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Abstract

This article examines the effect of the proliferation of the multimedia journalist (hereafter, MMJ) newsgathering model on reporters in large-market, local television newsrooms. This model requires one person to fill the roles of reporter, videographer, and video editor. The authors used a web-based survey of MMJs in the top 50 U.S. markets to gauge their reactions to—and the professional consequences of—working alone as opposed to working with a videographer. The results suggest many large-market reporters see the MMJ model as an inevitable outgrowth of advances in technology and increased news competition. However, they also lament that the trend leads them to believe they're producing lower quality journalism. Most of the respondents say they are less satisfied with their jobs and some have considered quitting the business.

Keywords

MMJ, one-man band, technology, job satisfaction, journalism quality

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Introduction

The news business can't do business the way it used to. Changes in how and where people consume news "are disrupting the business models that provided financial resources for news organizations in the twentieth century" (Picard, 2006, p. 3). According to Bob Papper, the director of the 18th RTNDA/Hofstra University Annual Survey on the state of radio and television news in the United States conducted in 2013, financial pressure is pushing—and new broadcast technology is allowing—news managers at many local television stations to replace two-person reporting teams with a single person called a multimedia journalist or MMJ (B. Papper, personal communication, July 26, 2013). The new, less expensive technology includes smaller video cameras often called prosumer cameras. These cameras split the difference between professional and consumer (prosumer) by offering professional quality images but only requiring an average consumer's level of expertise. This way, reporters can shoot relatively good video without their employers having to spend tens of thousands of dollars on cameras and professional videographers. Other advances include a myriad of simplified nonlinear video editing software as well as the ability to transmit video over the internet. All these technological developments make the business appeal of do-it-all MMJs compelling: it is more economical to send out one person to report, shoot, and edit a story versus the traditional two or even three people (Stelter, 2008).

Given that appeal, it is unsurprising to see that local TV news managers have continued to increase their reliance upon the MMJ model in large markets (B. Papper, personal communication, July 26, 2013).

Beginning reporters are already familiar with the idea of fulfilling multiple roles in the newsroom. A typical reporter's career begins at a television station in markets 100 or higher. In that first job, reporters may find themselves "running the prompter, logging tapes, editing someone else's story, working camera, running tapes, and even changing the oil in the news van" (Watts, 2003, p. 25). As reporters move up in market, they typically assume fewer roles. By the time reporters get to the top 50 markets, it is unlikely they are also producing a show or filling in on the assignment desk, and their sole focus is reporting.

However, that is changing, as more large-market newsrooms explore the possible financial benefits of having one person do the work of two or more people (Federal Communications Commission [FCC], 2011). The implementation of the MMJ model in these large-market newsrooms presents an ideal environment to investigate the impact on veteran reporters and any changes they perceive to the quality of their work. It is here reporters who have been working for years with a videographer suddenly find themselves reverting to the initial days of their careers by taking on more roles. These are the people who can best compare the benefits and limitations of working as an MMJ.

The value of this research lies in the possibility of managers having a better understanding of the benefits and pitfalls of applying the MMJ model in their newsrooms.

Although many newsroom managers highlight the possibility of expanded and improved coverage by converting their reporters to MMJs (Kurtz, 2010), few address the possible physical or emotional toll it takes on their employees and how they view the quality of their work. This study gives voice to the MMJs themselves, so a full explanation of the impact of this newsgathering model might be better heard by newsroom managers.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to determine how veteran, large-market TV reporters who formerly worked with videographers but who now work alone, are dealing with the newly added responsibilities of shooting and editing their stories.

Reporters who actually work as MMJs are in the best position to evaluate, both professionally and personally, the model's impact on the perceived quality of journalism presented in local newscasts and its impact on job satisfaction. This information can also be helpful not only to news managers who are considering adopting the MMJ newsgathering model but also to those who have already done so, so as to improve the quality of the stories their MMJs produce as well as their morale.

