

Connecting Clicks to Context: National Geographic's
Contextual Approach to Covering Environment Issues in a Digital Era

A Project

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GINA COOK

Lynda Kraxberger, Project Chair

Greeley Kyle, Project Committee

Clyde Bentley, Project Committee

Wes Pippert, Project Committee

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Chapter One: Beyond J-School

My passion for journalism began when I stepped into Mr. Ingle's journalism class my senior year of high school. What I thought would simply be a nice getaway from my AP classes turned out to be an introduction to my future. I fell in love with journalism and the idea that someone from a simple, average background, like myself, could inform and make a difference with their words, whether in the paper or on TV. It was this passion that eventually led me to the Missouri School of Journalism, where every course has guided me and prepared me for my professional project. These courses taught me many important skills, however, it was my time spent reporting and practicing what I learned that truly shaped my experience at Missouri.

Focusing on convergence and multimedia allowed me to report and work in several newsrooms and much of my experience was at KOMU and KBIA. The real pressure of turning stories for air and going live for KOMU taught me a lot about my strengths and weaknesses as a reporter. It also steered me further to my love for multimedia. I enjoyed taking a story from beginning to end and conceptualizing all of the formats it can take on, whether that includes online articles, videos or photographs.

My ultimate goal is to become a multimedia reporter or producer and focus on covering stories related to environment, science, or health. I feel this goal is attainable thanks to my experience gained at the University of Missouri and elsewhere. My wide range of experience across multiple platforms has honed my

reporting, writing, and editing skills and will prove beneficial for my professional project with National Geographic. This project, which is with the *National Geographic Weekend* radio show in Washington, D.C., will allow me to further my skills in multimedia and bring me closer to my goal of becoming a multimedia reporter.

Chapter Two: Working at *National Geographic Weekend*

Weeks 1+2 (May 28 – June 7)

I started my first day of work at National Geographic on Wednesday, May 28, 2013. My weekly highlights included:

- Tweeting for @NGWeekend using TweetDeck to time several tweets throughout each day about guests or discussions on recent shows.
- Learning the basics of ProTools, the audio editing software I will use to edit interviews.
- Learning how to search for and get Nat Geo photos to use on the *National Geographic Weekend* Facebook page and the proper formatting for Facebook posts.
- Setting up my Nat Geo WordPress account so I can start blogging on the site next week.
- Calling and emailing publicists to book guests for upcoming shows.
- Attending weekly department meetings and sitting in on interviews for the show.

I was introduced to many people in the Missions Media department during this first week working there and was excited to find that many of them do largely different tasks and come from various backgrounds. Although I work for the radio show, there are other people within the department who are also open to allowing me to contribute and help with their work. One very important event coming up for

the organization is the annual Explorer Symposium in which all of the explorers come to National Geographic headquarters to do interviews. I've been told I will get to "hunt down" explorers for Missions Media and I'm hoping to also possibly interview some of them myself to include in my professional analysis.

Another interesting experience was getting to sit in on the weekly meetings, which are held every Thursday. The first meeting is a Missions Media department meeting in which everyone reports to Mark Bauman, the Senior Vice President of Content Development for the department. The next meeting is where the grants for young explorers and scientists are discussed among several departments. My supervisor Justin O'Neill uses this meeting to get ideas for guests to have on the show and to discuss what sort of multimedia from the grantees he would like to use on the website. I found this particularly fascinating because I got to observe the discussion on which elements the various departments would like to use from the grantees for various forms of media.

In terms of my research progress, I have been researching which of the explorers coming to the symposium are best to try to interview for my analysis and I am also working on my list of questions that I will ask each person I interview.

Week two's highlights included:

- Blogging for NG Weekend

(link: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/03/ng-weekend-reflects-on-tim-samaras-life-explorations-as-storm-chaser/>)

- Updating the Facebook page with a new cover photo, album and posts

- Writing the blog/article to accompany the podcast for a previous show
(link: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/04/21/april-21-2013-running-vertically-swimming-1000-miles-and-more/>)
- Archiving audio using the Nat Geo admin site
- Using Bitly to create shortened audio links
- Booking an interview with an author for the radio show
- Cutting audio interviews using ProTools

In light of storm chaser Tim Samaras' death last Friday, this week at National Geographic was a very unique one. The day before he died, during the grantee meeting I attended, multiple departments were viewing some of Samaras' latest tornado footage and discussing how to use it. My supervisor and the host of the radio show actually interviewed him the next day - hours before his death. Coming into the office the Monday following his death was an odd experience because National Geographic became more of a traditional news organization, in the sense that it had to be at the forefront of covering Samaras' death because he was a NG Explorer. Rather than the typical feature-like articles or photos that usually grace the home page of the website, there were stories about Samaras' death. One such story was my first blog post for the *NG Weekend* website.

My blog was a simple reflection on Samaras' life as a storm chaser and highlighted the previous radio shows in which he was a guest. It also featured some of his quotes from his very last interview. My supervisor, Justin O'Neill, made the right call I believe in not posting the audio immediately and advising that I only use the quotes. Although this was a sad, strange story to write for National Geographic, I

am glad I was there for it because it gave me a unique glimpse into how the organization changes and adapts to cover news stories.

For my research progress, I am finalizing my questions for some of the explorers that are coming here next week for the annual Explorer Symposium. The radio show is interviewing all of the explorers and so I have found which of them have an environmental focus. I have also discussed my schedule with my supervisor so that I will be able to talk to explorers and attend the symposium events.

Week 3 (June 10 - 14)

Week three's highlights included:

- Editing audio interviews for the radio show.
- Updating the Facebook page & Tweeting about the Explorer's Symposium events that took place last week.
- Posting the latest show to the website
- Sitting in on many of our interviews with the National Geographic Explorers that were at headquarters for the symposium
- Interviewing explorers Mike Fay and Michael Lombardi for my professional analysis

Last week, National Geographic held its annual Explorers Symposium in which all the explorers that work across the globe, come to the headquarters to share their experiences and research. This also grants the various departments at National Geographic the opportunity to interview all of the explorers in person for material that is used throughout the year. I sat in on a few of our interviews with the

explorers on Monday and did a lot of pre-research on the explorers to choose which ones I would like to talk to for my analysis. Mike Fay is one explorer I interviewed who is currently focused on elephant conservation in Africa. I asked him how he uses photography to give context to the conservation issues he works on and he talked about how imagery is the key to making such issues real for people.

On Tuesday I greeted many of the explorers before their video interviews. This involved the unique experience of doing their make-up and wardrobe. While those tasks seemed trivial, it was a great way to make connections with the explorers and witness the interviewing styles of National Geographic staff conducting the interviews. The interview with Sylvia Earl was, perhaps, the most interesting. Earl is a pioneer in ocean exploration and received a prestigious award from National Geographic this year. The interviewer, however, only asked a few questions about what it was like for her to do all of this as a woman. After his last question, she spoke up and asked him if he would ask James Cameron or the other male explorers how it felt to achieve these accomplishments as a man. The interviewer was, of course, stumped. It was a great moment to witness and I really admire her for making that point.

