

## **Capturing the Next Generation: Breaking the Mold and Resonating with Younger Viewers through Vertical Video**

For decades, television networks have grappled with the challenge of capturing and retaining younger viewers in the face of dwindling viewership and steep revenue losses. According to Nielsen, the majority of traditional TV news consumers are 54 years and older— a stark indicator that younger audiences are tuning out. This generational divide is exacerbated by the proliferation of on-demand platforms, mobile-first content, and the meteoric rise of social media, which have disrupted legacy news distribution models. The 25–45-year-old demo represents a critical opportunity for broadcasters. This age group is largely employed, college-educated, digitally connected, and socially engaged— key attributes that make them both influential and lucrative. Yet, they're not consuming news the way their parents did. For journalists to remain relevant, they must radically reimagine their storytelling formats and platform strategies to meet these viewers where they are— on their phones, in their feeds, and on their time.

### **BTVN's Vertical Video Lab: An Innovative Response**

In response to this shifting media landscape, Beach TV News (BTVN) at California State University Long Beach launched its Vertical Video Lab in 2022. The goal: to train the next generation of journalists to meet digital natives on the platforms they use most— namely TikTok, Instagram, and other vertical video ecosystems. Within this lab, students produce two flagship short-form video news segments every week *Trending Now* and *Trending Now in Sports* and they also produce vertical news stories which leverage video and photos with eye-catching graphics and music. These efforts aren't just practice exercises; they are live experiments in digital journalism. They reflect a commitment to develop nimble, platform-native content that resonates with a younger, mobile-first audience.



### **Trending Now: A New Standard of News Consumption**

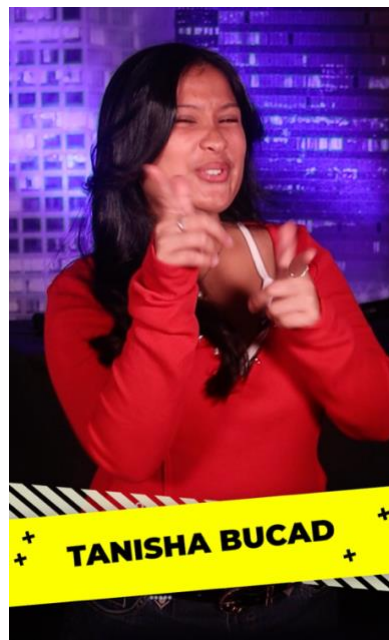
*Trending Now* is our fast-paced, weekly vertical roundup that encapsulates major news stories in under two minutes. This format directly addresses the reasons younger audiences are abandoning traditional news media. Research consistently shows that Millennials and Gen Z prefer news that is:

- Short and digestible
- Mobile-optimized
- Visually compelling
- Reflective of their identities and values

According to Baker (2021), digital natives prefer on-demand access to content that aligns with their social values and lifestyle. Smith & Lee (2022) emphasize that authenticity is a major driver of engagement for these viewers. Our students are trained to craft stories that feel personal, not polished; informative, not institutional. The format is designed to echo the kind of media consumption habits that dominate their everyday lives— scrollable, swipe-able, and socially sharable.



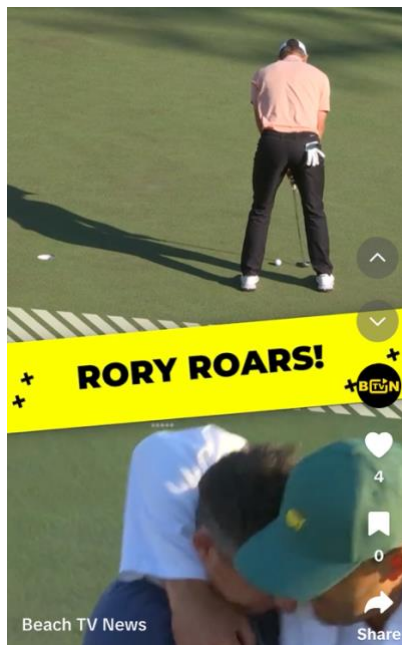
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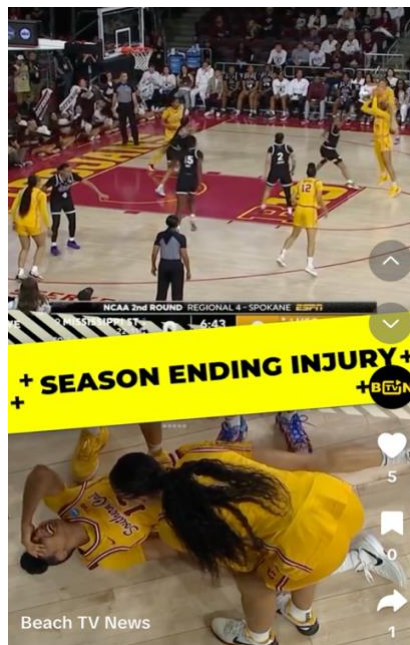
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### **Trending Now in Sports: Building a New Playbook**

*Trending Now in Sports* takes the same short-form storytelling principles and applies them to the world of athletics, highlighting major headlines in collegiate and national sports. Designed for audiences who don't necessarily watch SportsCenter or subscribe to ESPN, this vertical sports segment brings personality, commentary, and style to the headlines that matter to younger viewers.