Literature Review

Over the course of the last two decades, a dramatic shift has occurred in television newsrooms across America. Taking the place of a production team that once included a reporter, videographer, and editor each doing separate jobs and with separate responsibilities is a single journalist responsible for all the tasks. This new type of journalist goes by many different names or titles including but not limited to MMJ, solo journalist, mobile journalist, backpacker, one-man band, and videojournalist (Halliday, 2010, p. 5). Although there may be minor differences in the meaning of the terms, the concepts and effects are generally the same, and for the purpose of this literature review, the position will be referred to as an MMJ.

Smith (2011) traces the origins of the modern-day MMJ to the mid-1990s. The practice started on the margins of the journalism profession but has become mainstream in most newsrooms across the country (Hedley, 2013). From 2006 to 2013, the number of local television stations in the top 50 markets that at least sometimes rely upon MMJs for content jumped from 53% to 68% (B. Papper, personal communication, July 26, 2013). There is a disparity among the size of newsrooms that incorporate the MMJ model. Papper's 2012–2013 research shows MMJs are more common in smaller markets than larger ones; 90% of stations in markets of size 100 or smaller used MMJs.

The switch to the MMJ model borne out by Papper's surveys shows media managers are making an effort to adapt to changing times. Part of this evolution can be attributed to basic business strategy. As Kung (2008, p. 9) explains, "constant product innovation is a fundamental requirement" for survival in any competitive industry.

Because the goal of media managers is to “provide content which appeals to the largest number of consumers,” any newsgathering model that broadens the appeal of the newscast by increasing the number of stories produced could be considered financially beneficial (Kung, 2008, p. 10).

So it appears television managers have embraced MMJs in an attempt to keep their stations profitable during a time of fractured audiences and declining advertising dollars (Brand, 2011). Vukanovic argues (2011) the financial crisis in media predates the 2008 global recession as cheaper distribution of news via the internet put pressure on traditional media outlets. Moreover, Vukanovic (2011, p. 54) describes “an entirely new economic model for business—‘The Long Tail’ . . . a powerful new force in digital and information economy characterizing the rise of the niche.” Fulfilling the potential consumer demand for niche coverage of specific stories or locations has been called hyperlocal reporting, “devoted to the stories and minutiae of a particular neighborhood, ZIP code or interest group within a certain geographic area” (Shaw, 2007, p. 1). Because the MMJ model theoretically increases the number of stories a newsroom can produce in any given news cycle (reporter and videographer each with a camera rather than a reporter/videographer team with one camera), it logically lends itself to this niche or hyperlocal reporting, in that more stories generated equate to more topics covered more specifically. Indeed, Kurpius, Metzgar, and Rowley (2010, p. 360) note innovative newsrooms are considering “new methods of identifying, collecting, and disseminating news. One such experiment has been dubbed ‘hyperlocal media.’”

Despite the bleak financial outlook, local news is still a large part of television viewing habits (Alysen, 2009). In order to keep viewers happy while ensuring a positive bottom line, television stations are pushing for more content, presented on more platforms, with less staff. This is the only way news can be the large profit center for a station it must be (Martyn, 2009a). News is cheaper to produce than syndicated programming and retains all revenues for the station. With better technology, local stations could add low-cost news programs while maintaining or even reducing staff levels (Potter, 2008).

The concept of MMJs grew significantly in popularity after their use during difficult hurricane seasons due to a need for speed reporting (Marymont, 2007). Regardless of how quickly stations are able to transmit news, one argument holds that “real news” cannot be presented any faster than in the past, and by attempting to do so, journalism quality is not as good as it once was (Martyn, 2009a). Speed also causes greater legal concerns for stations, as libel and slander are more likely to occur without editor oversight, while rushing stories to air and online (Marymont, 2007).

One of the reasons speed is so important to news directors is because they demand considerably more content than ever before. In a Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance survey, 70% of reporters indicated their workload has increased over the past few years (Alysen, 2009). Evidence supports this, as newsroom staffs create 3 times more content than 20 years’ prior (Martyn, 2009a), and reporter productivity increased to meet managerial demands (Wallace, 2009). The repercussion is stories are “pumped out” and do not have the research and thought they once had (Alysen, 2009). Lou

Ureneck, Chairman of Boston University's journalism department, is quoted in TVNewser, labeling this phenomenon the "flattening effect," as MMJs must cut down on the time they spend gathering news and dedicate it to the demands of videography and production (Shister, 2010, ¶ 13). Taken together, these critiques—increased workload and increased production of "pumped out" stories, flattening effect—point toward a decrease in the quality of journalism. As Picard (2006, p. 37) points out, many journalists "are now regularly expressing serious reservations about . . . the news that they produce." Higgins-Dobney and Sussman (2013, p. 859) paint an even more disturbing picture, "there is a close connection between the economics and the new technologies of news production on the one hand and the reduction of news staff, the declining quality of news, and deteriorating public trust in the TV news function."

