**The Impact of Multimedia Journalism on Ageism in Television News – Commodification and the Anxiety of Aging in the Newsroom**

**Abstract**

Television news corporations changed their work roles from a tradition of team production to a ‘one-man-band’ method of production. Many veteran reporters are hesitant to accept the new methodology. This study intended to examine how television news reporters adjusted to more work demands and new technologies. A questionnaire was combined with participant observation for analysis. The participants included 289 television journalists, selected from local affiliates throughout the United States. The results indicate that there is preference for younger workers and burnout occurring to all age groups. This study explores the commodification of the profession in terms of labor value.

 **Introduction**

Television news reporting has a different production process than newspaper reporting. Research often overlooks the methods and concentrates on the final product’s audience, textual analysis or platform. This study focuses on the television news production process and the impact on reporters, specifically how age factors into the commodification of news.

Communication research often looks at the macro-level of the communication process (Mosco and Fuchs, 2016), the agendas of information construction and delivery (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), often examining the industrial changes that impact audiences, such as internet advances and social media interactions (Diamond, 1991). Some may say that the examination of news agendas and the impact on the audience is a necessity (Barkin, 2016).

This study implies that the work and careers of professional journalists, because of labor power given to their position, impact the agendas, and the technological advances which ultimately affect audiences. The workers are the ‘cell form.’ This study looks at the micro-level of the communication chain, specifically where the construction of information occurs. The workers are not robotic, nor insular to the labor process, nor is the final product divorced from the worker’s labor and workplace. Reporters, photographers, editors, producers, and assignment managers contribute to the news stories, but their contributions are not seen.

The multimedia journalist (MMJ) model challenges the traditional methods of television news gathering by expecting one person to perform journalism that previously required a team of at least two. The transition from the field crew to the solo journalist was difficult for experienced reporters.

Traditional television reporters were specialists, concentrating on the accuracy and depth of their reporting, while synchronously the photographers would concentrate on gathering needed material, and editing the video. The work of the two specialists was extremely efficient in many ways. Skilled reporters are expected to deskill, to the level of the MMJ, when they use technical skills and learn new routines. Veteran television news reporters and news photographers can be considered ‘old dogs’ with routinized methods. The Multimedia Journalist (MMJ) model challenges the traditional methods of newsgathering because the model expects one person to perform the tasks of others in order to be self-sufficient.

Older television reporters felt angst and frustration during the transition to the new model. Many older, non-MMJ reporters were told they must become MMJs. They were told they must do more work, by themselves, or face the consequences. For most experienced television reporters, the “one-man-band” was considered the entry-level position and with more experience they were promoted to the position that they wished to obtain, concentrating on journalism not equipment. Now, they felt they were being demoted, their status removed, and they were back where they started their careers. In the panic, the experienced reporters and photographers attempted paradigm repair to maintain their traditional roles. The workers teamed up to protect each other by pressuring management to keep the status quo. They did not learn the new skills and they were criticized for their inability to learn or adapt.

Perez and Cremedas (2014) examined the reactions of experienced workers to the changes in their profession and the difficult transition of learning new skills. They found it demoralizing for many older workers. The older reporters feel the new position demeans them, lowering their position in the hierarchy. Younger individuals may be able to perform multiple tasks more readily. For the younger journalist, technical skills may be more beneficial than experience. Filling the MMJ roles with inexperienced workers seems counter-intuitive, in contrast to hiring employees with more experience. But technical skills are necessary for the “one-man-band,” or MMJ, to be productive and many older workers do not possess the necessary technical abilities to work on their own.

Requiring employees to learn new technology and new methodologies is common in any workplace. However, many businesses do not train older employees to learn new skills. Instead, the companies rely on hiring younger, tech-savvy, less experienced reporters to fill their production needs. This study revealed that there are very few MMJs over the age of 36. This study intends to examine whether ageism appears in the hiring practices and cultures of television multimedia journalism newsrooms.

Ageism in an MMJ newsroom is subtle, based more on perceived lack of technical skills associated with age, but this subtle form of ageism is changing the newsroom culture. McCann and Giles (2002) found ageism to be more than job loss or restructuring work roles. Ageism can be found in the ageist discourse and attitudes. There is a demonstrated bias when rating the cognitive ability of older people. They found that 25% of companies they studied believe that the “mental demands of work” as a factor affecting the decisions to hire or retrain workers over the age of 55.

A sample of 172 MMJs, working in TV newsrooms across the country, in various size markets, were asked questions about the status of their profession. The results revealed that of the 172 respondents only 9 were over the age of 36. Newsrooms appear to be weighted toward younger individuals which creates many dynamics worth exploration. This study focuses on the work model. This study challenges positivism, that the multimedia journalist exists because of modernity or ideal considerations. MMJ eliminated experienced workers, commodifying youth as an asset, devaluing experience, while raising the labor value of employees but not necessarily the quality of journalism.

**Literature Review**

Kuprius (2003) stipulates local television news satisfies the market-driven requirements of business. There is a profit motive driving the decisions of news management. Staffing and news coverage is predicated upon productivity and expense. Multimedia journalism is accepted throughout the television news industry, currently 90% of the newsrooms in market DMAs 50 to 210 use mostly MMJs or some form of MMJ.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The widespread use of MMJ is what Marx and Engel (1848) would consider 'seeping commodification.' Seeping commodification is described as capitalism's need to revolutionize the means of production resulting in influence on the social forms as well. Marx viewed commodity form, such as the employee, as a ‘cell form’ of capitalism. Manipulating the value of the worker reconstructs the corporate organism to serve the accumulation of capital, enabling further expansion and reproduction (Prodnik, 2014). This study will look at how corporations increase labor power by changing cultural and technological paradigms within television newsrooms.

