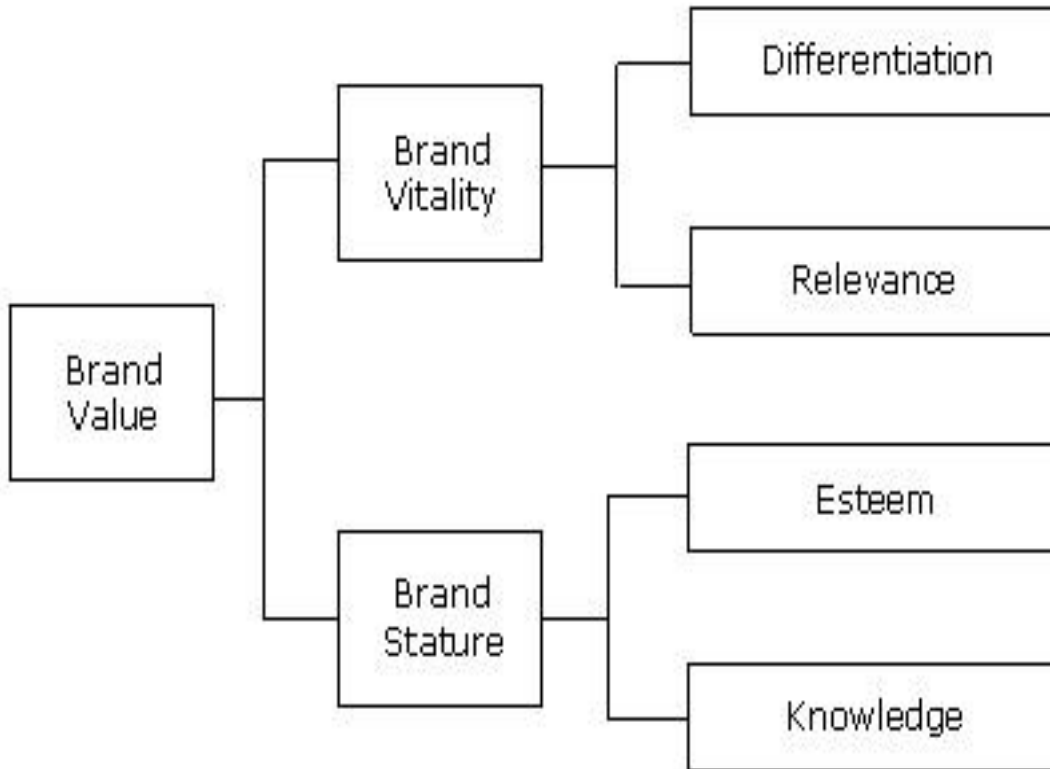

Figure 1: Young & Rubicam Brand Asset Valuator

Young & Rubicam calls its approach revolutionary, adding, "It is predictive, focusing on leading indicators instead of lagging. It is exhaustive in every way, size and scope. Most importantly, it evaluates a brand in the entire world of brands, not in its 'category'" ("BAV," 2003).

According to the BAV model, it is the relationships between the four measures that give a picture of brand health. The combination of differentiation and relevance forms brand strength, a leading indicator in a brand's ability to exist as a viable entry in the marketplace. The combination of esteem and knowledge forms brand stature, which captures a brand's pervasiveness in the marketplace. Branding growth can occur when differentiation is greater

than relevance and/or esteem is greater than knowledge. Otherwise, the brand stagnates ("BAV," 2003).

Methodology and Research Questions

The study was conducted through two related analytical procedures. The first was a case study of WFAA television in Dallas, Texas. One of the researchers was embedded at WFAA for two weeks in the summer of 2011 as part of a faculty development grant through the National Association of Television Program Executives. WFAA is owned by the E.H. Belo Corporation, which has earned a reputation as an organization on the cutting edge of news and journalism. In 2011, WFAA won two Murrow Awards and a Peabody Award for news reporting. Since 2000, Belo television stations have been honored with a total of 37 Murrow Awards, more than any other television group in the nation ("Five Belo," 2011).