Several studies have addressed television reporter job satisfaction. Price and Wulff (2005, p. 227) discovered female network reporters to be "significantly more dissatisfied than men" with their jobs. Changes in technology and the habits of news consumers are "creating a working environment in which those who prepare and disseminate news are appreciably disaffected with their work and their employers" (Picard, 2006, p. 35). And Deuze (2004, p. 143) found that as reporters expand their skills to satisfy emerging storytelling platforms "many if not most journalists tend to complain that convergence means more work for them, even while they get the same salary as before."

Some of that extra content goes to the internet. The trend of moving toward MMJs has been accelerated by a need for stations to have an online presence as well as on-air (Potter, 2006). By 2007 as many as 96% of television stations were producing content for the web (Smith, Tanner, & Duhe, 2007). Because of this additional demand, MMJs again find themselves having to choose between their traditional roles and their new ones. Described by her employer, NBC News, as "a pioneer of new media journalism," Mara Schiavocampo knows firsthand the limits of "producing, shooting, reporting, and editing video pieces, blogging, and shooting still photos." At some point, MMJs become satisfied with "good-enough journalism," according to Schiavocampo, as reported in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Fry, 2012, ¶ 10). They focus on their video stories first; with whatever time is left before deadline, they work on their written web stories (Fry, 2012). Likely as a result, online posts from MMJs tend to reproduce existing pieces that are not much different from what is shown on television, thus missing the opportunity to fully utilize the technology to interact with viewers and readers (Jankowski & Van Selm, 2000).

Research suggests while much has been made of the new model, few people are good at all of the tasks required: shooting, reporting, and editing (Penniman, 2009). Simultaneously performing multiple duties is difficult and puts considerably more pressure on those attempting it (Smith, 2011). Staff members under strict time constraints have difficulty with both production and reporting quality, and one or both inevitably slips (Drew, 2010). For example, some newsrooms have discovered MMJs are more suited to covering stories nearby, as the decreased driving time gives the

MMJ more time to dedicate to getting the story on the air (Bock, 2012). Critics contend MMJs assigned to press conferences are far more concerned with the technical aspects of coverage rather than with listening and asking questions, which are the basis of critical reporting (Martyn, 2009a; Wallace, 2009). Because they work alone, MMJs must also always have their cameras with them. One worry is anonymous sources, long a vital link to investigative reporting, are often wary of cameras and will be less likely to cooperate with this new type of journalist (Penniman, 2009).

Another concern is fatigue. In addition to the obvious added duties (shooting and editing), one person must now drive the news vehicle, call sources, arrange interviews, post online, perform social media responsibilities, and plan the next story. This multitasking can be distracting, if not overwhelming, and raises safety issues. These safety concerns arise in two main forms. The first is MMJs do not have another person looking after them while they are performing an interview or shooting in a crowd. Without another set of eyes, MMJs lose the 360° awareness another person provides and can miss dangers arising around them. The other danger is equipment must sometimes be abandoned to cover a story, and there is no longer another person to look after it (Halpert, 1995).

There are, however, benefits to news coverage from the changes. The ability to produce a greater quantity of news meets an audience desire for it, as television stations work to satisfy viewers' demands for hyperlocal and neighborhood news in greater detail and quantity than previously possible (Martyn, 2009a; Marymont, 2007). Studies suggest the public wants this type of good neighbor news that highlights communities and interesting people rather than watchdog-style news and will consider stories of this type to be "good journalism" (Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter, 2005). In order to satisfy viewers' demands for more community-based stories, especially hyperlocal pieces, more journalists and cameras were needed to search out and produce them, and MMJs play a key role in the strategy to meet the demand.