There were many other awesome moments from the symposium. I sat in on almost all of the talks that were given on Wednesday and Thursday and tweeted about them for the show. I learned a great deal about the explorers program and made some good connections with explorers and other National Geographic employees. I also interviewed Michael Lombardi, an explorer working on ocean conservation and have begun typing the transcripts for both his interview and Fay's.

Week 4 (June 17 – 21)

Week four's highlights included:

- Updating the NG Weekend website and doing social media for the show
- Learning how to mix music with audio clips
- Pitching ideas for guests for the show
- Booking guests for the show
- Starting a new blog that will incorporate a Google map showing where all of the guests on the show are working.

This week, following the Explorers Symposium, was fairly laid back since everyone was winding down from last week's hectic schedule, however, I made great progress in learning ProTools, the editing software the radio show uses. I have edited a couple of audio interviews for practice, but my supervisor gave me much more to work on this week and went through my edits afterwards to show me some tips and tricks. While I have edited video and audio in the past, this format is much different because it is not simply pulling one 15 second sound-bite. This form of editing is sometimes a challenge because there is still a time limit, but I also have to remember to keep the natural pauses, breaths, and even some "um"s to maintain the appropriate pacing. I was grateful to have my supervisor's help in learning the nuances of editing and also how to blend music in-between the segments.

Another project I focused on toward the end of this week is a blog that will include a Google map with pinpoints all over the world showing each of this year's guests and

what they are doing in those locations. I am really excited about this project because I have not done many graphics and this will be a great piece to show on my portfolio. The process is slightly tedious, as there are many guests that have come on the show this year, but it should be up online by next Thursday.

I also discussed further with my supervisor certain National Geographic staff that might be best to interview for my professional analysis. He has suggested a few I did not have on my list and I believe they will be helpful.

Week 5 (June 24 – 28)

Week five highlights included:

- Working on a Google map of all the previous guests for the year
- Setting up cameras and lights for a video shoot
- Updating the website with past shows that were not posted
- Tweeting/Posting on Facebook
- Editing audio and picking the music for this week's radio show
- Booking guests for the show

My main task this week was to build a Google map to show pinpoints of each of this year's guests. The original plan was to have it up on the site by Thursday, however, my supervisor and I underestimated the time it would take to go through every single guest. For every guest I have to find the location where they are doing the work, research, adventure, exploration, etc. that they discuss on the show. I am also putting a brief paragraph with links to the show they were on for each pinpoint.

With around 10 guests per show, this has proven to be somewhat tedious, but the map is looking great so far and it should be on the site in a few days.

Another reason the map is a bit behind is that I have gotten to work on so many other tasks this week, which is not a bad thing. One assignment was doing more audio editing, and I feel my editing skills have improved. I also got to pitch in on a video shoot for the radio show's website. We shot video of Boyd Matson, the host of the show, recording a segment of the show while someone from the TV department played piano. It was a lot of fun to participate in video work again.

Week 6 (July 1 - 5)

Week six was a short week for me at National Geographic because of the holiday, but here are my highlights:

- Finishing the Google map & blog
- Taking a research class at National Geographic's library
- Pitching ideas for local shoots for the show
- Tweeting and posting on Facebook
- Watching a screening of "The Linguists" at National Geographic

This week was still focused mostly on getting this map and blog done. It is finally done on my end; however, my supervisor is waiting until after the July fourth holiday to post so it can get more hits. Outside of finishing the blog, I have made some great progress on my research for the professional analysis. I have been discussing with my boss more this past week about the best people to interview and together we have come up with a decent list that covers a fairly wide range of

departments. I hope to start those interviews next week because I have not interviewed anyone for the article in a couple of weeks. We have also discussed some of my story ideas and may go out on a local shoot this coming week.

Although there were not many assignments during the week of the fourth, I did take an interesting class at the company's library about researching countries and cultures. The library holds a series of research classes for employees to show them how to best use databases and resources. I enjoyed the class and plan on attending more of these soon to meet other people in the company and learn more about how they research for stories.

Week 7 (July 8 – 12)

Week seven's highlights included:

- Google map posted (and got great feedback): <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/07/09/ng-weekend-map/>
- Wrote the blogs/podcast material for our two most recent shows. Here is the one that is posted: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/07/01/june-30-2013-avoiding-hippos-and-crocs-racing-up-and-down-mt-rainier-and-more/>
- Scheduled several interviews for my project
- Discussed more opportunities for projects I can work on
- Networked with various people about job opportunities

This week was great because I stayed very busy through usual tasks such as editing audio, tweeting, and posting on Facebook, but also posted my blog, wrote two shows, pitched a lot of ideas, and talked with a lot of people about my project. I have made a lot of headway on scheduling interviews and next week I have four interviews set up for my professional analysis. Everyone is being very helpful and many people, as well as my supervisor, have given me advice on the best people to talk to. I'm also using these discussions to network and discuss possible job opportunities.

The Google map blog is finally posted and got really good feedback in our department meeting this week. One person in the department really likes the concept and thinks it will be a great idea for other blogs. For example, there could be a map of where all of National Geographic's archaeologist explorers are working. I was pleased to see that the hard work paid off and Missions Media intends to promote the blog so it will get more clicks. I have been talking with the person in charge of blogs for the overall department about doing more blogs that entail multimedia such as picture slideshows, audio, video, etc. I will be spending next week fine tuning some of my ideas and hopefully getting started on another.

Week 8 (July 15 - 19)

Week eight's highlights included:

- Interviewing four people at National Geographic for my professional analysis
- Writing a blog about one of our guests
- Pitching an idea for a local shoot

- Working on pitches to blog for the Digital News department
- Twitter/Facebook
- Editing audio

I had four interviews this week for my professional analysis examining how National Geographic uses multimedia to provide context to environmental issues. I felt each of them went well and I learned a lot about the company and the viewpoints from people in different departments. My interviews were with Andrew Howley, who is in charge of blogs about Grantees and Explorers; Mark Bauman, the Senior VP of Mission Programs; Dan Gilgoff, the Director of Digital News; and Hannah Bloch who is Editor of Missions Projects. I got great information and insight from each interview and found more ideas for questions to ask in future interviews.

Another success this week was pitching an idea for a local interview for my supervisor and I to go out on while I'm still here doing my project. I researched conservation efforts for the Potomac River and found the Nature Conservancy has several projects at the Potomac Gorge. My supervisor liked the idea and so I spoke with someone from the Conservancy to find out more. Once I get more details about the conservation projects at the gorge, I will schedule the interview. I am very excited about this opportunity because my supervisor will allow me to get video and do interviews of my own to do a multimedia piece for the website.