Commodification of the news product begins with the paradigm shift of workplaces from one method of production to another. Mosco and Fuchs (2016) viewed commodification as the process of modernity. Technology benefits from cheaper labor, to mass produce, like cell phones, as the technology advances and the marketplace expands. The acceleration of technological advancement depends on supply and demand. While the product and its consumption are examined, in many ways, the employee is forgotten in the ‘logic of acceleration.’ Mosco and Fuchs (2016) believed that what is identified as new is how the drive to accelerate is taken to its logical end in the conditions of ubiquity and immediacy. Meanwhile, the workers are left in the dust if they cannot transform their work to adjust to the acceleration.

The necessity for more products with fewer journalists, especially MMJs who work alone, highlights the counter-intuitive nature of hiring and supporting the MMJ model instead of the traditional crew. Doing more with less, may be the managerial mandate since the Great Recession of 2007-2009 (Winslow, 2016). The commodity of the ‘cell form’ is reconstructed by the MMJ to gather news with less resources. Hemmingway (2006) and Lee (2015) view the challenges to modern journalism are in the processes of acquiring news. ‘The quest for speed is a double-edged sword (Lee, 2015).’ The ability to perform quality journalism is threatened by the resistance to change to both the performance of journalism and the technology utilized by journalists. The balance of speed, practice, and technology requires an evaluation of the actors (Hemmingway, 2006). The actors or forces impact the efficiency of producing news. Work routines and technologies change the ‘news work' and the ‘news texts' (Erdal, 2011).

Fortunati (1995), describing the work of housewives and prostitutes, explored Marx’s labor process theory, examining the commodity produced by work. She states that it is the capacity to work, rather than an alienable object that produces labor power but also that the power does not exist outside of the individual who contains it. Television news workers don’t produce an alienable object, something the audience can touch. The delivery of their processed material is the commodity and labor power exist in the capacity to produce it. The power of the worker changes with the capacity to do work. As technology changes, as workers age, the ability to adapt to maintain their power is essential for survival. Many workers say, ‘adapt or die’ or ‘an old dog must learn new tricks.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

It is important to acknowledge that the ability of the journalist to do their job well is dependent on multiple factors and that professional knowledge is distributed and negotiated in ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) and that professional practices are ‘distributed’ rather than stored in a person’s mind (Fenwick et al., 2017).

The transformation of skills requires experienced reporters or ‘old dogs’ to confront their habits and rituals.

Older workers are vulnerable during changes in production methods. According to Ciutiene and Railaite (2015), population ageing requires changes in the human resources strategies and labor market policy. For these reasons the older group of workers are the main victims of the organization’s downsizing or restructuring. In this sense, the MMJ was a restructuring of the company with additional downsizing.

Age discrimination activism in late 1960s materialized in the form of the ‘Grey Panthers,’ an activist group of senior citizens attempting to mobilize and protect their jobs. It is during that time that the term ‘ageism’ was first used in an article printed in *The Washington Post* in 1969 and credited to American psychologist Dr. Robert Butler but ageism, as a concept, existed long before. The cultural adoration of strength and beauty coincides with loss of strength and beauty of old age (Glover and Branine, 2018). These attitudes are confirmed and reinforced with ‘structural ageism,’ which operates to determine the functions and rules of everyday life. In the case of the TV journalist, the corporations determine the MMJ functions and the rules associated with the methodology. Many older workers face compulsory retirement, enforcement of productivity over quality, while their social status is diminished in a culture where old age is viewed as a sign of diminished skills (Glover et. al, 2018). On-air talent’s physical appearance is marketable, a commodity that loses value. The labor power of the older worker is perceived as lesser because of culture’s prejudice and assumptions.

Roscigno (2010) verified that age discrimination is common in many companies. He found that, ‘In the face of corporate restructuring and downsizing, replacing older workers with younger workers may be seen by some employers as a cost-savings technique, insomuch as pension payouts can be circumvented and wages decreased. Moreover, health benefit payouts can be held in check, and promotions and on-the-job training opportunities can be reserved for younger workers who are often seen as cheaper and more worth the long-term investment (Roscigno, 2010). He believes there are consequences, particularly for higher skilled older workers, including significant job displacement and involuntary exit from the labor market. Plus there is a significant downward mobility upon reemployment.

The career of an MMJ is similar to other applied technology occupations. The success of the worker is dependent on the technical skill of an MMJ and many are frustrated by their dependency on their technical skills. Fouad, Chang, Wan, and Singh (2017) identified many reasons for women to leave the engineering field. They used the Theory of Work Adjustment created by Dawis and Lofquist (1984) to label the values of the employee. They found that the women in the study left engineering because of 1) poor and/or inequitable compensation, poor working conditions, demanding work environments, 2) unmet achievement needs that reflected a dissatisfaction with effective utilization of their skills, and 3) lack of adequate opportunities for advancement. The findings can be applied to the MMJ model. The working conditions of the MMJ are strenuous, journalists are poorly paid, and advancement within the company is limited.

Gatekeeping of information is meant to increase efficiency (Zampa, 2017). A less age diverse newsroom, pressured to produce, may ignore issues outside their view or scope.