Analyses of MMJs also suggest positive impacts on reporting beyond simply having more stories. Although some stories are better with a crew, others were judged to be better because they were quirky and more interesting, thanks to the new method of reporting (Wallace, 2009). The best use of the MMJ, therefore, is when a television truck and accompanying crew would hamper the story coverage (Smith, 2011). Indeed, some MMJs find working alone makes them more approachable and less intimidating, so reticent interview subjects are "a lot more willing to talk and share information," according to WUSA MMJ Scott Broom, as quoted in the *Washington Post* (Kurtz, 2010, ¶ 4).

Many journalists enjoy the freedom of working alone and produce unique stories as MMJs. "The most rewarding part of working alone is knowing the package you created is completely yours," according to KUSA MMJ Kevin Torres, as quoted in *Advancing the Story* (Wenger & Potter, 2012, p. 81). However, those who started their careers as MMJs were far more likely to report this sense of independence than those who were forced to switch to working alone (Halpert, 1995; Wallace, 2009). The MMJ position is still thought of as a stepping-stone and not something to aspire toward

(Smith, 2011). Employees working in the traditional roles have been protective of their specialized skills and their impact on the news (Wallace, 2009).

Another argument in favor of the MMJ model is the more efficient use of talent. The old model of specialization (one person, one job) meant employees could only contribute to the newscast in the one way they were assigned. This new age of journalism turns cameras over to reporters, shows them the door, and asks them to be back by 6 pm with the best story or stories they are capable of (Rosenblum, 2008). So when all reporters are also photographers and editors, all employees can be creative and apply their talents in the best way they know how.

But some argue the benefits of a more efficient newsroom are not rededicated to newsgathering but instead only make the bottom line look better. The premise behind the MMJ movement promulgated by many news managers is to have “more cameras on the street.” But studies have shown “most stations have not used the savings to hire more reporters,” according to the FCC’s *The Needs of Communities* (FCC, 2011, p. 90). Instead, some worry the MMJ model is only a way to reduce staff and save money.

Research Questions

The review of literature provided guidance for determining what aspects of the MMJ model warranted more scrutiny. No studies were found that focused on how experienced large-market television reporters—who previously worked as part a two-person crew—are adapting to the increased demands of solo work. Based on the dearth of research in that area, the authors formulated the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Because large-market MMJs do the work alone that was formerly done by two or more people (reporter, videographer, and video editor), do they perceive that the quality of journalism suffers?

Research Question 2: Because large-market MMJs are responsible for performing so many duties, does job satisfaction suffer?

Research Question 3: Do concerns over the perceived quality of their work and/or job satisfaction lead large-market MMJs to rethink continuing their careers in broadcast journalism?

Method and Survey Design

In the winter of 2013, the researchers conducted a web-based survey of MMJs at network-affiliated stations (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) in the nation’s top 50 markets. An email address list of local television reporters was obtained through Cision, a national media database primarily used by public relations professionals. The database contains contact information for 6,128 TV reporters, with 2,892 in markets 1–50. Because the database does not distinguish between MMJs and those reporters who

work as part of a two-person team, the survey was sent to all top 50 market reporters, asking them to complete it if they worked as an MMJ.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 12 items, each of which included a box for open-ended comments. In five separate pretests by the researchers, the amount of time it took to complete the survey ranged from 4 to 6 min. It was sent out 3 times, each mailing about 1 week apart. A total of 164 MMJs responded. Since the researchers had no way of determining beforehand which reporters in the database were MMJs, the actual response rate is unknown and therefore is a limitation of this study.

This research was designed to gather information on how large-market TV reporters—many of whom presumably worked with a videographer in the past—are adjusting to working alone as an MMJ. The first few questions collected general information to include how often in a typical week the respondents work as an MMJ; their proficiency with the technical aspects of the job, that is, shooting and editing; and what other duties they perform as an MMJ.