Week 9 (July 22 – 26)

This week's highlights include:

- Interviewing a National Geographic environment writer/editor for my analysis
- Researching blog ideas for the digital news department
- Attracting more Facebook followers through my social media posts
- Scheduling more interviews

This week was a bit slower than most, but still productive. I interviewed Brian Clark Howard on Wednesday. Brian is one of the main environment writers for National Geographic and has had a lot of experience in multimedia as well. I asked him about the way he integrates multimedia into environment stories for National Geographic, but also how it compares with the other publications he has worked for in the past. He is also experienced in using social media to build audiences so we discussed the role of social media in environmental coverage as well.

My latest blog was published on the site last Monday. It is about an Aboriginal singer we had on the show last week. Here's the link:

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/07/23/australias-black-elvis-songs-of-aboriginal-heritage/>

This was something a bit different for me to write, but I was happy with the way it turned out and, once again, I was able to incorporate multimedia in the blog and get a bit creative with its layout.

Week 10 (July 29 – August 2)

Week 10 highlights included:

- Interviewing 2 environment editors for *National Geographic Magazine*

- Writing one of the shows for the website
- Doing further research for the local story I pitched
- Editing audio, posting on Facebook/Twitter
- Pitching blog ideas to the Digital News department

It is officially the 10-week mark for my project and time is flying by! I have four weeks left and am trying to make the most of them by scheduling more interviews for not only my project, but also informational lunches with others in the company. So far, I've interviewed nine people and intend to interview about six more. I have found out some interesting information from those I've spoken with thus far. This week I interviewed the executive environment editor for the magazine, Dennis Dimick, and a senior environment editor, Rob Kunzig. I felt the interviews with them went well and were much more enlightening in terms of learning how the magazine works when choosing environment stories and the additional media for those stories. I also learned that there is a big transition happening now at the magazine, as it will soon work closely with the digital department. Many people may not realize that National Geographic's website has no relation to the magazine department. This has caused issues in streamlining content and the website lacks organization. So, these are some of the things I discussed with Dimick and Kunzig and I intend to interview others on the digital side to learn more.

Week 11 (August 5 -9)

Week 11 highlights included:

- Writing last week's show for the website

- Doing research for more story pitches
- Booking several guests
- Tweeting and posting on Facebook
- Attending a Digital News morning meeting
- Editing audio

This week I did a good bit for the show through a lot of editing and booking guests. I also scheduled more interviews for my project. Unfortunately, the person I scheduled an interview with last week did not show up and has yet to respond to my emails or phone calls. He works for the National Geographic Channel, which is an entirely different department. I'm hoping someone in my department that knows him can help me get in touch with him.

While that is disappointing, I feel pretty good about my project so far. In combination with the interviews I have done for the analysis, I am also meeting with other people for lunch and going to intern events to network and meet other people in the company. Those events have been very insightful and occasionally give me ideas to further explore for my analysis.

Week 12 (August 12 – 16)

Week 12 highlights included:

- Writing last week's show: <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/13/august-11-2013-holding-our-breath-in-underwater-caves-biking-across-kyrgyzstan-mountains-and-more/>

- Writing another blog for the show's website
- Editing audio
- Interviewing two people for my professional project

This past week was a busy one. I wrote the website post for last week's show and wrote a blog for the website. The blog is about hiking tips from Andrew Skurka, a hiking guru who did a few interviews for the radio show recently. I really enjoyed doing this blog and was able to add some fun humor to the piece. With each blog, I've gradually become more comfortable and creative. This sort of writing is much different than the news writing I'm used to - or even the blogs I've done in the past, but I feel I'm getting the hang of it.

I also interviewed two people that do video in different departments for National Geographic. These interviews were great for my analysis because they provided more insight to the ways multimedia video is carried out for the digital magazine and website.

Week 13 & 14 (August 19 - 28)

The last two week's highlights included:

- Writing another radio show for the website:
- Helping out with a video shoot for the Women's Foundation
- Posting on Twitter and Facebook
- Editing audio
- Interviewing the last people on my list for my professional analysis

During my last couple of weeks at National Geographic I got to do a few things outside of my usual duties, which was a nice change. I helped out with a video shoot for the Women's Foundation, which is an organization that helps women making a low income achieve an education. (Here's a link if you would like to know more about the Women's Foundation: <http://thewomensfoundation.org/>)

This was a great experience because it showed the wide range of projects Missions Media is able to do. The department occasionally teams up with non-profit organizations like this one to produce videos and help those organizations. So, this was great experience for me to help out by coordinating the women in the video and also observing and learning some of Missions' video techniques.

It was bittersweet to end my internship with National Geographic. It has been a wonderful place for me to learn this summer and I truly was able to step outside the box and experience many things I would have never thought possible. From meeting National Geographic Explorers to writing the show's stories, blogs and webpages, I was able to contribute my own knowledge and learn quite a bit all at once.

My only disappointment is that the story for the Potomac River Gorge did not work out. Had my professional internship lasted a couple of weeks longer, I believe it would have, but because of the delayed responses from the Nature Conservancy, we didn't have enough research and could not schedule the interviews. Although this was frustrating, I'm happy to say I did my best in pitching the story and used my experience pitching for convergence journalism stories to do so.

Chapter 3: What I Learned From My Experience at National Geographic

I was not completely sure of what to expect when I began my professional project at *National Geographic Weekend*. Most of my journalism experience comes from what one might call traditional, local newsrooms in which reports consist of all topics newsworthy and are completed on tight deadlines. National Geographic is almost entirely different. Its focus on exploration, conservation, and culture coupled with an impeccable reputation for imagery make its standards high and deadlines long. This project required me to step outside of my news bubble and jump into another world of non-profit, mission-driven storytelling.

While working for the radio show, *National Geographic Weekend*, I learned a great deal thanks to my supervisor Justin O'Neill and others I had the opportunity to work with in the Missions Media department. This project was doubly fulfilling because I also had the opportunity to share my own knowledge of journalism and social media with Missions Media.

At the start of the professional internship, I had a few goals I wanted to achieve – some I achieved more successfully than others. First, I wanted to contribute to the radio show through various forms of media to grow in my multimedia experience. I also wanted to pitch ideas for the show and possibly field produce one of those ideas. Finally, I aimed to absorb as much of this experience as possible and make connections with the people in my department and those I intended to interview for my project.

My first goal to contribute multimedia was a great learning experience and a goal that was definitely achieved. I did this by posting to the show's Facebook and Twitter accounts daily, but I also wrote several blogs for the show's website. When I first began the professional internship, I didn't think posting to the show's social media accounts would be much different than my experience posting for KOMU. I was wrong. *National Geographic Weekend* is somewhat of a niche show, which requires a different writing style. Social media posts have to be informative, engaging, yet brief. Facebook posts are especially a challenge because they must also be accompanied with an iconic photo.

