

Evolution of breaking news

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Introduction

There is no question that throughout the history of journalism the coverage of breaking news has changed. This is evident by examining the 9/11 terror attack on the World Trade Center in New York and Pentagon in Washington, D. C. As the events unfolded on September 11th and the deadliest mass shooting in US history in Las Vegas in 2017. News agencies across the country used different tactics to best portray what was happening. Today, if breaking news happens, such as the mass shooting in Las Vegas in 2017, the tactics news agencies use is different. By comparing and contrasting the events of the 9/11 terrorist attack and recent mass shootings across the United States, the evolution of breaking news can be witnessed. How reporters analyzed the news as it broke, the inclusion of visual components, and technological advances can be analyzed to see how breaking news has evolved.

As early as the development of the telegraph, news has had a sense of urgency. However, in certain instances the planned reporting for the day is interrupted by “breaking news.” As defined by dictionary.com, breaking news is newly received information about an event that is currently occurring or developing. Over time, the reporting of breaking news has remained important to the public while the methods that are using in reporting have evolved. While viewing YouTube clips of breaking news from different stations presents the evolution of breaking news, there is also significant research explaining further why breaking news has evolved.

Analyzing of Breaking News

Throughout the evolution of reporting on breaking news, how the event was first announced to the public has changed. By analyzing clips posted to YouTube from major networks breaking news reports on the events of 9/11 and the Las Vegas mass shooting in 2017, reporters and anchors deliverance of the news can be analyzed. News anchors across the country held very candid conversations and reactions to what was happening on live television during the events on 9/11. Several anchors also began to speculate that the events were part of a terrorist attack before actually having confirmation that a terror group was responsible. Anchors also gave their “ best guess” on air.

Today, anchors are less likely to speculate or give their opinions on live television. Stations try to wait until they have officials to interview that explain the cause of an event or until an official statement is sent out. For example, when 58 people were killed in the deadliest mass shooting in US history, CNN provided basic details until they had officials to provide accurate information. While the anchor’s demeanor was solemn, they remained professional and did not show raw emotion.

Getting it Wrong

Because journalists were reporting on an incident they did not have all of the facts on, many got the events of 9/11 completely wrong. For example, a reporter from Washington, D. C. believed the plane that crashed into the Pentagon was actually a bomb that went off because of the smell and immense amount of smoke (Greenfield). But reports of incorrect information

on breaking news is not just a recent problem. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, a Dallas Radio Station KLIF released incorrect information. The radio station began by declaring him alive but in critical condition and then later declared him dead. A congressman that called into the station, said he saw Kennedy's " lips moving at a normal rate of speed en route to the hospital." As the radiocast continued, a report was released the Kennedy was dead when he arrived at the airport. Confusion continued to be spread as they announced that Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson was also shot. The radio station, and NBC affiliate, was the first to make the " unofficial announcement of Kennedy's death without an official report" from officials or family (Greenfiled).

Newspapers have also gotten information wrong when reporting on breaking news. As news of the Titanic sinking broke, getting the facts straight was difficult. During the time of the sinking, " bogus" telegraph messages were spread giving inaccurate information. People who installed their own telegraphs were said to be spreading the misleading information that led to The New York Times printing misleading information (Greenfield). The Chicago Tribune also printed the inaccurate headline " Dewey Defeats Truman" following the 1948 election. The paper argues that the headline is the most famous in the newspaper's history. A printer's strike led the paper to be printed hours earlier than usual and " polls and pundits" were sure that Dewey was indeed going to defeat Truman. The paper's mistake that is every publisher and editor's worst nightmare was blamed on pollster's inaccurate information (Jones). Today there is a common fear that social media will lead to incorrect information in breaking news reporting. However,

this is a concern that is long lasting and will continue to be a concern to journalists and news consumers.

Technological Advances

With the development of social media and technological advances, the reporting on breaking news has evolved. In 2011, people would have to call into the station if they were a witness and wait to get through. Today, people can tweet almost instantly to stations or individual anchors and reporters. This almost instantaneous process allows for stations that may not be located in the area of the breaking news to receive information and updates quicker. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat also increase the community journalism aspect of breaking news. With stations relying on independent citizens to provide eyewitness account and use their videos, there is a caution that must come along. While these technological advances can add to the story, stations must ensure they are accurate to stay credible. Technological advances also have led to different visuals added in breaking news.

Social media also is a new way to notify of breaking news. It is very common for news stations and reporters to have individual social media accounts. Sites like Twitter give the platform to give quick updates and report any facts as they come in. The internet becoming more widely used also has expanded the opportunities to reach news consumers. News websites can deliver information as it is received by the station. As one of media's role is to "inform the public," social media and the internet allow for this to happen ever more quickly. Dataminr a company dedicated to providing real-time

information about critical events, published an article about the evolution of breaking news. The article reports that Facebook has over 2 billion users and Twitter has over 330 million users (Dataminr). This proves the audience that social media is reaching is expanding rapidly, making reporting of news to social media even more important.

The article continues to explain how the Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton scandal was one of the first breaking news to “ fragment the news landscape.” For the first time, breaking news was communicated and shared on the internet instead of waiting for the traditional nightly newscast (Dataminr). The article also explains how social media is intermingled with breaking news reporting. For example, in April of 2017, a passenger was “ forcefully removed” from a United Airlines flight. The video taken by other passengers quickly went viral on social media. Following the eruption of videos and posts criticizing the airlines, major news networks picked up the story (Dataminr).