Respondents were then presented with three statements designed specifically to answer the research questions, namely, the impact of serving as an MMJ on (1) perceived quality of work, (2) job satisfaction, and (3) career choice. The researchers asked one question designed to elicit a response for each of those three categories. The specific questions have been included in the Results section of this article, so as to be more easily associated with the answers to those questions. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for possible responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

Finally, the questionnaire asked whether the MMJs worked in the past as part of a two-person crew, and if so, how many years they did so before switching to MMJ; how many years they have worked as a reporter in TV news; current market size; and for demographic purposes, age and gender.

Results

As noted previously, 164 MMJs in the top 50 markets responded to the survey. Nearly half (46%) of the MMJs had 11 or more years' experience as a reporter, just under a third (31%) had 5 to 10 years' experience, and about a quarter (23%) had fewer than 5 years on the job. Of respondents, 44% worked in markets 31–50, 34% in markets 11–30, and about 20% in the top 10 markets.

Just over half (55%) the MMJs were in the 25–35 age bracket; 20% were 36–45 years old; 22% were more than 45 years; and just under 3% were less than 25 years old. MMJs are overwhelmingly male, that is, two-thirds men compared to one-third women.

Research Question 1: Because MMJs Are Responsible for so Many Duties, Do They Perceive That the Quality of Journalism Suffers?

Using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, respondents replied to the following statement: “One of the criticisms of the MMJ

Table 1. One of the Criticisms of the MMJ Model is That Because the Reporter is Responsible for So Many Duties, the Quality of Journalism Suffers.

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<i>Strongly agree</i>	42	65
<i>Agree</i>	37	58
<i>Neutral</i>	12	18
<i>Disagree</i>	7	11
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	2	3

Note. *n* = 155 (skipped question 9).

model is that because the reporter is responsible for so many duties, the quality of journalism suffers.” Almost 80% of MMJs responded with *strongly agree* or *agree*. Fewer than 1 in 10 disagreed (Table 1). In open-ended comments, respondents described a number of reasons for the perceived quality differential between a two-person crew and an MMJ. Some examples:

On my worst day as a two-man crew, it’s still head and shoulders better than my best day as an MMJ. Everything suffers: the video is often a struggle because you’re not as well trained - and perhaps not as gifted an artist—as a professional photographer. You may not get the best interviews because you’re distracted. You may not get all the elements you need because your time is severely limited. You often end up tracking the first draft of your script when you really should spend more time sharpening your writing and checking facts. You end up racing through the editing. And after all that, you may not always find the composure to do a polished live shot.

I just think when you double the work on one person decisions have to be made to better use time so that you can make deadline. Shooting suffers because you want to make sure that you’re doing it correctly. Writing suffers because you have to worry about leaving time for editing. Editing suffers because you have to worry about making deadline and kicking yourself because you didn’t have enough time to get all the shots you needed.

I’ve got to carry a camera, tripod, microphone, computer. What don’t I have a hand for? A pencil! I make more mistakes now than ever before. Spelling of names, locations. And I don’t get to chat people up before an interview. I am futzing with the camera and audio, I don’t get a chance to make them feel comfortable and maybe get some tidbit I wouldn’t have received otherwise.

As indicated previously, a small number of large-market MMJs (about 10%) do not believe the perceived quality of journalism suffers. Some of their comments:

My stories are absolutely better when I work alone because I have more control. I often care more about the final product.

Table 2. Another Criticism of the MMJ Model is That Because One Person is Doing So Much, Job Satisfaction Suffers.

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<i>Strongly agree</i>	34	53
<i>Agree</i>	28	43
<i>Neutral</i>	15	23
<i>Disagree</i>	16	25
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	7	10

Note. $n = 154$ (skipped question 10).

I actually enjoy it, because I know EXACTLY what I want, and what I'm getting . . . having photographers doesn't mean the work is going to be better. In fact, often times, it could mean it's worse (given who the photographer may be).

If an MMJ is a strong shooter and storyteller, then it would be like the same reporter and photographer getting to work together all the time. You are in synch, with the visual and written aspect of the story.

It's easier to write to video when you shoot video. And it makes you fully invested in a story without opportunities to be distracted.

Research Question 2: Because MMJs Do the Work Alone That Was Formerly Done by Several People (Reporter, Videographer, and Video editor), Does Job Satisfaction Suffer?