Writing these social media posts every day was great experience because with each one I got better at writing in the laid back, adventurous style of the radio show, once again, bringing myself out of my news comfort zone. I also proved to have a good sense for what photos would attract more likes and clicks on *NG Weekend's* Facebook page.

The same experience goes for my blogs for *National Geographic Weekend's* webpage. In a way, it felt wrong at first to write in such a casual manner, but I started to understand it and even have fun with it. I incorporated multimedia I had never used in blogs before, such as Google maps, and I tailored each blog's multimedia elements in consideration of the story I was writing.

My second goal to pitch ideas to the show was met, but, unfortunately, not with the same desired results. I successfully pitched ideas but, taking those ideas to the field proved far more difficult. Under the guidance of my supervisor, I learned what sort of ideas for guests and stories would match the show best. My primary

story idea involved water conservation efforts at the Potomac River Gorge. Despite having arranged the sources, those sources needed much more time to give us the research and background for the story than we could allow. Without proper background research far enough in advance, the host of the show, Boyd Matson, would not have been fully prepared for the interviews.

This is another example of how I learned the unique circumstances and very high standards surrounding the way National Geographic must cover a story. Although this goal was not fully met, I was happy that my ideas were accepted and with more time at my professional internship, I could have received the extra materials needed for the story.

Finally, I met my third goal to make the most of the experience and to make clear my hopes and intentions to work with the company in the future. I really learned to love National Geographic in the few short months I worked there and so I made an effort to leave a lasting impression through my encounters with everyone not only in Missions Media, but the other departments in which I interviewed people for my professional analysis. At the end of the professional project, I received recommendations from my supervisor as well as Mark Bauman, the head of Missions Media. I feel I did well getting to know others and making my interests clear for future opportunities.

Interviewing the staff for my professional analysis was another aspect of this project that taught me a lot about the organization, particularly about the interesting decisions environmental reporters and editors must make when choosing to cover stories for an internationally known magazine. I especially

enjoyed my interviews with environmental editors Dennis Dimick and Robert Kunzig who spoke openly about the difficulties of choosing such stories and how National Geographic is in some ways struggling to keep up its readership just like many other publications in this digital era.

My experience at *National Geographic Weekend* was better than I could have imagined. I was given the opportunity to meet and learn from some of the biggest names in conservation and science during the Explorer's Symposium. I also learned a great deal from the environmental reporters and editors I interviewed for my analysis. Having the opportunity to contribute my own ideas and multimedia skills to the radio show was also great. Through these experiences I learned so much and feel grateful to say I worked for an organization with the history and reputation of National Geographic.

While working at *National Geographic Weekend*, I also participated in the University of Missouri's Washington Program. This was a distinctive experience because although my work at National Geographic was not political journalism, I learned some valuable lessons through the Washington Program seminars taught each Friday by Wesley Pippert.

The seminars primarily focused on the history and the evolution of the political atmosphere in Washington and Professor Pippert shared many of his own experiences reporting at the White House during Jimmy Carter's administration. I enjoyed his perspective on how Washington has changed and also the debates and discussions held during the seminars, especially those on current events topics such as the NSA leaks made by Edward Snowden that occurred last summer.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Washington Program, however, was the seminars by individual professionals. I took the opportunity to ask questions and advice from respected journalists such as Donna Leinwand and Peter Koring. The class also visited the offices of Terry Bracey, a lobbyist, and Jeff Biggs, the director of the Congressional Fellowship Program. Through these seminars I learned more about the relationship outside organizations have with the government and was surprised to have my own misconceptions proven wrong. Overall, the Washington Program gave me a broader knowledge of the political world in Washington and was a wonderful supplement to my work at National Geographic.

**Chapter Four: Abundant Physical Evidence of work at *National Geographic*
*Weekend***

See Multimedia Folder for blogs, Tweets and Facebook posts.

Chapter Five: Connecting clicks to context: National Geographic's contextual approach to covering environment issues in a digital era

Michael Lombardi spends countless hours hundreds of feet under the ocean's surface, sometimes in the Atlantic studying the Bahamas' bottomless sapphire waters, other times in his home territory of Rhode Island. No matter the locale, he always brings his underwater experiences back to sea level with his blog.

"People today they're hungry for content, for media and I find that the trick is you want people to be able to as nearly experience what you're experiencing as it's happening," said Lombardi, an oceanographer and National Geographic Explorer. "You want it to seem like that person's...sitting right there next to you experiencing what you're experiencing."

The Exosuit is Lombardi's latest project to go digital. It's a special underwater diving suit, reminiscent of an astronaut suit, which will take him 1,000 feet deep into the ocean and allow him to stay underwater longer to study the ocean's environment. His blogs chronicling the Exosuit Project are posted to National Geographic's website with pictures and videos to give a 360 degree view of this entirely new technology that could change what is currently known about the ocean's environment.

Just as the Exosuit can take Lombardi hundreds of feet deeper into the ocean, National Geographic's rich multimedia takes readers on a journey further into science and environment stories, minus the scientific contraptions.

“Overall, the grand tradition of the National Geographic Society is to put compelling visuals with the stories that not only illustrate what you’re talking about, but add context and additional information to it and whether through a single image, a photo gallery or a video, that’s the biggest thing that we do,” said Andrew Howley, missions online and interactive director for National Geographic.

No story on National Geographic’s website is without a photo, a video, a map or an illustration. Imagery is not a default for National Geographic, but a purposeful way to engage audiences and encourage them to learn more – a core mission of the educational nonprofit.

Multimedia is used for all coverage, but it can do especially well for explaining environment stories, which typically involve multifaceted scientific concepts.

“Things like science and the environment and climate are really kind of ripe for that because I think people feel like they're either being hit over the head with moral issues or they're being fed a lot of data that they just can't put up with. So, trying to find that middle ground how to make something complex very palatable digestible is what we try to do,” said Hans Weiss, the senior video producer for *National Geographic Magazine*.

National Geographic is using innovative and engaging techniques to deliver clickable multimedia that explains environmental stories to readers, such as how the biodiversity of the ocean is affected by climate change or why pollution is making storms stronger, while also educating them about the complex concepts involved.

125 years of media evolution

In 1888, the founders of the National Geographic Society set out to fund and promote research. Its magazine cover bore no glossy photographs as seen in today's version, but became the portal to show the swift pursuit of the organization's mission.

Black and white photographs of the first successful trek to the North Pole and the excavation of Machu Picchu appeared before the magazine eventually published its first colored photograph in 1914.

Shortly after, National Geographic proved to have a large role in establishing America's national parks. Editor Gilbert H. Grosvenor dedicated the April 1916 issue of the magazine to showcasing America's great lands and sent a copy to every member of Congress. He then helped draft legislation for the future National Park Service.

Alongside its influential role in promoting conservation and exploration projects around the world, the magazine became known for its photography. From making the first photographic survey of the Northern Hemisphere's night sky, to the iconic photo known simply as "Afghan girl", National Geographic has continuously pushed the boundaries in photography and continues to set the standard.

