

EPISODE 205

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09] ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this week's episode of Coffee with a Journalist brought to you by the team at OnePitch. Are you looking for a more efficient way to find and pitch the right journalists? Head to our website at onepitch.co to learn more.

Our Guest on today's episode of Coffee with a Journalist is Daysia Tolentino from NBC News. As the culture and trends reporter, Daysia covers the latest Internet happenings from pop culture to social media. During the episode, Daysia shares why she feels PR pitches are late to pointing out Internet trends, why she loves learning about relevant reports and data, why bolding and bullets are super helpful for her, and more. Let's dive in.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:57] BB: Welcome, everyone. This is Coffee with a Journalist. I'm Beck Bamberger. What we do on our little show here is bring on real reporters, real journalists, editors as well, sometimes freelancers to chat about what they can't stand about publicists. But also what they like about publicists perhaps, what they enjoy about their difficult career because it is hard being a journalist out there. Truly, you have to be one of the most smartest and also organized people on the planet, in my opinion.

Today with us, in fact, is someone who I'm sure is inbox-crazy. Well, we're going to get to it in just a second. Daysia Tolentino, she is the Culture and Trends Reporter at NBC News, talking about all things Internet and culture and whatnot. Daysia, thank you for being here and welcome.

[00:01:50] DT: Thank you for having me. Excited to get into it.

[00:01:54] BB: Yes. Well, let's indeed get into it because when you have a broad-ish umbrella, culture and trends, what is not of culture and trends? How would you define your niche in the coverage you do?

[00:02:08] DT: Yes. That's a really good question.

[00:02:12] BB: Yes, yes. What do you not want pitched? You know that's what we want to hear, too.

[00:02:16] DT: Yes. Broadly speaking, obviously, culture and trends is a wide umbrella and can encompass so many different things. What I like to emphasize is, for me, it has to happen online. I'm an Internet culture reporter. That's kind of the primary thing I like to say that I cover. If it doesn't have an online angle, then –

[00:02:43] BB: It's a no.

[00:02:44] DT: Yes. There's really not much for me there. I do get a lot of that in my inbox, and I understand that is kind of confusing. But I do get a lot of broad culture pitches, like whether that's museums.

[00:02:58] BB: I was going to say or this play launching in Brooklyn.

[00:02:59] DT: Like **[inaudible 00:02:59]**. Yes.

[00:03:01] BB: Yes. Exactly, exactly.

[00:03:03] DT: Or books. I really appreciate it. I love to be in the know about these things, but it isn't anything that I would cover for NBC. I could do a better job of probably communicating that. But if you do look through my byline –

[00:03:18] BB: If you look at your articles, though.

[00:03:21] DT: Yes. If you look through my byline, you can kind of guess what I cover and not cover.

[00:03:28] BB: If it's not online, it doesn't happen in your book, basically. I like it.

[00:03:31] DT: Yes. It's for someone else. Yes.

[00:03:34] BB: It is for someone else in the theater columns or whatnot. Okay. Then trend, I feel, is also difficult perhaps to nail. How would you define, "Ooh, that is now a trend," versus a little weird corner of the Internet?

[00:03:52] DT: That's a tough one sometimes because I think a lot of things, especially, there are these micro trends that pop up on, especially like TikTok, sometimes Instagram, things like that, where people are insisting that something is a trend, which is not usually the case.

[00:04:09] BB: Yes, right? Yes.

[00:04:10] DT: It often isn't the case, and it's often something that just comes and goes very quickly or something that people just really aren't talking about in the way that is newsworthy. I would say something is newsworthy, trending if it's inescapable. It's permeating all feeds. I think it used to kind of be – I think TikTok is still the primary place where things are happening right now, even as, I guess, its growth kind of declines. But it is still the hot place to be, I think.

If I see that there's millions of people engaging with this thing on TikTok, then I'll look into it as something for potential coverage. It's especially even more, I guess, boosted if it makes its way to other platforms, which oftentimes is the case. On X, formerly Twitter X, things from TikTok migrate there often and create discourse there.

[00:05:18] BB: Not to be confused with the other platform called Discourse.

[00:05:21] DT: Yes. Oh, Discord. Yes. That's totally different. Those are more insular communities.

[00:05:27] BB: Yes, that's true.