Technology now allows stations that may have reporters on the scene to go live at the scene. While most live shots have a delay of one second, this gives an up to date report from a journalist witnessing the scene. Reporters can do live interviews of eyewitnesses as well. Other technological systems such as Dejero, allow previously shot footage to be fed back to the station. This is just another method of getting news to consumers in a faster method. The Pew Research Center conducted a study in 2013 on “ The Changing TV News Landscape.” Within the study, results found that there was a decrease in live breaking event coverage from anchors and a large increase in

interviews from witnesses (Pew Research Center 2013). This could be due to the fact that technology allows long distance interviews to be more accessible.

The development of applications (apps) on smart phones has also evolved breaking news. Local news stations across the country as well as major national networks have applications available for download for iPhone and Android users. The apps allow push notifications to be sent to users in a breaking news scenario. This not only notifies people of the breaking news but gives them the opportunity to tune in to the coverage. This is a win-win for stations and users. Stations have higher viewership during breaking news, which leads to a better economic standing and users are able to keep up-to-date on important events that could affect their daily lives.

Visual Components

With television news being a visual medium, what is on screen or being shown is often what attracts viewers. As news breaks, viewers turn to television to see what has happened after they have heard of it. With technologies like Skype and FaceTime, stations have better access to getting a visual from the eyewitnesses and not just a phone call. A study found that it is more cost efficient and easier to get in contact with an eyewitness and set up a long distance interview than it would be to send a reporter to the scene (Saltzis 2012). Technological advances also allow for stations to use Facebook live and video footage taken from cell phones. Over time, breaking news has added more visual components. It is no longer just an anchor reading from a prompter but visually tells the story as well.

On 9/11, several stations had eyewitnesses on the phone explaining what they had seen happen. One station also had a reporter on the phone but visually showed a US map with a pin with the reporter's picture. Stations also pulled video from local affiliates that were able to get a reporter near the action. Contrary, during the Las Vegas mass shooting stations relied heavily on video recorded on cell phones. This footage can be given to a station and aired within minutes. While the quality may not be the highest due to the fear of the situation, it provides viewers with a real experience of what is, or recently occurred. Security cameras throughout the Las Vegas hotel also had footage of the shooter. This footage was also used by stations after the incident was resolved and the investigation began.

Another visual component that has evolved over the years, is the animations that announce breaking news. These animations lead into the newscast if it is beginning or returning from commercial break. They draw attention and captivate viewers to notify them that breaking news is being announced. A collaboration was posted to YouTube of CNN's evolution of breaking news animations. Over time, the animations have become more dynamic and attention grabbing. Not only are the latest animations visual but have audio announcing that the segment is " CNN Breaking News."

Making Headlines

Breaking news and how it is reported has always been a topic of discussion. Television's response to breaking news is different than other journalistic mediums. The New York Times published a headline on July 20, 1958 reading " COVERING THE CRISIS-How Broadcasters Met Challenge of Reporting the

Fast-Breaking News.” The newspaper articles gives readers a look at some of the hardships of breaking news. At the time of publishing, The Middle East crisis was the most popular thing covered and reported on. Throughout the article, author Jack Gould makes many valid points about breaking news that still prove to be true today.

The first point Gould makes is that television networks have to “ juggle their schedules to accommodate the swiftly moving events on the international front.” Other scheduled commercial programming was also canceled because of breaking news. Eliminating regular scheduled commercials from a newscast can cause economic loss for networks. Gould continues to explain how breaking news “ illustrates the importance of networks.” Critics to media say that networks have a “ dangerous monopolistic power.” Gould disagrees with this criticism and says the average Joe consuming television news is not going to look that far into the world of media. But more importantly, Gould explains that broadcast journalists are correct in believing they are providing a public service to citizens by providing the latest on breaking news.

Gould’s article not only addresses the shortcomings stations face when covering breaking news but the difficulties stations and journalists face. Readers, who possibly are television news consumers as well, are given explanation. With breaking news, consumers demand updates and want to know details. The article gives reasoning why breaking news is a beast to cover.

Conclusion

As seen by the newspaper article from 1958, breaking news has always been relevant to journalism and has evolved over time. The coverage of breaking news has changed due to technological advances. With the changes news is analyzed and expressed differently. Technological advances have led to different methods to report the events. Visuals are also used more widely to tell the story. As technology continues to develop and journalism reshapes to keep up with current times one thing will remain the same-important news will break.

Critics to breaking news reporting say that it leads to copycat crimes and give bad people a motive to execute any bad thoughts they have. While in minimal cases, this could be an accurate assumption, it is more important that people are aware of events that are happening throughout the world. Unfortunately, breaking news tends to be horrific events. By reporting on the events, the public is more aware and can take appropriate action. As always, journalists must use proper news judgment to know what is appropriate and acceptable to report on and show on television.

Reporting on breaking news is challenging and does not come without mistakes, as seen throughout the history of breaking news reporting. Breaking news reporting proves the importance of journalism and the media to everyday life. Not only does human curiosity lead people to consume breaking news, but anyone who may be affected first hand or indirectly will turn to breaking news to get information on a situation. The evolution of breaking news will continue as long as journalists tell their stories. Breaking

news reporting will follow the changes that media take and journalists adapt to fit consumers wants and needs.