

STORYTELLING IN VIDEO NEWS PRODUCTION IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

WHY THIS MATTERS

Social media has changed how video content is discovered, consumed, and judged, and journalists now compete not only on speed but also for attention, meaning, and trust. Newsrooms operate in a saturated media space, do not control platforms in the same way as before, and face audiences affected by fatigue and constant information overload.

This creates a practical challenge for journalists: reporting is no longer enough on its own if the story does not quickly feel relevant, understandable, and emotionally engaging. This does not mean abandoning journalism but ensuring it travels better in the environments where audiences now encounter it.

THE REQUIRED SHIFT

A central shift is simple: stop thinking only like a news organisation and start thinking more like a storyteller. That means moving away from a purely institutional mode of delivery and toward a more human way of structuring and voicing the story.

This shift is not anti-journalistic. It is a way of making reporting more accessible by connecting facts to people, scenes, emotions, and consequences that audiences can immediately recognize.

TELL IT LIKE GRANDMA WOULD

The phrase “tell it like grandma would” captures several storytelling instincts at once: simplicity, intimacy, memory, rhythm, and relevance. The idea is not to make journalism childish or sentimental, but to make it human enough that people stop scrolling and pay attention.

Stories told by grandparents often stay with people because they feel personal rather than abstract. They are rooted in people instead of concepts, they set the scene quickly, they repeat what matters, and they often leave the listener with a takeaway that makes the story feel meaningful.

Applied to journalism, this means a story should not begin from a position of institutional distance if a human entry point is available. Instead of leading with a policy, a statistic, or a bureaucratic label, the story can begin with a person, a place, a voice, or a concrete moment that gives the audience an emotional handle on the issue.

This idea also suggests a more conversational form of authority. Rather than sounding cold, overloaded with jargon, or structured like a report being read aloud, the story should sound like someone trying to help another person understand something important.

In that sense, the phrase points to a change in both form and style. Form concerns the structure of the piece, while style concerns the way the story is voiced, paced, framed, and emotionally carried.

This approach is especially effective on social platforms because audiences do not enter stories with much patience or background knowledge. They decide quickly whether to continue watching, and stories that feel distant, overly technical, or generic are easy to ignore.

HUMAN, NOT GENERIC

A strong version of this approach creates human-to-human storytelling rather than broad, impersonal broadcasting. That means making the story sound like it belongs to a real audience with real concerns, not to an abstract public addressed in generic language.

This is also where local journalism becomes especially powerful. When a story is given a face, a place, and a recognizable social context, it becomes easier for audiences to see themselves in it and understand why it matters.

Stories that sound familiar, grounded, and honest are often more likely to create connection than stories that sound formally correct but emotionally remote.

KEEPING JOURNALISM STRONG

Human storytelling still needs context, evidence, relevance, and explanation. A story may begin with a person or a vivid scene, but it should still help the audience understand the larger issue and why it matters.

Context can be built in at least three places:

- In the story itself, through background, stakes, and relevance.
- Through data, numbers, comparisons, charts, or visual evidence.
- In the caption, title, or description, where supporting information can deepen understanding without interrupting the main narrative.

This balance is one of the strongest parts of the framework. It does not ask journalists to choose between emotional storytelling and public-service reporting; it asks them to combine the two more intelligently.

THREE STORYTELLING FORMATS

Three practical formats help translate this approach into editorial decisions: **character-led**, **presenter-led**, and **explainer**. These are not rigid categories, but they help reporters choose the most effective form for the material they have and they want to achieve.

Format	Best used when	Main strength
Character-led	The goal is to show personal impact, community relevance, or make an abstract issue human.	It begins with a person and gives the story emotional, local, and social relevance.
Presenter-led	Footage is limited, time is short, or a walk-and-talk format adds energy.	The reporter becomes the guide and creates pace, clarity, and presence.
Explainer	The subject is abstract, complex, data-heavy, or visually thin.	It simplifies complexity through narration, structure, and visual support.

Character-led storytelling is the clearest expression of this philosophy because it starts from a life rather than a topic. Presenter-led storytelling works when immediacy matters and the journalist's presence can make the piece feel direct, mobile, and accessible. Explainers extend the same logic into more abstract territory by breaking complex topics into understandable parts.

USEFUL RULES

Two rules summarize this framework especially well:

1. Social media rewards clarity, emotion, and structure, and
2. Journalists should show rather than tell.

“Show, don’t tell” matters because audiences respond more strongly to scenes, actions, voices, contrasts, and visible consequences than to abstract summaries. Clarity helps audiences understand, emotion helps them care, and structure helps them stay with the piece long enough to absorb its meaning.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK

A practical way to use this model is to ask a few editorial questions before producing any social video:

- Who is the human centre of the story?
- What is the clearest entry point: person, place, scene, question, or tension?
- Which format suits the material: character-led, presenter-led, or explainer?
- What context must be present so the story remains journalistically strong?
- What should the audience understand, feel, or remember by the end?

These questions help move editorial choices away from instinct alone and toward a shared and consistent storytelling framework. That is especially useful in teams where “good editorial judgment” can mean different things to different people.

About the author

Ibrahim Ahmaid is a multimedia journalist and IMS Business Viability Advisor with a background that combines journalism, format development, and social media video production. He has worked with BBC, Al Jazeera, KBS World Radio, Yonhap News, KUNA, and Cafebabel, helped build video and social media teams, and focuses on local journalism, audience connection, and storytelling as a tool for trust.