According to Cohen (2002), the pressure from journalists not to negotiate the terms of the news environment, to maintain traditional journalistic values, is an important market externality factoring against compromising pressures from advertisers. The increased pressure of the MMJ may be tipping the scale from rigorous journalistic enterprise to convenient commercial or audience driven news. Cohen (2002) believes these challenges expose the “seams” that illuminate the tensions between news routines and market driven journalism. The workload and routines are a “seam” mitigated by efficiency and increased production. One of the results of the industrial revolution was the importance of adopting organizational practices intended to promote the efficient use of time (Pfeffer et al., 2012).

MacDonald and Levy (2016) believed psychosocial factors can predict job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement. They concluded that age discrimination at work was not a significant predictor, but aging anxiety and social support at work were significant predictors of job engagement. Some of that anxiety comes from the stereotypes associated with the negative perceptions of aging. For the experienced reporter, the management expectations that they learn new tasks likely heighten the anxiety. Gaines and Domagalski (1996), explains this heightened anxiety are meant to control the employee and affirm a hegemonic state. They consider this to be a ‘managerial control imperative.’ Older journalists with different, and somewhat dated, technical experiences, struggle with adapting to the MMJ model. Those workers view their particular strengths of writing or interviewing challenged by the interference of technology. Older journalists seem to suffer from technophobia in learning how to use new equipment, particularly the Internet (Ruggiero, 2004).

Maslach et al. (1987) maintained that older workers, not necessarily those with greater longevity on the job, tend to suffer from burnout less frequently, finding that with increased age, comes stability and maturity, and a balanced perspective on work and life issues. Therefore, a younger workforce may mean a less stable workforce within news organizations. Inevitably, (Scott, 2005), (Anderson, 2004), (Pavlik, 2004) believe the work structures in news organizations are altered in response to the economic and financial concerns of corporations owning the news organizations.

**The Challenges of the Profession**

According to Pew Research (2018), the number of Americans who rely on local TV for their news fell by 9% from 46% to 37% from 2016 to 2017. At the same time, revenue increased by 10% in 2016 and is projected to continue to maintain and grow in the next 5 years. Much of the revenue growth is projected to be the result of retransmission fees. Concurrently, the number of local TV newsrooms has declined according to RTDNA (2017). Meanwhile, the amount of local TV news programming has hit a record high (Pew Research, 2018). In contrast, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a decline in jobs for reporters, correspondents and broadcast news analysts of 9% between 2016 and 2026. Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013) pessimistically determined that the expanded new hours and shrinking staff has led to weakened investigative reporters, the quality of news production and the utility of local news for the community.

The Federal Communication Commission changed decades-long rules on ownership to increase the number of stations a company can own in a single market (Kang, 2017). The change allows a single company to have reach and influence in a majority of US households. Sinclair Broadcast Group is singled out as a conservative news organization with a political agenda[[3]](#footnote-3). Strahl (2016) and Jackson (2009) joined the voices of McChesney and Scott (2005) in a rebuke of the current tide of corporate ownership of local television news. They each believe the rising expectations of capitalism do not give corporations an excuse for neglecting the social responsibility of the press.

Consolidation of ownership impacts employment. Albarran (2010) identified the trend of trimming payroll during the 1990s. The large number of mergers and acquisitions often resulted in a reduction of employees to eliminate duplication of job functions. The bottom line for many companies’ rests in payroll. The employees are the most expensive part of the business operation. Eliminating redundancies within the company helps to lower costs. The use of multimedia journalists was intended to lower costs.

The corporate offices have an impact on the factory floor of news. Commodification of the ‘cell form’ is assigned in the corporate office and applied in the newsroom. The labor value of the MMJ rises in capitalistic standards, not by journalistic standards (Jackson, 2009). In the wake of eliminating job functions, people were deemed redeemed redundant, specifically the photographer. The photographer was no longer essential when technology decreased the size and added mobility of the video camera.

Many researchers view the changes in the newsgathering model as economically driven. The beginning of the convergence era was full of doubt and the motivations for change was beneficial to journalism. Scott (2004) and others warned that there are alterations to work structures in news organizations in response to economic and financial concerns of corporations owning the news organizations (Anderson, 2004), (Pavlik, 2004). Killebrew (2005) declared that the economic pressures at the time and in the future would cause the industry to change the production process.

Smith (2015) relies on Marx's view of the labor process as a transformation process. Labor power of the worker enters a production process in which labor is realized to produce a tangible commodity or service that contains a use and exchange value. There is also a surplus value that the employer takes as a reward. Management balances the skills required to produce surplus value. Higher skills can mean not only increased productivity but also higher costs. The levels of skills are important to both managers and workers (Smith, 2015).

Journalism has always been a ‘stopwatch culture’ and a very competitive profession (Schlesinger, 1980). Today’s journalists are expected to perform more work in the same period of time compared to the prior generations because of the expansion of technologies[[4]](#footnote-4). Access to material, collection and distribution are streamlined by computers, software, and web applications. For better or worse, researchers (Kolodzy, 2006, Hemmingway, 2008) conclude that technology is credited for the changes to the traditional news gathering paradigm, but economic demands are complicit. The traditional television broadcasting model is threatened by more Internet and web-based programming and news sources. At the same time, audiences appear to be shifting their habits away from local TV (Pew Research, 2018).