[00:05:27] DT: That's something we're definitely interested in, too. I do like covering niche communities. But I think to get it to the level of newsworthiness nowadays, it either needs to

kind of have this overarching theme or nut graph, as we kind of like to say, this broader picture that we can connect it to in the cultural and societal landscape. Or it has to be kind of this ubiquitous thing, this super unignorable thing. That is the level, I think, that makes a trend newsworthy.

[00:06:08] BB: I imagine this is hard to get a pitch for. Do you ever get good pitches for something where you're like, "Oh, thank God a publicist sent me that."?

[00:06:18] DT: I think that sometimes PR pitches are late. They're too late for me. I think a lot of people try to hop on a Internet trend that I've either already covered, which that is a pet peeve of mine. If I've already covered it, I'm not going to cover it again.

[00:06:40] BB: Yes. Just to clarify, too, are people coming to you where, one, they just haven't at all read what you've written recently? That's very embarrassing. Or is it more, "Oh, hey. You know what, Daysia? You missed this part. Can you add my client in there? Because it would just be –" Is it more like, "Oh. Me, too."?

[00:07:00] DT: I think it's both. Sometimes, if there's like –

[00:07:01] BB: [inaudible 00:07:01].

[00:07:03] DT: I think it's more the first one where some people just don't maybe read my byline first or check that I –

[00:07:12] BB: Which is basic. By the way, publicists, basic. Yes. Don't do that.

[00:07:17] DT: Yes. I'll delete your email. I will because I find it to be a waste of time if you already didn't do that basic step, I think. That's not to be rude or anything. I don't really have too much time to respond to emails or go through them. So I go through them as quickly as possible. If you already reached out to me about something that I've done already, then I'm not super interested, unless you have interesting source that maybe I could use for a future story. But that's not often the case.

[00:07:50] BB: How is your inbox, Daysia?

[00:07:52] DT: I try to get to inbox zero every day. Sometimes, I don't do the best job of that. I also – when I say that, I mean just like unread.

[00:08:06] BB: Unread. Me, too. Me, too. I have 97,000 from, you know. Yes, exactly.

[00:08:11] DT: That are open.

[00:08:12] BB: Yes. That are open. That have been – they did something one time. But unopened, no. Zero is the way to get to. Okay. That's your sanity. By the way, how do you get to that? Do you have a process, or are you constantly getting it down?

[00:08:29] DT: Yes. Every day, I think I'll log on to maybe a hundred emails already, and it'll be both internal emails and external emails. I will usually kind of sort through the external emails really quickly just based on what top-line information is there, so the subject line and maybe the first few sentences of the email. Usually, I could tell by the subject line if it's even worth reading or not.

[00:09:05] BB: Yes. You do a subject line swoop.

[00:09:08] DT: Yes. A lot of times, I get super irrelevant emails. Most of the emails I get, I think, are irrelevant. Most of my sourcing, I think, has come from my own outreach, although that's not to say that I haven't gotten emails from publicists to connect that I don't or that I haven't opened and responded to and created sources from there. A lot of times, the people in my sourcebook are either people I've reached out to myself. Or a few of them are the ones who have reached out to me. Otherwise, yes, a lot of the external emails and the PR emails that I get are not super relevant to anything that I cover. So I just delete them.

[00:09:52] BB: Yes. What a fricking bummer, by the way. Not of any value. Okay. Let's turn that on its head. What would be the perfect pitch for you? What are the elements?

[00:10:05] DT: I don't typically – there has to be a lot of synergy going on for me to actually take a publicist or a comms person's exact pitch. As in I have to already be either thinking about pursuing it or actively pursuing it. Then you happen to get on that. That's only maybe happened once. Otherwise, pitches, I don't usually take pitches. I will consider interesting ones for future reference. I'll often get pitches about reports or data and things like that, and those are my favorite pitches. Those are the things that I just keep in my pocket for later.

[00:10:48] BB: Oh, data reports.

[00:10:50] DT: Other pitches, if I think that the source or the angle that you are proposing are interesting, I might keep you in mind for future reference, in case there's anything that actually pops up. The thing is you can't pitch me something out of the blue that's happening online. It's not to say that if I've never heard of it or I haven't been seeing it, it's not newsworthy because everybody's algorithm is different, obviously.

[00:11:18] BB: Yes, yes. You're probably aware.