Again, a *strongly agree–strongly disagree* Likert scale was used for the following statement: “Another criticism of the MMJ model is that because the reporter is required to do the work formerly done by three people, job satisfaction suffers.” Almost two thirds (62%) of the respondents agreed with the statement; just under a quarter (23%) disagreed, saying they are satisfied working as MMJs; 15% were neutral (Table 2). Here are some open-ended comments from reporters who said job satisfaction suffers under the MMJ model:

I think young journalists can be overwhelmed anyway when first breaking into a newsroom or new market. Add to that the responsibility that goes with doing everything yourself to meet deadline and I think just finishing is the goal for the day for most. Improving or doing work that provides job satisfaction is a very distant second to all of the above.

It's exhausting. I often go home right after work and collapse, I'm so tired. It's so very frustrating to see your story fall short of your own professional standards.

You can't please two masters and as a MMJ you have three masters: the web, the photography, and the reporting. Also given the pace of a top 10 market it makes you want to pull out your hair daily.

While a few people thrive under the model, I know people who are miserable, who have quit, and one co-worker who sought psychological help as a result of the stress of trying to perform so many duties each day.

When you're slamming out as many PKGs and VO-SOTs as possible, it's hard to take time and be proud of something you got on air.

I feel like a piece of my soul is being sucked out of my body every time I do this.

But as indicated previously, some reporters—albeit a much smaller number—enjoy MMJ work. Based on a number of open-ended comments, job satisfaction for them comes from having total control over the final product.

I like the diversity of the job now. And I love the control. I don't have to explain to a camera person what shots I need and don't feel frustrated when I don't get the shots I need.

The job can be much more stressful, but when I turn a really well told, well shot and well edited story all by myself. I get all the satisfaction for myself as well. I get the satisfaction of knowing that *****I***** did that, without the help of anyone else.

I loved my full-time MMJ days for the most part. Freedom to shoot the way I wanted and to craft the story as I saw fit. It helped me write to video and shoot to the story I had in my head.

The MMJ is not a job for everyone, but I believe there is more satisfaction knowing you have complete ownership over your story. At stations where efforts are made to provide the MMJ with new technology and optimum equipment the process can be very rewarding.

Research Question 3: Do Concerns Over the Perceived Quality of Their Work and/or Job Satisfaction Lead MMJs to Rethink Continuing Their Careers in Broadcast Journalism

The MMJs responded to the following statement: "Concerns over the quality of your work and/or job satisfaction as an MMJ has led you to re-think continuing your career in broadcast journalism." MMJs were divided equally on this question: 40% agreed, 39% disagreed, with 21% neutral (Table 3). Some examples of the open-ended comments:

If there were consideration given to the fact that we were one person doing multiple things then I would consider (remaining in TV news) but there's not and I'm not sure I can keep up this pace.

I have been in the business 6½ years and at least 3 times, I've thought that the stress level is too high and the pay too low to justify staying in the business.

After MMJ was introduced at Scripps, I rethought my career for the first time in twenty years and—despite being offered a high-paying contract to continue my work

Table 3. Concerns Over the Quality of Your Work and/or Job Satisfaction as an MMJ Has Led You to Rethink Continuing Your Career in Broadcast Journalism.

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<i>Strongly agree</i>	20	29
<i>Agree</i>	20	29
<i>Neutral</i>	21	30
<i>Disagree</i>	21	31
<i>Strongly disagree</i>	18	26

Note. $n = 145$ (skipped question 19).

Table 4. In a Typical Week You Work as an MMJ.

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<i>Always</i>	31	47
<i>Frequently</i>	22	34
<i>Sometimes</i>	11	17
<i>Rarely</i>	36	56

Note. $n = 154$ (skipped question 10).

there—I left. While the MMJ concept was not the only reason for deciding to do something else, it was a major factor.

i am an older guy, . . . certainly may push up retirement.

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.

As noted previously, in addition to Likert statements designed to elicit responses directly related to the research questions, respondents were also asked to provide information on the following:

How Frequently in a Typical Week Do TV Reporters Work as MMJs?

Just over half (53%) the respondents work alone as an MMJ *always* or *frequently* in a typical week; just under half (47%) *sometimes* or *rarely* (Table 4).