Today’s journalist is expected to be maintaining a social media presence while on the job as well as creating “speed-driven journalism” (Lee, 2015). The traditional tasks are required of an MMJ, but the non-traditional tasks are filling in production roles when needed, especially live production. Posting on Facebook and Twitter is a common practice and a requirement of the MMJ and is widely adopted for news coverage (Hermida, 2010). The MMJ copes with the exchanges of traditional and non-traditional tasks by creating routines. Many times, technology such as social media changes the conventions of the profession (Lowrey, 2006) and in the adaptive process individuals are expected to take on the new and old methodologies. The rise of digital technology “contributes to the industry’s obsession with speed,” and journalists are expected to “do more at a faster pace, giving rise to new expectations and practices in the news industry. (Lee, 2015, p. 217).”

Skill levels are defined by the tasks of the multimedia journalist (Aviles et al, 2008, pp. 229-230) and expertise rises the valorization of the employee. More labor from an individual will increase their value to the company. Concurrently, the critics view the multiskilling leads to a deskilling of the journalist. Braverman (1974) detailed the Labor Process theory as a way to describe the surplus-value of workers under capitalism invisible to workers. Braverman viewed "deskilling" as a way to enslave workers into a production process and saw evidence of the deskilling on the shop floor among blue-collar workers. He predicted that one day the white-collar jobs would similarly be affected. A reporter that must concentrate on audio levels, video quality, shot composition, while interviewing and collecting information will more likely be deskilled in the production process.

**RQ1: What is the relationship between age and experience in the proliferation of MMJ?**

The veterans are leaving the industry and the newsrooms are filling with younger MMJs, working alone, and without any mentorship in the field. Speed and efficiency take precedence over researched and investigated reporting. Press releases are eagerly accepted because they provide quick coverage and maximize efficiency. Originally, the concept of the MMJ inspired ideas of increasing the staff and broadening the reach of the news organization (Hemmingway, 2006).

McManus (1994) identified the tenets of market-driven journalism at the meso-level where the relations between journalists and their newsrooms constrain newsgathering. The routines of newsgathering are impacted by balancing journalistic practice with businesses practices (Cohen, 2002). The consolidation of work did not result in larger staff or team production, it created isolated employees. From 2007 to 2011, 1300 broadcast newsroom positions were eliminated (Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013). Corporate buyouts are encouraging older workers to retire early. In 2016, Tegna Corporation offered buyouts to workers aged 55 and older with 15 years of experience. Kevin Eck (TVSpy, 2016, 25 April) reported 82 employees took the buyout. The employees included reporters, photographers, producers, engineers, accountants, and a general manager. Reporter Glenn Counts, 60, took the buyout from WCNC-TV in 2016 but returned to broadcast television with a job at WSOC-TV. News Anchor Lee Van Ameyde, WZZM-TV, accepted the TEGNA buyout but refused to say he was retiring despite the station management’s claim he was retiring.

John McManus (1994) predicted that technology would change the news environment and the news values of journalists utilizing the new technology (Cohen, 2001). The technological change challenged the existing paradigm of most local television newsrooms from the ‘team’ approach of newsgathering, a reporter and a photographer, to the ‘solo’ approach of the MMJ. There are fewer photographers and editors used in production today. The elimination of individuals from behind the scenes interrupts the newsroom culture as much as the hybrid production method disrupts the reporter’s ability to efficiently gather stories.

Technology is often cited as the reason for the changes in the news production model, but technology is often viewed as the excuse for eliminating jobs. Remler, Waisanen, & Gabor (2014) viewed journalism as a business model that is disintegrating and hemorrhaging jobs. They point out that the more labor-intensive a form of journalism, and the smaller the market it serves, the greater the cost per consumer. Therefore, the rise of the MMJ, in larger markets, makes perfect sense. The labor value rises as the cost per consumer drops. And the form of journalism is increasingly vulnerable due to the amount of time required to produce a single product of airtime, therefore streamlining the process in the form of press releases, Facebook posts, or Twitter feeds reduces the work of investigation.

The change of the job for many older reporters, the physical or cognitive changes, is a significant barrier whereas the younger employee does not see it as change but as the profession in itself. Job crafting defined by Wrzensniewski and Dutton (2001) may be applied to the changes in the work model of the MMJ.

The MMJ lifestyle requires more isolation and independence. It is difficult to draw definitive causal conclusions between the job and specific stress variables. Young and old seek a level of life satisfaction but each group has different needs. According to Segrin (2003), life satisfaction varies as people grow older. The need for social support changes as we age. Social support leads to less depression and loneliness. Segrin (2003) finds that the psychosocial well-being of older adults may not be devastated by lack of social interaction. In contrast, younger people require diverse sources of social support, the less support and interaction may increase psychosocial distress due to self-sufficiency. Social support can help people to appraise stressful events as more manageable and, in some cases, provide tangible assistance with issues that otherwise provoke stress (Segrin, Monelis, & Swiatkowski, 2016). MMJs are often in dangerous places, dealing with highly emotional and confrontational bystanders or family members of victims. Often, the support group they seek is unavailable during and after the crisis.

Perez and Cremedas (2014) found the stress of the work is pushing experienced workers out of the business with many citing the pay did not make up for the workload. One of their research subjects concluded, ‘I rethought my career for the first time in twenty years and despite being offered a high-paying contract to continue my work there I left. While the MMJ concept was not the only reason for deciding to do something else, it was a major factor.’. Other respondents in the Perez and Cremedas (2014) study echoed the same sentiment, ‘I am an older guy, (the MMJ concept) certainly may push up retirement.’ Plus, ‘I honestly wonder how much longer, after 10 years, I can keep doing this. Unless I make it to a network where I’m allowed to do long-form special projects, I cannot envision doing this much longer.’