[00:11:21] DT: Yes. You kind of have to get to a level of where people online are talking about something, where I'll be able to take that step forward and start reporting something out or even consider covering things. I'll get pitches about creators or people or companies or brands and things like that. That's not to say that what they're doing isn't interesting. It's just that there's not really a news peg to it or a reason for me to actually cover it.

[00:11:53] BB: Well, it's not trending.

[00:11:54] DT: Yes, it's not trending. Period. It's not trending.

[00:11:58] BB: Yes. I think that's the ultimate pitch protocol for you with anyone who wants to pitch you is like, "Is it trending?" "No." "Okay, it's not." If it's so obviously trending, you probably already know about it because this is the reporter who is doing this constantly, looking at what's bubbling up in the Internet.

[00:12:17] DT: Yes. That's something that I was kind of thinking about in looking just kind of thinking about my inbox over the past couple of days. If you're going to pitch me –

[00:12:26] BB: I love that. You were like, “Let me think about my inbox before I get on the show.

[00:12:32] DT: If you have a good source for a trend or some sort of angle or resource that you can give me regarding a trend, you need to do so as soon as possible, like as soon as you see it because you might be too late by the time you email me. It's not even that maybe I have even published anything yet, but it might be that I'm already finishing a story. Or I'm already been assigned this story. Also, I don't love pitches that – I really respect this grind. Publicists, I do respect that if you have –

[00:13:04] BB: Yes. We got the grind.

[00:13:06] DT: Yes. If you are trying to push your niche, your creator or product angle into a viral thing that's honestly like not related to what people are actually talking about, I respect that you're trying to get on that wave. You're trying to get on that train. It's just not going to be relevant to me. For instance, if there's a viral story time or a viral trend that's going on and, I don't know, you're trying to squeeze in this thing that people just aren't talking about, then I respect that you tried. But I probably won't cover it.

[00:13:44] BB: Very good. Daysia, I think we're learning a lot here, so this is super helpful.

[BREAK]

[00:13:50] ANNOUNCER: Today's interview will continue after this brief message brought to you by OnePitch. Are you curious to learn about the unique ways OnePitch helps brands engage with the right journalists? Head to onepitch.co and create your own custom media list in five minutes or less. Now, back to today's episode.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:14:13] BB: How do you, if there is a process, pitch a story you want to do to your editors? We're all pitching something.

[00:14:24] DT: Yes. I will usually see something. I think what really helps is if you see a pattern of reactions to certain things. I think I've been moving a bit away from this singular viral thing that's happening and more toward there have been a series of viral things that are happening that are connected by this one through line.

[00:14:55] BB: Can you give an example, by the way?

[00:14:57] DT: Yes. Recently, I guess this is a good example. It's very niche, but I think it's a pretty good example.

[00:15:04] BB: Oh, we love a niche.

[00:15:05] DT: There's a real obsession around 2014 Tumblr, that era of Internet, especially among young people.

[00:15:12] BB: I know. It's nostalgic.

[00:15:14] DT: Yes. It's super nostalgic. I think that people have been yearning for this for years now. People have also been writing about it for years now. If you're going to write a new story about it, we need to think critically about why now, right? I was trying to think because I'd seen a lot of sentiment online of 2014 is going to be so back this year in a big way. But what are markers of that? What evidence or proof is there that suggests that this is a growing trend versus just something that has been here?

[00:15:53] BB: Yes. Tell us more.

[00:15:55] DT: Yes. I saw that sentiment, and then I saw a bunch of people reacting to the influencer Addison Rae's New Year's posts. People loved how Tumblr-esque they were. Addison Rae has also tried to bring back Tumblr before.

[00:16:13] **BB:** Yes, she has.

[00:16:14] **DT:** Yes. These pictures that she posted on her Instagram for New Year's Eve caused a big stir on TikTok especially. I was like, "Okay, that's marker number one, great." Then

–

[00:16:26] **BB:** You're like a trend sleuth. You're kind of in a data room going like, "Hmm, let me see. Let me –"

[00:16:32] **DT:** [inaudible 00:16:32].

[00:16:32] **BB:** I think you need a dashboard, Daysia, the Daysia dashboard trend. That, I think, has so much –

[00:16:37] **DT:** I need like a big pin board with –

[00:16:40] **BB:** Yes, yes. No, we need to have live digital information coming through at all times. I don't know. It's an idea for you, talk to your office.

[00:16:47] **DT:** Yes. It's got to be viral.