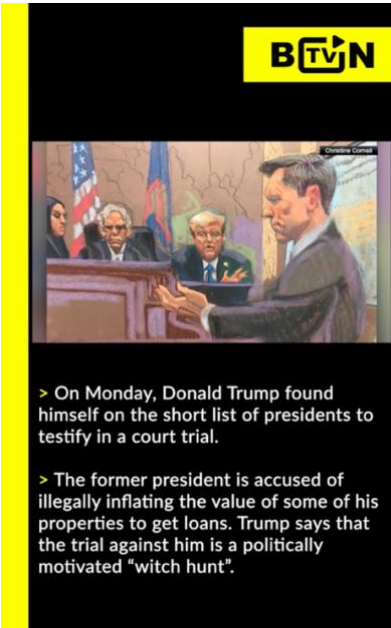
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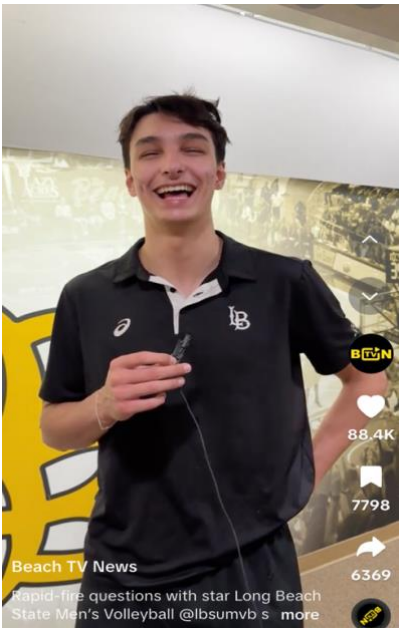
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**Vertical Stories: News Designed for the Mobile Era**

In addition to our weekly roundup segments, BTVN also produces vertical stories— short-form videos tailored to fit the mobile-first consumption habits of younger users. These stories are more than just re-cropped horizontal videos; they’re designed from the ground up for vertical viewing.



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**The Analytics: Impact that Outpaces Tradition**

Our data shows the impact of this shift. During a 30-day period from April 14 to May 13, for example, our vertical videos averaged 25,000 views— ten times more than our traditional 30-minute newscasts. These metrics underscore what industry-wide research has long suggested: younger audiences don’t hate news—they’re just not consuming it the same way. Our vertical shows were designed specifically for IGTV, TikTok, and vertical mobile viewing. Its performance confirms that format matters just as much as content. By leaning into the visual and interactive norms of short-form platforms, we’ve unlocked engagement that simply wasn’t possible through traditional models.

Analytics for April 14, - May 13, 2025:

<b>Video views</b> <b>25K</b> ↑ +12,217 (97.7%)	<b>Profile views</b> <b>187</b> ↑ +70 (59.8%)	<b>Likes</b> <b>2.4K</b> ↑ +1,292 (121.2%)
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Our most watched video was viewed 755,000 times:

<div><div>Rapid-fire questions with star Long Beach State Men's Volleyball @lbsumvb se... Posted on 4/19/2025</div></div> <div><div>755K</div><div>88K</div><div>299</div><div>6,369</div><div>7,798</div></div>				
<b>Video views</b> <b>755K</b>	<b>Total play time</b> <b>4677h:5m:3s</b>	<b>Average watch time</b> <b>22.2s</b>	<b>Watched full video</b> <b>14.7%</b>	<b>New followers</b> <b>1.3K</b>

## **Lessons Learned: Reimagining Journalism Education**

By shaping our content and production style around the ways younger audiences already communicate and consume media, we've come to understand that preparing future journalists means embracing these native behaviors and platforms. Rather than resist emerging formats, we've embraced them as legitimate tools for impactful storytelling. Our results speak to the power of meeting students and audiences where they are— on the platforms they use daily.

Journalism education must evolve by blending core principles— like ethics, reporting, and multimedia production— with fluency in digital-native formats. This means teaching students to think across platforms and to produce work that is both journalistically sound and natively engaging. This approach to storytelling doesn't just reach young audiences— it resonates by speaking their language, both visually and narratively. When we train students to become agile and digitally fluent storytellers, we're not only meeting the demands of today's media landscape, we're also preparing them to shape the future of journalism in a rapidly evolving ecosystem.

## **Conclusion**

What makes this approach innovative is its willingness to break from tradition and meet the realities of today's media environment head-on. Rather than retrofitting old models to new platforms, it reimagines storytelling from the ground up— guided by how younger audiences actually engage with content. It integrates journalistic integrity with digital fluency, merging foundational skills with forward-looking techniques. By doing so, it not only modernizes journalism but also positions students to become pioneers in a media landscape that rewards adaptability, creativity, and connection.

Beach TV News respectfully submits this application for the Pacemaker for Innovation in the spirit of growth, experimentation, and service to the next generation of news audiences. Our Vertical Video Lab represents an ongoing effort to adapt journalism education to a rapidly evolving media landscape, while empowering students to create content that is timely, authentic, and mobile-first. We do not claim to have all the answers, but we are proud of the strides we've made in embracing innovation, and we are committed to continuing this work with curiosity, humility, and a passion for meaningful storytelling.

Thank you for your consideration.

BTVN Staff