In the Past, Have the MMJs Worked Exclusively as Part of a Two-Person Team?

Over two thirds (67%) of the respondents formerly worked with a videographer, one third did not (Table 5).

Table 5. In the Past, Did You Work Exclusively as Part of a Two-Person Crew?

	Response Percentage	Response Count
Yes	67	103
No	33	51

Note. *n* = 154 (skipped question 10).

Table 6. Rate Your Proficiency With the Technical Requirements of Being an MMJ (Shooting/Editing).

	Response Percentage	Response Count
<i>Very good</i>	44	68
<i>Good</i>	30	46
<i>Neutral</i>	8	12
<i>Fair</i>	8	13
<i>Poor</i>	10	16

Note. *n* = 155 (skipped question 9).

How Do MMJs Rate Their Proficiency With the Main Technical Requirements of the Job (shooting/editing)?

The MMJs responded to the following statement: “Rate your proficiency with the technical requirements of being an MMJ (shooting/editing).” The response choices offered were, *very good*, *good*, *neutral*, *fair*, and *poor*. Almost three quarters (74%) of the respondents rated their technical proficiency as *very good* or *good*. Less than a quarter (18%) rated their technical skills as *fair* or *poor*, and about 1 in 10 answered *neutral* (Table 6).

In Addition to Reporting, Shooting, and Editing, What Other Duties Do MMJs Perform?

The survey asked the following: “In addition to reporting, shooting and editing what else do you do as an MMJ?” The answer choices were graphics, transmitting stories from the field to the station, social media, web posting, maintaining equipment, and “other.” Nearly all the MMJs (95%) are responsible for updating social media, 80% post to the web, over half (57%) transmit their stories from the field to the TV station, over a third produce graphics, and about a third maintain equipment. One in 10 selected other, which included such duties as driving and maintaining news vehicles, running electronic news gathering live trucks, and shooting their own live shots (Table 7).

Table 7. In Addition to Reporting, Shooting, and Editing, What Else Do You Do as an MMJ?

	Response Percentage	Response Count
Graphics	39	57
Transmitting stories back to the station	57	84
Social media	95	140
Web posting	80	117
Maintaining equipment	35	51
Other	10	15

Note. $n = 147$ (skipped question 17).

Discussion and Future Study

Our targeted subjects for this survey were reporters who currently work as MMJs but who likely had also worked as part of a two-person reporter/videographer team in the past. In fact, two thirds of the respondents self-identified themselves as members of this category. The researchers considered this specific group best able to evaluate what it sees as the benefits and limitations of working alone versus with a videographer.

This reporting model is not preferred by most of the people who execute it. By substantial majorities, the respondents said the perceived quality of journalism and job satisfaction suffer under the MMJ model. The limitations of the MMJ model are easily defined. Although the MMJ model adds responsibilities to a reporter's workload, it does not add more time to carry out those responsibilities. During the time MMJs spend driving to a story, shooting a story, and editing a story, they are not reporting that story. The survey respondents clearly proclaimed what is lost in the time crunch is the quality of their work.

Interestingly, the way reporters view this model contrasts with how some news managers perceive the quality of MMJ work. According to the 2011 Federal Communications Commission report entitled *The Needs of Communities*: “‘Now, under the right circumstances, they’re [MMJs] doing more and the quality isn’t suffering,’ says Andrews Vrees, news director at WCBV in Boston.” WUSA General Manager Allan Horlick is quoted in the *Washington Post* in 2010 as saying “the quality goes up” after switching to the MMJ model. This apparent discrepancy between managers and MMJs is worthy of further investigation.

Still, when MMJs were asked whether they would consider quitting the business rather than continue working as an MMJ, there was no clear answer. Virtually the same number said yes as said no, perhaps implying a sense of resignation—this is the way of the future. Working as an MMJ may be better than not working as a television reporter at all. Several personal comments from the survey buttressed this thought, such as “I have a love–hate–hate relationship with MMJ work” and “This is the future, but I see a mixed newsroom with traditional crews and MMJs. Some stories work for MMJ, others require two people.”