Decades after the establishment of the National Park Service, National Geographic photography proved critical in another major conservation milestone. In 2000, Explorer in Residence Mike Fay completed a 456-day, 2,000 mile-long Megatransect across the Congo Basin of Africa to survey its ecological and environmental status. Photographs and documentation of Fay's project convinced

the Gabonese government to establish 13 national parks in an effort to preserve the lands and protect endangered species from poachers.

“Without the imagery it’s always going to be nebulous, you know. It can be real or not real, but with the imagery you can just make it real for people,” Fay said.

Today, the National Geographic brand spans across the globe and includes 37 international local-language editions and about eight million total subscribers to the magazine.

Dennis Dimick, the executive environment editor for *National Geographic Magazine*, estimates that at least 40 percent of the magazine’s current audience derives from these international publications.

“As a result, stories that focus on domestic, U.S. issues, environmentally, are not going to necessarily be the kinds of pieces that resonate with our readers overseas,” Dimick said.

A growing international audience has changed the organization’s approach to environment coverage, taking it from stories that focused on national parks and domestic energy, to broader pieces on climate change and global energy issues.

In 2004, for example, the magazine dedicated a 70-page spread to the issue of climate change. Around this time “green” content was at a high point with many news outlets investing in separate websites or environment desks dedicated to all things green, such as *The Washington Post*’s “Sprig” and *The New York Times*’ environment blog “Dot Earth”. National Geographic had its own “Green Guide”, which is now fully integrated with the website.

Interactive graphics have become one of the latest forms of multimedia National Geographic incorporates to engage its audience about environment issues.

The “Great Energy Challenge” is a section on the website that incorporates interactive quizzes to teach its audience about energy consumption. “What you don’t know about solar power” or a quiz on “Vampire electronics” interpret environmental science in a way that is entertaining for the participant.

“We’ve always brought the science to life and I think interactives allow us to perform that sort of translator popularizer role even better because you could really break stuff down and explain how something works and be able to connect with a reader in a way that text only, say, could not and I think that makes a really big difference in our teaching role and that role is essential to what National Geographic has always done,” said Dan Gilgoff, the director of National Geographic News.

Focus on imagery

National Geographic Magazine’s content is driven by its photography. From the very first stages of story conceptualization, it is the photos that are thought of – not text.

“It’s wonderful because it’s a way of giving your story a much bigger impact and a much broader reach,” said Robert Kunzig, an environment editor for the magazine. “...At the same time it’s intensely aggravating because you have ideas that you just know are good stories but you have to get your colleagues in the photo department - you have to sell it to them.”

One such story Kunzig and another writer could not successfully sell was about the bacterial disease that is devastating the Florida citrus groves. Without the promise of visual variety, the photography department couldn't approve the story.

A few months later, the story appeared on the front page of *The New York Times*.

Dimick shared Kunzig's frustration saying, "We could've done that story well. We could've done it in words, but the challenge is that what are you going show visually that's surprising and unusual?"

National Geographic's emphasis on imagery sometimes limits its coverage to certain environmental issues that are more visual like global warming or water scarcity, while newer issues like fracking are not often covered because they lack compelling visuals.

Small-scale environmental projects done by National Geographic Explorers are also not typically chosen because there are no photogenic images to entice the audience.

Melting glaciers or vast landscapes with wind turbines tend to offer more captivating images than pictures of obscure equipment used to turn garbage disposals into composting machines.

This focus on imagery stands for all of National Geographic's outlets, even for those that publish online content daily.

Brian Clark Howard covers the environment for NationalGeographic.com and says the focus on photography makes it much different than other websites he has

worked for in the past, some of which would use the same photos for every story about a similar environmental topic.

“Because the photos are so important here, and we believe people really expect high quality original photos, we just wouldn’t do that here because we think our readers wouldn’t like that. So, that’s good and bad. It does probably make a better user experience but it can slow down the process,” Howard said.

Photographs, in fact, are a large reason why the magazine’s deadlines are so long. National Geographic plans out its stories months in advance, as opposed to most news organizations that have to turn stories in a matter of days or weeks. It allows enough time for the photographer to go out into the field and capture enough photos to send back for review well before the story is published.

Interaction reaction

In today’s digital world, there are many opportunities to visualize and engage the public about environment issues, but one-note articles on environmental disasters or brief news videos about green energy abandon any background or context. Chances for enrichment are wasted.

“Whether it's crop failure, whether it's political unrest, or the impact of storms on human populations, we're really just trying to do many of these kinds of stories that help explain why you read about a lot of stuff in the news,” Dimick said. “Then, the real challenge is then how do you take what you know and frame it and present it in ways that are going to capitalize upon sort of the emergent platforms that everybody's moving towards.”

National Geographic is embracing new online platforms to carry its strong reputation for imagery into the digital arena. For the past three years in a row, *National Geographic Magazine* has won the National Magazine Award for best tablet magazine and won the best multimedia award for both 2013 and 2014.

According to a 2012 report from The Audit Bureau of Circulations, National Geographic's digital editions and apps contributed significantly to the organization's "brand universe" of 30.9 million people. That year, its apps had more than five million downloads and its tablet edition of the magazine had more than 100,000 subscribers.

Weiss says the tablet edition offers innovative ways for translating environmental data that might otherwise overwhelm readers.

"If we can take a very dense graph or map or something that you would see in print and somehow allow the user to swipe it, to build layers, to take away layers, and if that makes it easier and better then we'll do it and that's considered a successful piece to the story," Weiss said.

Dimick, Kunzig and other editors of the magazine coordinate with both the video and graphics departments to come up with what multimedia elements will best compliment the environment stories for the magazine.

Graphics are often used in environment stories to explain complex data. A graphic titled "Coal and Climate Change", for example, shows the data for the top ten countries that consume coal. It doesn't just use one chart, but is a series of multiple charts and illustrations to visualize the amount of coal used and to demonstrate how carbon is captured.

Juan Valesco, the art director for the magazine, says the print publication can only use a finite amount of the graphics that can be shown on digital platforms.

“It's always helpful because it allows you to introduce more context and I mean [the] magazine is very small in size and sometimes we spend months researching for a new experiment and creating graphics that are very important but we just cannot show because we cannot try to offer too much information in one,” Valesco said.

Collaborating for the click

Like all media organizations, the first and most important task at National Geographic is getting the audience to click.

Mark Bauman, the former executive vice president of Missions at National Geographic, says it's important for the audience to build an emotive connection to the content they are experiencing. Connecting hearts with minds is half the battle and, ideally, once that connection is made, a pyramid effect will begin in which readers become more involved in what they are consuming.

“The first step is a single click online, or the decision to watch an individual program, but we try and provide the ability to go deeper and deeper across a lot of different media,” Bauman said. “We go after audience on the platforms where they spend most of their time. We try and create the introductory opportunity there and then create deeper opportunities for them to learn more on other platforms.”

