

TRANSITIONING TO SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM

One newsroom's shift to solutions-focused reporting

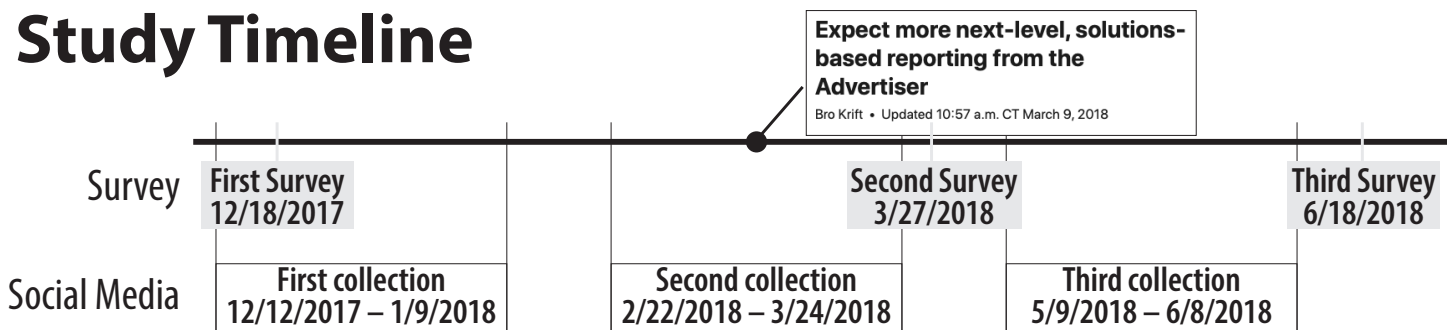
A research summary by Kyser Lough, Ph.D. and Karen McIntyre, Ph.D

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Executive Summary Solutions journalism — rigorous news reporting on how people are responding to social problems — has gained much attention in the past five years as newsrooms have looked for innovative ways to increase audience engagement. In 2018, in a move that was the first of its kind, Alabama's largest daily newspaper, the Gannett-owned *Montgomery Advertiser*, executed a complete transformation of its newsroom to focus on enterprise and solutions journalism. To examine its impact, we conducted a multiple-wave audience survey before and after the transition and collected community conversations from social media. The results were mixed. Audience perceptions from the survey data revealed less engagement over time. However, the newspaper saw an increased number of page views and longer engagement times on their solution-oriented news stories compared to their traditional stories. Sentiment analysis of the social media data showed a significant increase in positive sentiment and significant decrease in negative sentiment.

For complete study, please contact KyserL@uga.edu or Kemcintyre@vcu.edu

Study Timeline



Survey

191 participants completed all three waves of the survey, which asked the same questions about their media habits/opinions. They were primarily white (81%). Age ranged between 18-85 (average age = 55) and gender was evenly split. When asked about politics, they reported an average of 3.27 on a scale of 1=conservative and 7=liberal.

News consumption

Readers said they were **less** likely to visit the Advertiser website over time, but no specific change based on sections, print consumption or on other news outlets.

Perceptions of the Advertiser

Readers said the Advertiser was **less bias** immediately after the solutions launch, but back to original levels by the third survey.

Trust in news

Reader trust in the Advertiser remained the same, but steadily **decreased** for national network TV news.

Perceived knowledge

Readers said they felt **less knowledgeable** over time about corruption in local politics.

Perceived engagement

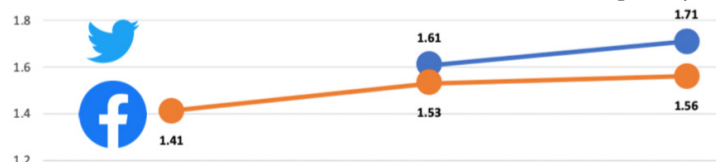
Readers said they were **less likely** to talk about a story with friends/family, share a story on social media, comment, read more on the same topic or contribute money to support a local issue.

Social Media

We collected 35,841 posts from the *Advertiser* Facebook and Twitter accounts, mentions of *Advertiser* reporters on Twitter and when #Montgomery was used on Twitter. We then used sentiment analysis to determine the amount of **positive** (scored +1 to +5) and **negative** (scored -1 to -5) sentiment.

Positive sentiment

There was a significant increase in positive sentiment on posts to and comments on the Advertiser Facebook page between the second and third collection, and over all time for #Montgomery.



Negative sentiment

There was a significant decrease in negative sentiment on posts to and comments on the Advertiser Facebook page and for #Montgomery over all time.