**RQ2: What are the relationships between age, experience and ‘burnout’?**

According to Reinardy (2011), burnout is a prolonged response to chronic job stressors. In newspaper journalism, stress is an acceptable by-product when pursuing deadlines, scoops, and the demands of editors and readers. Stressors are compounded when working long hours, when the job conflicts with family and with the increased pressure to produce not only on a daily basis but perhaps on an hourly basis (Reinardy, 2011).

The MMJ model may be adding to the stress because of the autonomy required. Braverman saw worker's autonomy as a function of skill (Smith, 2015). He believed there is a relationship between skill, job autonomy, knowledge, and control. Braverman did not believe that increased formal education of the workforce translated into increased skill levels. He believed that was a myth and that production, not training, was central to capitalism. O’Doherty et al. (2001) criticized Braverman, and they contend that Labor Process Theory is subjective in its application and use. The standardization and deskilling of labor articulate the essential dynamics of capitalism of securing growth of capital at the expense of an increasingly impoverished and degraded working class.

Other studies found that young journalists appear to be more susceptible to burnout than their older counterparts (Maslach et al., 2001). Reinardy (2011) believes there is no cure for burnout and the only way for workers with low professional efficacy to deal with the stressors of high levels of exhaustion and cynicism is to leave the job (Reinardy, 2011).

The valorization of the employee is changing with the development of the MMJ, as the elimination of two individuals raises the importance of the remaining worker. We often do not look at journalism as labor, with a commoditized entity attached. In this sense, the reporter can express frustration to be known as laborers (Martyn, 2009). While management may view the shift in valorization and status for reporters as an acceptable and beneficial change. Older workers or non-MMJ reporters may view the alteration of their job roles as the erosion of status, importance, and quality. In this context, management takes on risks of modernity in forms of control and success is viewed by fulfilling the criteria of production, with each action of the multimedia journalist as a savings of production costs (Van Loon, 2007).

The expectations of meeting deadlines and carrying a heavy workload are accelerating burnout. ‘Burnout’ is described by Schaufeli (2008), as ‘exhaustion, cynicism, and lack of professional efficacy.’ Rahim (2016) explained job burnout as a syndrome of physical and mental health caused by prolonged exposure to stress involving emotional responses. The symptom can lead to disillusionment about their job. There are three components of job burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment.

 **RQ3: Is the MMJ model commodified by workload?**

According to RTDNA/Hofstra, Newsroom Staffing, 2017, there are more MMJs in newsrooms than reporters in markets smaller than the top 50. The trend of growth continues. The number of MMJs has risen 13.2% while the hiring of photographers and reporters is down. (RTDNA/Hofstra, Newsroom Staffing, 2016).

The job market was viewed as expanding in 2016 with 49.2% of all TV news stations posted increases in their staff between 2015-2016 (RTDNA/Hofstra, Newsroom Staffing, 2016). The RTDNA/ Hofstra report states that in general, TV newsrooms are growing in size, but fewer stations are producing local news with increased shared news production between multiple affiliates within the same company. There are also plans for expected growth in the next few years. Over 42.5% of all TV news stations anticipated an increase in the size of their news staff (RTDNA/Hofstra, Newsroom Staffing, 2016).

There are three dominant characteristics in Labor Process Theory: the concept of the social relations of the production, the idea of managerial control and the notion of deskilling through the restructuring of work. (Littler, 1990, Thompson, 1989). The application of Labor Process Theory to the multimedia journalist reveals the relationships between management and the workers. The fear of layoffs, delayering, and downsizing, once confined to the working class, is now a constant anxiety of managers and knowledge workers (Jaros, 2001).

News managers want the calculability of their employee’s work. The work hours are measured in product forms such as the news package, vo/sots, vo, online news, and social media posts. The work is counted and quantified to make sure the MMJ is increasing valorization. Many MMJs will complain about the expectations because it leads to what Ritzer (1998) believes is a desire to measure their value of quantity over quality.

Braverman saw worker's autonomy as a function of skill (Smith, 2015). He believed there is a relationship between skill, job autonomy, knowledge, and control. Braverman did not believe that increased formal education of the workforce did not translate into increased skill levels. He believed that was a myth and that production, not training, was central to capitalism. Youthful MMJs arrive at their employment trained enough to create sufficient production. Without mentorship the MMJ may not see improvement, but the labor value may not diminish.

Reaching skill levels appears to be redefined by the tasks of the multimedia journalist (Aviles et al, 2008, pp. 229-230) and expertise rises the valorization of the employee. More labor from an individual will increase their value to the company. Braverman (1974) detailed the Labor Process theory as a way to describe the surplus-value of workers under capitalism invisible to workers. Braverman viewed "deskilling" as a way to enslave workers into a production process and saw evidence of the deskilling on the shop floor among blue-collar workers. He predicted that one day the white-collar jobs would similarly be affected.

There are arguments against the assertion that deskilling is not a degradation of work. The deskilling leads to adaptive practices that are not standardized, and the skill sets are altered, not diminished. Leider (1993) found that while management seeks to streamline production, the reality is different. The workplace becomes chaotic because low pay leads to high attrition. Meanwhile, there is a constant number of new workers rushing into the profession without mentoring. Mentoring helps the new employee acclimate to the culture as well as refine their work methods.