Iconic and compelling photographs are known to draw in clicks, but short-form videos are another common introductory outlet for environment stories

because they can easily create feelings and emotions without overwhelming viewers about environmental issues.

“It’s a one story video, but to frame it into the bigger story and be the doorway into the viewer’s knowledge base growing - we always try to do that with every story to get them to go deeper into something whether it was an ocean issue, an environmental issue connected to the atmosphere or something that was pollution related,” said Art Binkowski, video director for Missions Media.

Videos are sometimes embedded in blogs or article pages on the website to give more context. National Geographic has found those pages get more clicks and people spend more time on the page to watch the video.

For the digital edition, videos are another feature to take the reader deeper into a story. “The Comeback Croc”, for example, was a story published in July 2013 about why caimans are appearing back in an area of Brazil where they were thought to be extinct.

While the photographs of the caimans are very visual, the video features shots of the animals’ movements and also has the photographer’s first-hand account of the experience while he is in the water taking shots of the caimans.

One issue, however, with the strategy to use multimedia as the entryway to greater audience exploration on the website is that navigating National Geographic.com can be difficult. The site has all the features of the society: the magazine, the channel, digital news, explorer blogs, etc., which can create confusion.

In October 2013, National Geographic launched a new layout of its website that was created, in part, to improve navigation. The cleaner looking layout also

makes the site adaptable to newer forms of interactive multimedia seen on the tablet edition of the magazine.

Now, stories published in the magazine take on a completely different persona online. “The American Nile” for instance, is a story that integrates audio, time-lapse photos, maps and video, but all of those elements are not listed on the sidebar, they are interwoven with the article so the audience views all the elements as one complete experience. Scrolling through each section of the article brings the reader to each individual multimedia element at the appropriate moment.

As it currently stands, the website is not completely redone and many pages still have the old layout. Rebuilding the website to include more of these interactive stories is a significant endeavor and will likely influence all areas of National Geographic’s coverage, but it also coincides with a major change to the organization itself.

During the past two years, National Geographic’s Digital Media and Magazine departments have gradually come together to form a collaborative effort. Until now, the departments were two entirely separate entities. The change is to create consistency between the magazine’s content and online content.

Several people were hired on to help guide coverage as the two departments meld together.

Mike Schmidt is the new multimedia director for National Geographic and manages the video team. This team is comprised of Weiss’s video group that builds the tablet edition of the magazine and the Digital Media video team that does everything from news videos to kids videos for the website.

Schmidt says there will be elemental changes to the way video is done and the video team will likely put greater focus on news videos.

“It's a great time here because all of a sudden, the things that National Geographic is able to do really, really well in print and in the iPad edition - we're now finally able to do some of that stuff on the actual Internet, which is really, really cool,” Schmidt said.

The April 2014 launch of “The Future of Food” is another example of how National Geographic is building up its online capabilities. The eight-month-long series is published on a separate website, Food.NationalGeographic.com.

News articles, photographs, magazine articles, social media, a daily food fact and even a blog called “the plate” are all compiled on the site to show how food impacts people's lives and our world's environment.

The series is the latest major environmental piece from the organization since its collaboration and change to the website. The food site takes on the same feel as the new layout, with rows of squares that link to each feature and photos on each square, rather than a list of links to articles.

Room for improvement

It is too soon to tell how the new website will influence the organization's readership, but National Geographic is hoping it will attract a younger audience to the magazine.

Kunzig says a great predicament with the magazine is that its readership has fallen from 12 million to four million in the U.S. over the past 20 years as the age of its subscribers continues to get older.

“Everyone around here wonders 'Hmm, how long is there going to be a print magazine?' Maybe it'll last indefinitely. Maybe it'll last 10, 20 years. We don't know. So, we're all feeling we've got to adapt. It's a digital world. We've got to grab the opportunity and make something, make something good that's still true to the history of this place and still ourselves,” Kunzig said.

Its investments in digital are the beginning of what National Geographic hopes will be a solution to fixing its decline in subscriptions, but Dimick says there needs to be a greater focus on mobile apps.

Social media is another way it has tried to diversify its audience and reach younger people. National Geographic has more than 25 million likes on Facebook and more than 6 million Twitter followers on just its main social media pages, but it capitalizes on social media interaction most by using Facebook comments at the bottom of online articles.

A new comment portal allows readers to share their Facebook comments on other social media streams, which potentially brings more people to the web page.

While social media is a great way to get feedback from readers, consumers now are looking to be more involved, to have some sort of say and be able to interact with the content they read, watch and listen to.

“We find that our readers want to be more empowered to take action. It's always been a question - what's the role of media? And encouraging people to do something versus just reporting on things, but we've found that our readers definitely want information so they can take their own next steps. So sometimes it's

hard to present that in a way that's not going to be too advocacy-ee or in a way that will be authentic," Howard said.

For environment coverage, the organization sometimes struggles with where to draw the line between straight reporting and advocacy. It has a unique position as a non-profit that funds a lot of scientific projects, but there's a debate on whether it should go the extra mile to advocate for certain issues.

At least for now, the goal is not to advocate, but continue to educate.

"I think the barrier is perhaps our own tendency to sort of talk amongst ourselves, to talk to people who are already onboard with like the environmental movement or people who are kind of inside science and the challenge being to connect with a readership that's kind of a lot broader than that," Gilgoff said.

While the future direction of National Geographic is unknown, the need for context in environment stories will always remain.

If the organization continues to push for innovative, interactive media to engage its viewers on complex environment issues, there's plenty of reason to believe that there will be a bright future for National Geographic's environment coverage.

Appendix

Introduction

Many of the courses I have taken at the Missouri School of Journalism have prepared me for a professional project. Extensive work in professional media outlets through both the convergence and broadcast sequences also qualify me to work in most any multimedia newsroom and have given me the experience to ensure the professional level of my reporting. My previous experience working in both print and television newsrooms while earning my bachelor's have also led me to this project. All of these experiences over the past several years have honed my reporting, writing, editing and multimedia skills, any of which I can contribute to a multimedia reporting position. My ultimate goal is to become a multimedia reporter and fulfilling my professional project will bring me closer to obtaining that goal. I will complete my graduate studies outside of the university setting through The Missouri School of Journalism's Washington Program, where I will do multimedia work for the *National Geographic Weekend Radio Show*.

Professional Skills Component:

I will fulfill my professional project this summer at *National Geographic* headquarters in Washington D.C. for its *Missions Media* department. My main responsibilities will include promoting the *National Geographic Weekend Radio Show* through social media such as Facebook and Twitter and editing audio

interviews. Justin O'Neill, the senior producer for *National Geographic Weekend*, is my supervisor and is also allowing me to pitch ideas for the program, help develop those ideas, and go out on local shoots.