This investigation was conducted along the lines suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967, 23) in which "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence, and then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. These conceptual categories can then be explored in other comparison groups, which may support the categorical concept or suggest modifications to make it more generalizable." Observational data was used to generate conceptual categories related to reporting, social media and personal branding.

At WFAA, reporters were specifically asked about their use of social media reporting. Senior reporter David Schechter said, "If you're a young journalist moving from market to market, you could maybe bring some of these people with you and develop a brand over time. Your brand becomes somewhat important; not just the TV brand" (D. Schechter, personal communication, July 11, 2011). Reporter Jonathan Betz added, "There is a demand for each reporter to have a Twitter and Facebook presence. Is that the best approach? I don't know. Is that going to build viewers? I don't think anyone knows that at this point" (J. Betz, personal communication, July 18, 2011).

These and other discussions, taken in context of the literature, led to the research questions:

RQ$_1$: Are reporters using the social media to create their own personal brands?

RQ$_2$: Whether or not reporters are trying to create brands, do their attitudes suggest that branding can take place?

RQ$_3$: Are there distinctions for reporters based on demographic factors such as outlet size, type and/or professional experience in regards to using the social media for branding?

RQ$_4$: How do newspaper reporters compare to television reporters in terms of using the social media for branding?

These questions were investigated through a purposive survey directed to newspaper and television reporters across the country. Reporters were determined by looking at news markets across the country based on television designated market areas (markets one through 210). A random number generator was used to select 100 areas from the total DMA list. Television stations were determined through Station Index (http://www.stationindex.com/tv/), while newspaper outlets were determined though U.S. Newspaper List (http://www.usnpl. com/). From these 100 areas, outlet websites were checked, and all outlets that had newscasts, and included reporters with active Twitter and/or Facebook accounts were included in the sample. Active was defined as posting activity related to news or reporting within the past month. This yielded a sample of 4, 548 reporters, who were then invited by e-mail to take part in an online questionnaire designed to measure the research questions.

The invitations were sent in the fall of 2011, and follow-up invitations were sent two weeks after the initial contact. Of the original sample, 327 invitations were returned as blocked or undeliverable, reducing the final sample size to 4,221. The invitations yielded 230 total responses, for a response rate of 5%. A demographic breakdown of the response can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of Response (N = 230)

Category	Percentage Response
Gender	
Male	55
Female	45
Circulation size	
Small	33
Medium	43
Large	24

Professional Experience

0-5 years	33
6-10 years	17
11-19 years	17
> 20 years	33

Type of Reporter

General assignment	41
Sports	12
Business	9
Politics	9
Education	5
Arts/Entertainment	3
Religion	1
All others	20

Type of social media most frequently used

Twitter	48
Facebook	36
Blog	12
All others	4

Note: Size defined as small (DMA < 151), medium (DMA 51-150) and large (DMA >50).

Results

Reporters were asked to rank their motivations for using the social media in the context of their reporting on a scale of one to five, with one representing "least important" and five representing "most important" (RQ_1). Their response to the option "create a personal brand" ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.35$) suggests they are not aggressively branding themselves. Since three would represent the neutral position, a response of four or above would suggest that reporters were actively involved in personal branding. A one-sample t-test using a test mean of four indicated that branding was not a significant motivation for reporters in their social media use ($t = -4.99$, df = 227, $p < .001$).

Reporters were also asked to evaluate the components of the BAV on a scale of one to five, with one representing "strongly disagree" and five representing "strongly agree." Using a similar one-sample t-test and the same test mean of four, reporters were asked if their social media reporting was unique/differentiated ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.20$), if it was important/relevant to the audience ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.15$), if it was of high quality/esteem ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.13$) and if it received strong, positive feedback/awareness ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.10$). These responses were significantly under the test mean of four in three of the categories. The only exception was quality of reporting ($t = -1.47$, df $= 226$, $p < .08$).

