

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERTS HELPING TO SPREAD THE WORD

Evelyn Kwong works in one of the newest fields of journalism. She and her team are responsible for the Toronto Star's social media.

It's much more than tweeting and Instagram. Kwong's job is about keeping an eye on what's trending and what's happening in the world, to give The Star's news editors a heads-up on breaking stories they may want to cover.

Social media is where many people find out about news stories so, even though it's a career that barely existed a decade ago (it's been around since about 2011, with the rise of Twitter, says Kwong) it is now vitally important to news organizations.

Each social media platform—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn—has a very specific audience, interested in different kinds of news and each one has a "culture" of its own. Kwong has to choose the right platform for each story and know how to structure posts for each of them.

"Day-to-day, you post stories from The Star on Twitter and Facebook," says Kwong. "And if you have a story that has lots of good photos and videos, Instagram as well."

For big investigative stories that a reporter may have worked months on, "we want to find the best words and use the best videos to make a strategy to promote the story in a big way." She may create infographics and videos to bring the public into the story and get them interested in it.

One important part of her job is working with The Star's lawyers. That's because social media is fast and brief—you only have a few seconds or words to tell a story. But when a big story has many sides, that can mean you're leaving out important



We need to learn how to use (social media) better ... to help make change happen.

-EVELYN KWONG

facts. For instance, The Star ran an article accusing doctors of wrongdoing. Kwong had to make sure her posts accurately reflected the story.

"People don't really necessarily take the time to click to the story. It's the first line you read and it's the most damaging. If we can't fit it, we may have to make the caption less spicy, in a way. Tone it down." She says it's "a huge balancing act" to write a post that is accurate, but also captures readers' interest.

Kwong leads a team of five social media experts working in shifts until about midnight every day. They not only post but watch for emerging news. She trains reporters on posting on social media as well. They often have to tweet about stories they are still working on.

"I ask reporters to tweet their stories or thread their stories and talk about their process of getting to the story. Interesting anecdotes that will give people behind-the-scenes (details)," says Kwong.

The Star's social media team helps reporters by creating interesting visuals to go with their posts and helping them publicize their articles. Social media experts are always watching Twitter and other social media so they know what's happening in the world.

"We are well-rounded in terms of what's happening with sports games coming up, entertainment, election coming up, reshare a piece from two years ago ... you're on every beat. You know a little bit about what's happening, in every single pocket."

Kwong's team also steps in to protect the news team from any online "trolls" who may post racist or derogatory comments on stories.

"There is a really ugly side of (social media). When we see hurtful comments about our reporters, racism, personal attacks ... we will delete or report them.

Kwong said young people are using social media in innovative ways. "The next generation is not afraid to use social media as an effective tool to rally people and share a message with people ... criticizing the government, (that they) don't feel safe about going back to school. (They're doing) things I can't even fathom right now. Gen Z care about the issues more than I think millennials do and I think that's attributed to social media. Funny and super-smart but also getting their voice through."



JOURNALISM 101:

Social media can amplify stories to bring about change. Star reporter Nicholas Keung (@nkeung) found out about a nanny living in Canada, who became stuck in Dubai when the pandemic hit. The social media team worked with Keung to put the important facts on social media. "Change is usually made this way, when people are aware of these situations. This nanny might be just one of many," says Kwong.

Check out: tinyurl.com/ftcc8 and tinyurl.com/ftcc9



DID YOU KNOW?

If a tweet has an error or even a typo, the tweet is deleted and reposted correctly, with an accompanying comment noting the error and the deletion. "(We) recognize (the error) and call it out so people know we're right there and it's not just a robot behind the scenes," says Kwong.



DIG DEEPER:

Take a look at how stories are covered differently on the Toronto Star's social media platforms:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/torontostar>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/torontostar> and <https://www.facebook.com/torontostarsports>

YouTube: tinyurl.com/ftcc10

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/thetorontostar/>

Pinterest: <https://www.pinterest.ca/torontostar/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/toronto-star/>



EDUCATION CONNECTION

Discuss!

One of the Star's biggest social media moments happened with a story about "murder hornets." Specifically, about two "murder hornet hunters" in British Columbia. Did you see the story?

Check it Out!

The "murder hornet hunter" story: tinyurl.com/ftcc11

Investigate!

What do you know about murder hornets? Are they really a threat to people in North America? Who else covered the murder hornet story? Why do you think this story went viral?