The journalism areas of emphasis for this professional placement are multimedia and broadcast. My qualifications for this placement stem from the convergence and broadcast journalism classes I have taken and experience gained in multi-platform newsrooms. The previous experience I have obtained in TV, radio, and multimedia qualifies me to pursue this project.

I will begin my placement on May 29, 2013 and end on August 28, 2013, working 30 hours each week for a total of 14 weeks. Justin O'Neill will disseminate and assign the tasks I am required to fulfill for the show. I will write field notes each week to describe the work I have contributed and also document that work through saving any social media posts, copies of interview transcripts, copies of emails detailing pitches for stories, research for stories, audio or video files, and any links to my work that is on the radio program's website. This documentation is to fulfill the project requirement for "abundant physical evidence."

Analysis Component

My proposed professional analysis will examine how journalists covering the environment utilize multimedia to create content and give context to environmental issues. I intend to tailor this topic to assess the ways in which environmental reporters, editors, and producers at *National Geographic* use various multimedia elements, such as photographs, video, audio, text, links, or graphics, to give

additional context and background on the environmental issues featured. I aim to assess the norms and practices of *National Geographic's* multimedia environmental coverage by conducting interviews with several of the organization's reporters, editors, and producers. The primary question I intend to answer through these interviews is: In a rich multimedia environment, such as *National Geographic*, how commonly do environmental reporters, editors and producers provide more multimedia content to give environmental issues more context and background on the environmental issues featured?

National Geographic, one of the largest nonprofit scientific and educational institutions in the world, was founded in 1888 and has since made a name for itself through its coverage of geography, archaeology, natural science, environment and historic preservation ("About us"). Long known for its compelling photography, the organization has also garnered praise for its digital coverage in recent years (Perez-Pena, 2008). In 2013, *National Geographic* won several National Magazine Awards including best tablet magazine and best multimedia. Lauren Indvik wrote an article for *Mashable* following the awards ceremony and interviewed Declan Moore, *National Geographic's* president of publishing and digital media:

"I asked Moore if he was at all worried that the popularity of *Nat Geo's* tablet edition was hurting its print business. 'We have to lead readers across the digital divide, else we risk losing them,' Moore responded. 'We're not worried about cannibalization. There's encouraging data [that shows] that people who come across are more engaged [and] renew at a higher rate,' he said (Indvik, 2013)."

This emphasis on digital engagement made by *National Geographic* is precisely what some say is lacking in environmental news coverage in the United States.

In 2004, Senecah stated environmental reporting had become more impressive than in the 1970s and 1980s, however, “providing numerous points of view, explanations, background and context” is difficult because the news hole is getting smaller. There is also still much that needs to be done to improve the amount of context given to environmental stories. Providing additional “multimedia dimensions” such as audio, video, and interactive graphics is one approach Senecah states can help fulfill the need for greater context (Senecah, p. 198).

This professional analysis examining *National Geographic’s* multimedia environmental coverage is important to others in journalism because the media are not taking full advantage of the Internet to provide background on environmental issues and often only cover environmental crises or the drama surrounding environmental issues (Senecah, p. 196; M.T. & J.M. Boykoff, p. 3). Also, some journalists covering stories on the environment do not have scientific backgrounds and can fail to provide context (Detjen et al., p. 4, 5, & 10). While National Geographic is not a conventional media outlet, it aims to provide coverage of issues such as sustainability and conservation (“About us”). Learning what tactics *National Geographic* employs, or does not employ, for multimedia coverage of the environment may provide insight into how such an organization, awarded for its use of multimedia, aims to deliver that needed context.

This analysis also closely aligns with my professional skills component, as I will be doing multimedia work at *National Geographic* for *Missions Media*, a department focused on covering environmental issues.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of framing is the predominant theory that relates to this analysis, as it entails the way in which environmental stories are conveyed. Framing is rooted in sociology and psychology. Goffman first described frames, stating:

"I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events ... and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify." (Goffman 1974)

Entman's definition of frames is refined for the purpose of understanding framing in mass communication. In media studies of framing, the choice of frames is a conscious process. Individuals select certain aspects of a perceived reality and those aspects become salient when they are used to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). This emphasizes the importance of understanding frames because "the concept of framing directs our attention to the details of just how a communicated text exerts its power (Entman, 55-56)."

The mass media set the frame of reference audiences use to interpret public events. While the media depict this frame of reference, preexisting meaning structures, or schemas also influence individual interpretation of media coverage (Scheufele, 104-105). Scheufele's research focuses on the linkage between media

frames and individual frames and discussed the concept of frame building as follows:

“The key question is what kinds of organizational or structural factors of the media system, or which individual characteristics of journalists, can impact the framing of news content (p. 115).”

Framing is most relevant to my proposed professional analysis because it is the theory most directly connected to the media’s active involvement in depicting how the public perceives news stories. The United States media actively frames news stories through the platforms it chooses for telling those stories as well as how much, or how little, context it chooses to give.

Literature Review

The media significantly influence American society by shaping the public’s consciousness of the people, places, and events that form reality (Dispensa & Brulle, p. 75). The public’s primary source of information for science, risk, hazards, and technology is the media (Sachsmann, Simon & Valenti, p. 96). Therefore, people especially depend upon the media for information about environmental issues because much of the public lack the scientific background needed to grasp such complex topics (Ungar, p. 133). Unfortunately, the media’s vague approach to the environment can leave news consumers uninformed and bewildered (Boykoff, 2009 p. 440). Many of the problems of the reports are due to the complexity of the subject matter itself and the multi-faceted nature of the environment (Friedman, p. 25).

Without informative media reports on the environment, the public citizens are left in the dark and can be confused about complex environmental issues such as global warming. Despite many studies that show this public confusion, the U.S. media continue to rely on longstanding journalistic norms such as balance, personalization and drama, when covering the environment (M.T. Boykoff & J.M. Boykoff, p. 3 & 4).

“The macro is foregone in favor of the micro” when the distresses of individuals take focus over the broader informational context. Journalists are also in search of something fresh and new, which leads news outlets to avoid environmental issues covered in the past. This causes coverage of more crises than long-term issues and underlying causes (M.T. Boykoff & J.M. Boykoff, p. 3).

Jenkins’ research also found the norms of novelty and drama influence newsworthiness. Jenkins did a content analysis of the television nightly news programs on networks NBC, CBS and ABC from 1970 through 2010 to examine global warming coverage. Jenkins found that despite a majority view among scientists that global warming is occurring, journalists focused primarily on the conflict or “dueling scientists” angle. Journalists also focus on the “here and now” by reporting only the immediate impact of economic costs from global warming policies rather than doing stories about the long-term benefits of effective remedies (Jenkins p 215).

Through dramatizing stories, the intriguing controversies that lie on the surface of an issue are given more focus than the enduring problems (M.T. Boykoff

& J.M. Boykoff, p. 3). This need for dramatization is perhaps why the mass media continue to portray global warming as a debated theory.