Rowlinson & Hassard (2001) challenged Braverman’s assertions about deskilling by stating that the tendency of separating conception and execution from each other. Conception is concentrated on smaller groups of employees while most of the workers in the executing phase are increasingly meaningless. Post-Taylorist work does not have the division of design and execution, and in this sense, production has evolved.

Leider (1993) suggests that management wants the labor process standardized, but workers find ways to circumvent the standardization, making it unique to their methods. The MMJ may develop their own methodology because they are not closely supervised. The MMJ may be closer to the model of a traveling salesman. The MMJ frequently travels without the monitoring and guidance of the corporate office.

There is a paradox within the industry of increased hours of news, which results in more work to be produced and the decrease in staffing that adds additional pressures. According to Papper (2011), it is cheaper to produce news than to purchase other programming and that is why the numbers of hours of locally produced news went from 3.7 hours in 2003 to 5.6 hours in 2010 (in Higgins-Dobney & Sussman, 2013).

**Methodology**

This study took a grounded theory approach to analyze the quantitative and interview data. Grounded theory approach enables theoretical elaborations but forbids forming a hypothesis before data analysis (Barbour, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

From 2007 to 2015, an ethnographic study was conducted in Cleveland, Ohio. Participant observation took place at WKYC-TV. That station was adopting the MMJ model during this period of time, with limited results. Other stations in the same designated market were also experimenting with MMJs. I had an office in the WKYC-TV building and interacted openly with the observed journalists. Interviews were conducted along with the observation.

A Qualtrics questionnaire of 39 questions was created, IRB approved, and distributed via the Facebook group page, Storytellers. The Facebook group represents a community of television journalists currently working in the television news industry. Their website tvnewstorytellers.com is a resource for journalism education. Their mission statement on their website defines their role as a place where, “Journalists frequent the community to mentor, share stories, discuss ethics and inspire each other.”

The questionnaire collected quantitative data on age, gender, specific work requirements such as writing, editing, and videotaping as well as the television designated market area where the participants work. Two-hundred-eighty-nine participants responded to the survey. They were given opportunities to give personal feedback, and the qualitative data was collected and coded by similar keywords.

**Findings**

Of the 289 respondents, 172 considered themselves to be television multimedia journalists and 80 did not. The MMJs represented 132 television markets in the United States. Of the 289 respondents, 111 work in a TV station in DMA 70 or higher. Of the 111 respondents, 64 considered themselves to be MMJs. Of the 64 respondents, 42 were female. Of the 42 respondents, 13 were between the ages of 18-25, 27 were between the ages of 25-36 and only 2 were older than 36 years of age. Of the 289 respondents, only 9 were over the age of 36 years of age that considered themselves to be an MMJ.

“Decreasing quality, increasing danger, increasing work for decreasing pay, burnout.”

(MMJ, Female, age 36 and older, Kansas City, MO)

**Age and Experience**

About 93% of the MMJs in this survey are under the age of 36. Sixty-four of the 172 MMJs are 18-25 years of age. It appears the rise of employment for recent college graduates is rising and the percentage of older employees at local television stations is falling. Of the 172 MMJs, only 18 (10.4%) have more than seven years of experience in television news. Of the 172 MMJs, 41 (23.8%) have no more than two years of experience in television journalism, and 60 (34.8%) have no more than three years of experience.

It appears the rise of employment for recent college graduates is rising and the percentage of older employees at local television stations is falling.

 “Bigger markets want to hire journalists out of college because it’s cheaper (you get what you pay for) and I think this is a detriment to the station and the news reporter.

(MMJ, Female, age 26-35, Paducah, Kentucky)

“You have people who want to be news photographers becoming MMJ's because there's no other option, and they're bad at writing. You have people who want to write and report becoming MMJ's because there's no other option, and they're shit at shooting. You have dinosaur management getting fat on salaries that could pay for two or three extra photogs to work with reporters.”

(MMJ, Male, 18-25, Tyler, TX)

In general, the majority of MMJs are young women. Of the 289 respondents, 162 (56%) were women. Of the 172 respondents considering themselves an MMJ, 95 were women (55.2%).

“The MMJ method is being instituted while still expecting the same amount of work in the same amount of time as two people, on top of that companies aren't willing to put in the money to pay reporters for overtime to make sure that something is the best quality it can be. We're supposed to do 60 hours of work in 40 hours being paid hourly, and overtime is looked at as though you have failed to make a deadline, not that an inhuman amount of work was placed on one person.”

(MMJ, Female, 18-25, Green-Bay, WS)

According to Radio Television Digital News Association (2017), MMJs outnumber TV news photographers in DMAs (Designated Market Areas) over 101, but TV news photographers outnumber MMJs in markets larger than 100. MMJs have a big edge over reporters in markets larger than a DMA of 101. MMJs have a large margin over reporters in markets greater than 101. In this study, 67.7% of the respondents stated they believe the implementation of the MMJ model has become the dominant method of news production. However, 64.89% say they prefer the traditional crew of reporter and photographer over the MMJ method.

**Burnout**

Much like other professions, the work environment does not meet the needs of the workers. Specifically, female reporters are required to take on tasks, previously performed with the security of a work partner, and now are risking their safety on a daily basis.

“There is a great deal of pressure to turn multiple stories on multiple topics for more newscasts. I find security and safety issues impact my ability to do my job each and every day.”