When looking at RQ$_2$, differentiation was significantly lower than relevance ($t = -4.65$, df $= 227$, $p < .001$), and esteem was significantly higher than awareness ($t = 7.56$, df $= 226$, $p < .001$). This was further broken down to examine those reporters who placed a high priority on branding, by looking at response to the motivational choice "to create a personal brand." A linear regression was conducted based on the response to this motivation, loading the factors associated with the BAV. The result indicated that uniqueness/differentiation was the strongest predictive factor, $\square\square = .30$, $t(226) = 4.34$, $p < .001$, and was greater than importance/relevance ($\square = .24$, $p < .004$).

When looking at different groups of reporters in terms of their use of social media (RQ$_3$), several interesting patterns emerged. On the same questions regarding motivation for personal branding and components of the BAV, larger media outlets had higher mean responses than smaller outlets in every instance. These differences were significant in terms of uniqueness, $F = 3.16$ (2, 220), $p < .03$, and importance/relevance, $F = 3.03$ (2, 220), $p < .03$. There were no significant differences observed in regards to type of reporting or gender, although women typically had higher mean responses than men on branding issues.

Based on previous research related to the adoption of media technologies (Rogers, 1995), it was not surprising that the most experienced reporting group (those with 20+ years of experience) had the lowest mean responses to social media and branding issues. However, the next-most experienced group (11-19 years professional experience) had the highest means in all the branding response categories, and this difference was significant for motivation to use

social media for personal branding, $F = 4.01$ (3, 224), $p < .004$. This same 11-19 group was also more likely to use social media reporting to interact with audiences, $F = 3.09$ (3, 224), $p < .02$. The least experienced group (0-5 years experience) was more likely to use social media reporting for gathering story ideas, $F = 5.93$ (3, 224), $p < .001$, and keeping abreast of news, $F = 6.72$ (3, 223), $p < .001$. The group with 6-10 years of experience was significantly more likely to use social media reporting to promote work on other media platforms, $F = 5.02$ (3, 244), $p < .004$.

The type of social media used by reporters also turned out to be important. As a group, reporters most often used Twitter for social media reporting, followed by Facebook and blogging (Table 1). For those reporters who indicated they were using the social media for personal branding, Twitter was used significantly more than Facebook, $F = 7.19$ (3, 221), $p < .001$). Regarding the BAV, Twitter users were more likely to believe their reporting was unique (differentiation) compared to those who used Facebook or blogging, $F = 3.48$ (3, 221), $p < .01$), and were more likely to believe that their social media reporting was of importance, $F = 2.59$ (3, 221), p $< .03$.

Reporters were also asked about the level of managerial support/control of social media at their outlet on a scale of one to five, with one representing no support/control and five representing total support/control. Results indicated that on the whole, reporters do not think outlets are controlling their social media reporting ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.14$) and believe that their outlets are somewhat supportive of their social media reporting ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .88$). High levels of managerial support correlated strongly with personal branding. This includes motivation for personal branding ($r = .16$, $p < .02$), and the BAV components of uniqueness ($r = .24$, $p < .001$), quality of reporting ($r = .21$, p $< .001$), audience feedback ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) and importance to the audience ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). High levels of management control of social media reporting were negatively correlated to motivation for personal branding, but not significantly.

Regarding RQ$_4$, newspaper reporters were significantly less motivated than other groups[1] to use their social media for branding purposes, $t = -3.33$, df = 197, $p < .001$. They were also

[1] Because of low response from web/online reporters, that group was combined with television reporters for more accurate analysis.

less likely to believe that their social media reporting was unique (t = -2.50, df = 197, p < .01), and that they received strong, positive feedback from their social media reporting (t = -2.40, df = 196, p < .01). Compared to other groups, newspaper reporters were significantly less likely to believe that social media reporting was important (t = -2.24, df = 199, p < .02) and less likely to use it frequently (t = -3.26, df = 198, p < .001).

Discussion

On the surface, it does not appear that newspaper reporters are actively involved in branding. Looking at the BAV model, their overall response suggests that relevance is higher than differentiation, and since differentiation is the starting point for all branding, the process really has not gotten off the ground. This is especially true when comparing newspaper reporters to television and web/online reporters, and large outlets to medium and small sized ones. The BAV suggests that when "knowledge is greater than esteem, consumers have no motivation to listen. When relevance is higher than differentiation, the brand has become commoditized and uniqueness had faded" ("BAV," 2003).