Climate scientists have struggled to create a simpler picture of the issue and journalists have struggled because its complexities are too difficult to capture in a simple sound bite or icon. Therefore, a small number of climate scientist “mavericks” have capitalized on the media’s balance norm, undermining political support for global warming. Balancing opposing views in the field of science is neither fair nor truthful (Palfreman, p. 30, 33).

Studies have also found that environmental reporters have little training or background in science. Detjen, Fico, Li & Kim analyzed the responses of questionnaires sent out to environmental reporters to find the background and training of the reporters. About 44 percent, of the 506 respondents, spend more than half of their time covering the environment. The study also found that 45 percent of the reporters had specific training to cover the environment and 14 percent had a college degree in a field related to science (Detjen et al., p. 4, 5, & 10).

Sachsman, Simon, and Valenti used a census approach to obtain the perspectives of environmental reporters in the four main regions of the U.S. including the Mountain West, New England, the Pacific Northwest, and the South (Sachsman et al., p. 94). Each region demonstrated that environmental reporters spend the majority of their time covering non-environmental stories (Sachsman et al., p. 93).

Overall, newspapers were more likely than television stations to regularly have reporters covering the environment (Sachsman et al, p. 98). Many of the

“environmental reporters” also juggle other tasks and stories not related to the environment (Sachsman et al., p. 99). Many of these reporters’ official titles were general-assignment reporter, staff writer, or reporter (Sachsman et al., p. 100). The amount of time the reporters spent on environment stories in the 12 months preceding the study ranged from 53.7 percent in the Pacific Northwest to 37.9 percent in New England (p. 101).

Friedman states that the pressure of meeting deadline is an obstacle for journalists because even if the story has a good news peg, there may not be enough time to thoroughly explain the issue (Friedman, p. 27). Journalists typically do not have the time or the knowledge to check the claims made by sources; therefore, rather than doing fact checks, reporters simply give equal amount of time to each side of the story, creating “balanced coverage” (Boykoff 2008, p. 3). General reporters are also assigned to cover many things in addition to environmental stories and do not have the time to build a rapport with sources (Friedman, p. 28).

The recent dismantling of *The New York Times*’ environmental desk in January 2013 was done for similar reasons, according to managing editor Dean Baquet. Poynter quotes Baquet as saying:

“When the desk was created in early 2009, the environmental beat was largely seen as ‘singular and isolated,’ he said. It was pre-fracking and pre-economic collapse. But today, environmental stories are ‘partly business, economic, national or local, among other subjects,’ Baquet said. ‘They are more complex. We need to have people working on the different desks that can cover different parts of the story (Beaujon, 2013).”

But the decision was also economical as *New York Times* DotEarth blogger Andrew Revkin wrote:

“These background financial pressures, building around the industry the same way that heat-trapping greenhouse gases are building in the atmosphere, are what will erode the ability of today’s media to dissect and explain the causes and consequences of environmental change and the suite of possible responses (Revkin, 2013).”

Nonprofit entities such as National Geographic, however, are perhaps immune to this sort of financial pressure because, unlike all-encompassing newsrooms such as *The New York Times*, its mission is solely to create content on issues such as conservation, sustainability, and the environment (“About us”). Also, National Geographic’s content does not come from general reporters, but rather from its emerging explorers and photographers, many of which have a scientific background (“Emerging explorers”). The company also does large-scale projects that are unlikely to require a tight deadline. Therefore, many of the aforementioned problems environmental reporters in conventional newsrooms experience including deadline pressures, financial pressures, or lack of scientific knowledge, may not apply to *National Geographic*.

While National Geographic may not experience what most newsrooms experience, environmental journalism as a whole is at risk. Economic struggles in the media have led to cutbacks on science reporters (Jenkins, p. 215). Environmental journalism is especially at risk with downsizing taking place at major newspapers and cable networks (Spencer, 2010). The ongoing migration of

audiences and advertisers to the Internet only heightens the pressure felt by the current recession and threatens the stability of the media from which we seek information about the environment (Spencer, 2010). As economic cutbacks appear to become the next journalistic norm, the role of the Internet continues to grow.

Riffe and Reimold found through a randomized, national telephone survey that the Internet is a significant news source for younger Americans and many 18 to 24 year-olds said it is their primary source for environmental information from the global level, to the community level (Riffe & Reimold, p. 73, 74).

Despite the extensive use of the Internet in recent years, Senecah states environmental journalists and news organizations have not taken full advantage of its opportunities. One major issue is journalists are,

“... Not including more context and background information in online stories than originated in print or broadcast versions. Generally, when information is added online, it consists of mostly links to other information sources, databases, and archives of past stories.”

Another area for improvement is the lack of multimedia dimensions for stories including audio, video, and interactive graphics.

“This approach can be an incentive to some reporters, but only a few traditional environmental journalists have enlarged their role by adding a Web dimension (Senecah, p. 196).”

Since Senecah proposed these multimedia improvements in 2004, some media outlets are trying to keep up with the digital age through utilizing similar strategies. The *Columbia Journalism Review* states, “While some regional outlets’

efforts to create environmental news “portals” for their readers and viewers have thrived ... others have floundered (Brainard, 2012).”

Oregon Public Broadcasting is one example of the effort to develop localized, environmental news on the web. The *National Center for Media Engagement* writes,

“Using news reports, video, radio, photography and blogs, OPB engages citizens in an on-going conversation about local and regional issues, from urban gardening to water quality to the removal of a major dam (*“Oregon Public Broadcasting:...”*).”

National Geographic’s Environment department uses interactive elements such as displaying its “NatGeo Green” Twitter feed on the sidebar and using interactive graphics and quizzes about the environment. It also includes various platforms and multimedia including environment news, pictures, blogs, magazine articles, video, and information for kids. The environment is also broken down into further tabs such as energy, fresh water, and global warming (“Environment”).

According to Maier, environmental discourses on the Internet such as these will determine the quality of the public’s environmental knowledge through their use of language and images. This Internet coverage will guide “our choices in the years to come” (Maier, p. 167).

Methods

This professional analysis will utilize the journalistic method of in-depth interviews. I intend to interview reporters, photographers, editors, and producers for National Geographic such as Dennis Dimick, executive editor of *National Geographic Magazine’s* Environment section; Carolyn Barnwell, NG associate

producer; Don Belt, writer and editor for *National Geographic Magazine*; Brad Scriber, deputy research director for *National Geographic Magazine*; Joel Sartore, NG photographer; Lauren Ward, NG blogger; Lisa Lytton, digital editions director for *National Geographic Magazine*; Neil Losen, a NG Young Explorer; Sarah Leen, visual story development editor of photography for *National Geographic Magazine*; Robert Kunzig, senior environment editor for *National Geographic Magazine*; and Boyd Matson, host of *National Geographic Weekend*.

This professional analysis would be suitable for publication by the SEJournal, Online News Association, or Columbia Journalism Review.

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