(MMJ Female, age 26-35, Boston, MA)

The workload creates anxiety for many of the respondents. Some of the inexperienced MMJs (18-25-year-olds) are being routinized into a high paced workday, with increased expectations, and the MMJs are often overwhelmed.

“I'm exhausted every day. And I feel like my quality of work suffers cause I'm doing the job of 6 people. (Female, 18-25, Scranton, PA)”

“Burn out is the number one issue. People are being worked into the ground.”

(MMJ, Female, 18-25, Wichita, KS)

“There are a lot of issues. The responsibilities of a single person are out of control. The expectations are so much higher and typically quality goes to the wayside. It's out of control.”

(Female, 18-25, Ashland, KY)

About 54% of the respondents in this study stated they believe the workload of the MMJ is too much for one person and only 2.87% believe the workload is not an issue. The workload is similar for all MMJs according to the results of this survey.

“Too much load for quality work. We're expected to shoot mobile stories for the web and take slideshow photo essays, while simultaneously conducting interviews on ENG-style cameras. Covering large events alone is impossible. And asking for help is useless since all other MMJ's are working on their own stories. Modern newscasts are built on the backs of underpaid and under-resourced MMJ's.

(Male 18-25, Tyler, TX)”.

Market size did not indicate an increase or decrease in expected output. The workload on a daily basis involves four individual products: the news story (referred to as PKG), a voiceover script with associated video (referred to as a VO), a voiceover script with video and a soundbite (referred to as a VO/SOT), and an ONLINE version of their story. Smaller markets have a slight increase in their output, mostly online stories. Of the 172 MMJ respondents, 93% stated they are expected to post pictures to social media. Facebook (51.54%) and Twitter (33.85%) are the most popular social media outlets.

“Sometimes I feel like newsrooms are so focused on gathering more content that the quality can be lost. Where did the storytelling go? My station is doing okay with it, but I see other reporters at different stations who are only allowed to turn 45 second packages and 2 per day on opposite ends of the viewing area. They're drained, turnover is high at their shop, and they forget why we're here to tell the story.”

(MMJ - Female, age 26-35, Dallas, TX)

**MMJ Model Effectiveness**

Of the 289 respondents, 64.89% stated they prefer the traditional crew of reporter and photographer overusing the MMJ method, while 23.94% of the respondents stated they prefer the MMJ model. Of those who prefer the MMJ model, 53% are 18-25 years of age.

“The emphasis on cutting back on some staff means more MMJs that are expected to cover more content, lowering the quality of the stories.”

(MMJ, Female, 18-25, Dallas, TX).

The workload of the MMJ can be measured in the products they produce. Of the 172 MMJ respondents (N=172), 1 news pkg (*x*=1.27, *std* =.93), 1 vo/sot (*x*=1.51, *std* = 1.71), 1 vo (*x*= .59, *std* = 1.30), 1 online story (*x* =1.49, *std* = 1.72). The commodification of the MMJ and the potential labor value could be measured by the productivity of the MMJ.

“The problem is news managers (many of whom have no real field experience) have the same deadlines and production asks for MMJs as 2-person crews.”

(MMJ, male, age 36 and over, Washington, DC)

The internet platform and social media increased workload, deadlines became more frequent, and the pressures to perform videography and editing made it very difficult for the older worker. The younger employee, who has only experienced working alone, is desired. The younger employee is already fluent in social media practices. Ageism in the newsroom occurs as older workers are seen as a detriment because of their lack of productivity. Work experience in the multimedia journalism newsroom is not as important as the ability to multitask. Proficiency in camera work, editing and social media is balanced with journalistic skills.

“The expectation to do everything simultaneously. Sometimes I feel pressured to email or text while driving. The station wants facebook live, tweets, and station web updates by 2 pm (we don't have a mobile app so to publish to the web we need to be in front of a computer). At the same time, we were expected to communicate with sources and managers. I can't do all these things on my phone at once and drive from place to place! Also, I feel like I am creatively struggling. Our station has no value for storytelling. The most important thing to our managers is finishing two stories by deadline and not having overtime.”

(MMJ, Female, age 18-25, New Orleans, LA)

Experienced reporters see multitasking as a threat to verifying the accuracy of their stories and can ultimately lead to a loss of integrity.

“Certain people will try to tell you one thing and put a spin on a story that you may not have time to check out. You’ve got to worry about that. I think at some point, if they cover a big enough story, they’re going to have to put their foot down and say, ‘I’m not comfortable airing the story the way it is now. I’ve got to find out more.’ And that might be a difficult thing to get through to a producer or a news director, but those are the times we live in now.

(MMJ, Male, age 26-35, Syracuse, NY)

“If one-man-bands can enhance what you can do, I’d be all for it. (But) The grind of breaking news with no staffing and two stories because you know you need a vo/sot, and it's just churn, churn, churn, no time, day in, day out, lead stories. You go nuts.”

 (MMJ, Female, 25-36, Tampa, FL)

**Discussion**.

Media convergence follows a techno-economic paradigm whereas the media development and change stem from the interplay of technological innovations and entrepreneurial strategies for media to grow profitably (Murschetz. 2016). It would be very difficult to comprehend the industry ‘de-converging’ and return to previous integrations of production. The value chain of news impacts local news broadcasting as audiences change. The immediacy of information, the platform and delivery, and the dynamics of news gathering to keep up with demand will result in seismic paradigm shifts in roles and culture.

The labor process of journalism is commodified by the MMJ, in forms of work and distribution to platforms. The ‘cell form’ of the production organism is one person varieties of by-products to be delivered to various audiences despite the workload or stressors.