It is not correct to say the MMJ model only has detractors. In fact, several of our respondents wrote glowingly about the satisfaction of being in control of a story from beginning to end; others noticed a more genuine personal connection with interview subjects when they arrived as an MMJ rather than as part of a more imposing two-person crew.

The authors conclude a majority of MMJs in large markets perceive their work alone to be of inferior quality to the work they used to do with a videographer. Similarly, the overall satisfaction with the job of an MMJ is lower. However, these negative attitudes do not reach the level where large-market MMJs would consider quitting their jobs.

The survey results also suggest these perspectives. Despite the complaints about perceived quality and satisfaction, most respondents claimed to be technically proficient with the requirements of being an MMJ. That finding implies adequate training is being provided by the stations that employ the model. Or, perhaps, advances in technology have simplified what used to be complicated tasks. Current video editing software and the previously mentioned prosumer cameras are easier to use and require less training.

MMJ work is virtually an either/or proposition. Approximately half of respondents said they work as MMJs *always* or *frequently* and the other half said *sometimes* or *rarely*. One possible explanation for this apparent dichotomy is newsroom managers who have committed to employing the MMJ model have found reporters capable of successfully working as MMJs and rely on them consistently, while those reporters who are not as adept are not asked to take on the extra duties with regularity.

The job requirements for MMJs are now well beyond shooting and editing in addition to reporting. The vast majority of MMJ respondents said they also do social media and web posting. There is more. Other new technologies mean MMJs are becoming responsible for an additional step in the reporting process—transmitting the story back to the station from a remote location. Faster internet speeds and backpack-sized kits that transmit video over cellular networks make this role simpler and cheaper to fulfill. In fact, more than half of respondents included transmitting stories from the field back to the station as part of their MMJ responsibilities.

MMJ implementation becomes less common as market size increases. Our survey was sent to MMJs in the top 50 U.S. markets. More than three quarters work in markets 11–50, while less than a fifth work in the top 10 markets. Why the varying degrees of implementation? We submit numerous possible reasons to be explored in future studies: the smaller markets are more accepting of the aforementioned diminished quality the MMJs complain about; reporter and videographer unions have greater influence in larger markets and have pushed back against the use of the MMJ model; the financial pressures on smaller markets may be greater and make the supposedly cheaper MMJ model more attractive.

One of the more surprising findings in the survey came in the demographic questions, which explored the breakdown of MMJ work by gender. MMJ work is a job for young males as more than two thirds of respondents were male and more than half between the age of 25 and 35. What happens to the newsroom dynamic when a majority of male reporters work as MMJs and a majority of female reporters work with

videographers? Does this constitute a gender bias in favor of women? How do newsroom managers quell possible dissension due to this disparate treatment? These questions are ripe for more investigation.

And what about viewers? Are they able to distinguish between an MMJ story and traditional two-person crew story? If the viewer is indifferent, one could argue the worries over the perceived quality of MMJ journalism expressed in this survey are merely complaints from the people now assigned to do more work. Perhaps the concerns about the perceived quality of the MMJ product being voiced by the reporters and videographers are actually an “inside-baseball” discussion that is not relevant to the viewer.

Most importantly, what is the economic impact of the MMJ model? Over and over again, news managers say the whole point of using MMJs is to create more local content with fewer people—“to have more cameras on the street.” One key study could focus on whether increased local content translates into higher ratings and advertising revenue. A simple way to determine the economic impact of MMJs would be to compare the ratings and revenue, within a single market, among stations that have made the switch to MMJ and the stations that have not.

There is little reason to think MMJs will disappear from large-market newsrooms. Listening to the MMJs themselves, as opposed to the people who hire them, provides the best opportunity to ensure their contributions to journalism and society remain valuable.

Study Limitations

One of the main limitations of this survey is the inability to determine the response rate. As noted previously, the database we relied upon to contact our large-market reporters did not separate them into two groups: reporters who work with videographers and MMJs. The only way around this was to ask the respondents to self-identify as MMJs. Therefore, there is no way to know the total number of MMJs possible in our survey pool who could have answered, and we only know the MMJs who told us so. Also, to ensure the highest response rate possible, the survey was sent to all large-market reporters. Therefore, a representative sample was not used and the results are purely descriptive.

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