While many respondents said they were involved in social media reporting, few of them specifically mentioned branding in their qualitative responses. One reporter noted, "It (Twitter) does not drive much traffic to my blog or our website. It's also generated limited crowd sourced responses to questions I've posted. It reaches a very limited set of our audience and is largely members of the media talking to each other and an avenue for PR folks to reach us." Another reporter was even blunter: "I'm 54, hip enough. I just refuse allow the latest genre or "platform" determine what work I pursue or how I do it. I'm not trying to build a brand; I'm trying to tell good stories. I refuse to call news a product or content."

However, there is an important distinction between actively or purposely seeking branding, and the ability to brand. Favorable conditions and attitudes for branding certainly exist, even for the overall group, which indicated low levels of differentiation compared to relevance, but higher levels of esteem in relation to knowledge. "When esteem is greater than knowledge, consumers have motivation to find out more about your brand. The brand is better liked than known," ("BAV," 2003) creating a situation in which the audience is eager to find out more about the brand.

For the group highly motivated to brand, differentiation was greater than relevance and esteem was greater than awareness; both conditions are essential for brand growth. According to the BAV model, "When differentiation is greater than relevance, the brand has room to grow."

The two strongest factors of response, uniqueness and importance, further suggest that a newspaper reporter brand would have very strong brand strength/vitality, which is "a leading indicator in a brand's ability to exist as a viable entity in the marketplace. (It) allows the brand to both defend itself from competition and generate margin, earnings and economic value" ("BAV," 2003).

Several factors could be holding back reporters in terms of personal branding, including a distrust of social media. "Social media as a source of reporting is highly overrated," noted one respondent. "It's mostly gossip, speculation, polemics and incomplete--the Wild West for reliability and trusted sources." There has long been a tension in journalism between technological adoption and traditional practice, which Huesca calls the "ambivalent sense of the impact of new technologies on traditional practices" (2000, 7). Since personal branding is relatively new, it has not had time to overcome this tension and become an accepted part of reporter practice. Newspaper reporters have traditionally relied on ingrained work roles and habits, and resisted changes to these routines (Singer, 2004). Daniels and Hollifield (2002) found that newsroom professionals react to change with resistance and negativity. Giles (1995) argued that journalists resist change because it threatens traditions and news routines.

The continuing emphasis on using social media reporting for promotion rather than interaction also delays branding. Promoting work on other platforms—such as using Facebook to alert audiences about an upcoming story on the evening news—simply cycles the audience back through the media outlet. Audience interaction builds brand knowledge, and eventually leads to brand stature. One respondent noted,, "My newspaper does NOT (capitalization original) want us to use social media to connect with readers (believes in a separation of online and print reporters) but most of us do it anyway. We're mostly low profile." Added Jonathan Betz of WFAA, "It's absolutely crucial to engage (the audience). There's no point in doing it if you're not going to engage. You just can't put a link on the Facebook page and ignore it. People want to talk to you, not only about the story but the

behind the scenes aspects of it. If someone comments, you really should comment back" (J. Betz, personal communication, July 18, 2011).

When looking at total response, management control was not considered a significant issue, but several reporters mentioned that their individual outlets were too restrictive, and the reality is that more and more media companies are regulating how their reporters use social media. In 2011, the Associated Press released new guidelines that forbade its reporters from expressing any opinion on Twitter. When he heard the news, reporter David Carr of the *New York Times* tweeted, "AP to staff: Don't retweet anything with an opinion. Good luck with that" (Watling, 2011). "My company regulates social media way too much," wrote one survey respondent, "so much so that my co-workers are afraid to ask for a Twitter account/Facebook account (yes, we have to ask permission) out of fear they would do something accidentally that would get them fired. I wish I had more freedom to use social media more in my work." A shift in managerial attitudes related to social media control would seem to be an important factor in personal reporter branding.