“There is no time to efficiently or effectively MMJ 99.9% of the stories we are sent to cover. There is so much news, too much land mass and traffic to get there, and not enough hours in the day before your live shot or package is due to do ‘one-man band,’ or MMJ work. Trust me, it doesn't matter how organized you are. They prefer quantity or quality, the majority of the time in large markets. In my opinion, traditional crews work best in big markets and network television news hands down. (Female, age 36-over, Top 10 DMA).

Future studies should look at the individual products produced by a single MMJ and examine how they are used by the company. Is there a price tag for each piece of journalism the MMJ creates?

Age and gender are vital characteristics of the labor value of the MMJ. The model employee is viewed as self-reliant, highly productive laborers, despite their social and occupational conditions. According to Lee, Czaja and Sharit (2011), in order for older workers to adapt to the changing workplace, the older workers will need to participate in worker training programs. Corporations do not wish to train employees when they could hire someone with the skills already.

For older workers (over the age of 50) age discrimination is a threat and they feel that their age is a serious concern if they wish to remain employed (Lee et al., 2011). This study may benefit future research to examine career longevity. Nearly two decades ago Ursell (2000) believed that entry into the workforce was becoming more difficult for young workers to get their start because of the number of experienced workers in newsrooms. The experienced workers were apt to find longevity in the profession. Because of the MMJ model, Ursell’s view of employment appears to be reversing. News stations are developing a system of ‘churning’ young talent to fill their production needs.

**Conclusion**

The lack of older workers (36 years of age and older) impacts this study but also indicates that the labor value is closely associated with age. Of the 289 respondents, 107 (55.7%) work in a newsroom with a majority of MMJ employees. If the MMJ model becomes more dominant in the newsroom, the impact on the newsroom culture will be decided by the factors mentioned in this study age, gender, and burnout.

The newsrooms with MMJs are much younger, less experienced and many have very little interaction with their colleagues because they work in isolation. Because the MMJs are young, the collective age group does not represent their audience and issues important to the community may be unintentionally ignored. For instance, in editorial meetings, the MMJ may not view school taxes in the same perspective as older employees with children and property, meanwhile the issue could have a significant impact to the viewers in the community.

Safety concerns arise because of increased burnout. Studies by Maslach & Jackson (1987) identified burnout symptoms with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and inefficacy. Burnout can lead to the risk of injury. Ahola et al. (2013) found that employees suffering from exhaustion have a 10% increase in risk for severe injuries. And those employees who experience burnout symptoms at least once a month saw a 19% increase in their risk of serious injury as compared to those with symptoms less often. They concluded that ‘burnout is a risk factor for future severe injuries.’

Safety concerns in larger cities are a threat to reporters under the MMJ model. Age was not a factor in safety, but concerns focused on gender.

“Newsrooms are requiring many MMJs to report in dangerous situations without backup. Solo live shots are a terrible idea, no matter what neighborhood you're in. It's impossible to focus on anything but the camera, which could be you in danger.”

(Female MMJ, age 26-35, Washington, DC)

“Management doesn't always take safety into concern. I don't think MMJs should be doing live shots alone. - Role models for women MMJs- there really aren't a lot of older women one man banding and I worry it's because companies haven't supported them (what happens if a woman is pregnant, has safety concerns? I feel management is not sympathetic to those concerns.”

(MMJ Female, age 26-35, New York City).

The last fifteen years have been difficult for television journalists and the television news industry (Bark, 2008). In a farewell address Mike James, Editor of NewsBlues.com lamented that during the last decade there had been an unhealthy transformation of TV news. He opined, ‘We've watched a handful of broadcasting companies leverage investment money to gobble up local TV stations by the hundreds, creating ownership behemoths that threaten the public interest by centralizing news production, eliminating competition and diversity’ (NewsBlues.com, 2017). This observation neatly sums up the challenges that face the MMJ industry.

Job skills in television news are degraded or eliminated at all levels in the newsroom. Higgins-Dogney & Sussman (2013) found that the younger, less experienced and cheaper workers are brought in to take on the responsibilities of seasoned workers because the demand outweighs the skill level available. ‘Cheaper and faster are the principal interests of management.’

“The MMJ is a terrible thing for journalism. Great for companies who want to cut cost - bad for quality journalism. Don't get me wrong - you can still turn a great story as an MMJ. But your attention is divided - meaning something also always suffers. And there are physical limitations as an MMJ that just cannot be replicated without a full crew. Anyone that says they can do just as good of a job as an MMJ as a competent, traditional crew, is either in complete denial or totally ignorant. Two is always better than one.”

(MMJ, Male, age 26-35, Hartford, CT)

Younger and ambitious employees are eager for the opportunities and because there is a fresh supply of journalism students willing to take the jobs there is a revolving door of new talent. In this sense, Ursell (2000) called television news a ‘vampire’ for ‘Ingesting youngsters at low prices from a large pool provided by the education system, working newcomers and established hands remorselessly, and discarding the older and less accommodating at will’ (Ursell, 2000). It appears the ‘vampire’ continues to be lurking in the background in today’s television journalism world. The experienced worker is not as necessary, and the churn of younger workers is beneficial to maintain enthusiasm and vitality to the grinding workload. The restructuring of staff appears to have made it easier for younger and lower-salaried employees to enter the television news market, and it makes it harder for older workers to keep their jobs (Dickinson, 2007).

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