Age will certainly play a role in the development of personal branding. As the older, more resistant group of reporters begins to fade from the scene, they will be replaced by groups much more accepting of social media, and thus, more open to branding. Given that the group with 11-19 years of professional experience placed such a high value on social media reporting, this transition may not take a long as many have predicted. However, the less experienced groups will need to move away from promotion and toward interaction to make the transition complete.

The strongest outlet for social media branding appears to be Twitter, which newspaper reporters use frequently and to which they have ascribed high levels of both differentiation and knowledge. Twitter allows reporters to break outside their own media outlet and potentially create their own brand. As a result, "Some well-known news-media names now have Twitter followings that are almost as large as the circulation of their newspapers or viewership of their TV shows" (Farhi, 2011).

 It appears that television reporters are much further ahead in the personal branding process compared to print reporters, which is not necessarily surprising. Tradition holds that

newspaper reporters are somewhat interchangeable parts of a collective effort. By contrast, television news, with its emphasis on anchors and news personalities, has a much more engrained history with branding. Bill Hoffman of Cox Media Group, sees "a world out there where there is more local television news coverage going on by strong news brands than ever before," (Marszalek, 2011) a reality that suggests it may take awhile for newspaper reporters to catch up. In the November 2011 list, 10 journalists ranked in the top 600 in terms of total followers on Twitter; nine of those were primarily television reporters, while only one worked for a newspaper ("The top 100," 2011).

Limitations/Future Research

The researchers acknowledge that low response and response rate make generalization much more difficult. In addition, the sample included only those reporters who work at local media outlets. The attitudes and experiences of reporters at national outlets, such as *Time* magazine or Fox News Channel, might be different. Finally, as with any survey methodology, those who hold extreme positions on social media reporting, either positive or negative, might have been more inclined to respond.

Future research could focus on several areas, and a content analysis of reporter social media seems like a logical next step. A content analysis could determine what value reporters place on the components of the BAV, especially in terms of uniqueness, quality and feedback. A more thorough investigation of how reporters are using the social media for reporting would add valuable information. The data here suggested (although not significantly) that women were more inclined to use the social media for audience interaction compared to men. Understanding the motivations for social media reporting could help explain branding patterns. There also appears to be a legal component to this situation that bears investigation. Specifically, does the newspaper own the rights to a reporter's work and would that keep reporters from personal branding? Attorney Neil Sibley believes that if an employee was required to engage in social media reporting as part of the job, "That database of followers must properly belong to the employer" (Bradshaw, 2011, 3). Reporters are just as convinced they own the material. "I'm not giving ownership over," said one television reporter at ITN in Britain. "I've spent years building up a group of people interested in what I put on Twitter" (Bradshaw, 2011, 3).

Conclusions

While personal branding might not yet be in full flower, there are indications that at the very least the ground appears fertile for growth. Laura Kuenssberg's case may signal a shift in the dynamic. The social media, with their emphasis on interaction and creating online relationships, may be helping individual reporters create their own brand that supersedes that of the media outlet. "It's a fairly widespread problem (in that) the age of social media does encourage people to express their personal brands online," said Robin Grant, managing director of the marketing agency We Are Social. "In many cases it's hard to work out if people are trying to raise their own brand or their employer's brand" (Bradshaw, 2011, 3).

While Kuenssberg created a brand and didn't even know it, Bill Simmons was much more proactive. Simmons began as an independent blogger, writing and distributing his own online sports material in Boston. His content was aimed mostly at fans like himself. "The main thing I noticed was that none of them (sports writers) were writing about stuff I talked about with my friends," said Simmons. "The stuff we were doing (going to Vegas, spending 10 hours a day watching football, playing sports video games) wasn't represented." ESPN noticed Simmons' audience appeal and hired him in 2003. He now has 1.5 million followers on Twitter, and his ESPN column averages 1.4 million page views and 460,000 unique visitors per month. Simmons has also leveraged his brand into a popular line of books, online articles and podcasts.

Where is the next Bill Simmons? It could be an anonymous newspaper reporter currently working at a small circulation daily. Branding is the key, and right now reporters are standing outside the door poised to open the lock.

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