[00:16:49] **BB:** It's got to be viral. It has to be. Then there's an alarm if it goes off like, "Oh, approaching one billion." Whatever. I don't know.

[00:16:55] **DT:** Yes. Well, there's the Addison Rae stuff. Then are a couple of Kardashian things that happened. I think, one, Kardashians are a really good indicator of when something is super mainstream.

[00:17:07] **BB:** Oh, yes. Seismic shifts of the Internet.

[00:17:09] **DT:** Yes. Kylie Jenner, she literally made other headlines by herself just for changing her hair because this is a very specific time. She was evoking a specific era of herself called the King Kylie era, and that is very connected to Tumblr in many ways. That happened.

[00:17:32] BB: No, I know. I'm aware.

[00:17:35] DT: Yes. There's a huge indicator that people are really serious about bringing back the aesthetics and the vibe of 2014 Tumblr, especially online. Then I think the nail in the coffin for me was that Kim Kardashian for her Valentine's Day's SKIMS collection tapped Lana Del Rey to model for it and created these very Tumblr-esque images. That's when you know it's like, "Okay, we can hit go on this." I think three incidents, which was really good.

[00:18:07] BB: Yes, three indicators.

[00:18:09] DT: That's a really good gauge for what is trending and viral for me because whether that's literally just videos, like videos –

[00:18:19] BB: Yes. It could be just videos.

[00:18:21] DT: Millions of views that each got three videos with each millions of views. Or if it's something like this which is a little bit more abstract and you need more concrete evidence. Having three incidents, I think, make it a trend, at least. If you have more, even better.

[00:18:39] BB: Hey, even more, even more. You can keep it going. Okay. Daysia, I have a little rapid-fire question session here for us. Are you ready to get into it?

[00:18:49] DT: Yes.

[00:18:50] BB: Okay. Video or phone interview?

[00:18:56] DT: I like video because I like you to see my face, although I think phone is more convenient.

[00:19:03] BB: Agreed. Bullet points or paragraphs in a pitch?

[00:19:06] DT: I actually like a short graph. Keep it short and sweet. If you can bold –

[00:19:13] **BB:** Three sentences with bolding.

[00:19:14] **DT:** Yes. If you can fold the big point or hyperlink the important point, then I think that would be ideal.

[00:19:25] **BB:** Images attached or a Dropbox zip file?

[00:19:29] **DT:** I don't love a zip. I do like an attachment that I could just see immediately.

[00:19:35] **BB:** Exactly. I want to know what's in there. I want to know what's in there. Yes. I don't like any links myself with like, "Download this." No, I don't want to touch that. You never know.

[00:19:46] **DT:** If it comes from a company like a tech company.

[00:19:50] **BB:** Yes, legit. Yes, okay.

[00:19:51] **DT:** You never know. I'm aware of the assets instance. I'll click it. But I prefer to see it up front. I don't want to download, basically.

[00:20:02] **BB:** Yes. Email or XDM?

[00:20:05] **DT:** Oh, just email me because I don't. XDMs are hard now because you can't DM me. I need to follow you back. If I don't follow you back, then you're not going to reach me.

[00:20:16] **BB:** That's too bad. I know.

[00:20:18] **DT:** Although I do like – I don't necessarily mind people reaching out to me on Instagram.

[00:20:23] **BB:** Oh, really? Okay.

[00:20:24] **DT:** But I might not see it.

[00:20:26] **BB:** Okay. All right. Good clarifying. One follow-up or multiple?

[00:20:30] **DT:** One.

[00:20:31] **BB:** Direct or creative subject lines?

[00:20:34] **DT:** Direct.

[00:20:35] **BB:** Press release or media kit?

[00:20:36] **DT:** Media kit.

[00:20:38] **BB:** What time, if there is one, that you read pictures?

[00:20:42] **DT:** I read pictures in the morning, usually. I try to do it when I log on.

[00:20:47] **BB:** ET-based, right?

[00:20:48] **DT:** Yes. Sometimes, I get a story straight away, so I have to just **[inaudible 00:20:53]**.

[00:20:53] **BB:** Oh, I see. You just got to plow through. Okay.

[00:20:56] **DT:** I have to do the story first, and then I'll check my email. Usually, I try to do it before noon.

[00:21:01] **BB:** Types of sources you'd love to get if any.

[00:21:08] **DT:** I love academics. I love creators.

[00:21:11] **BB:** You love data.

[00:21:14] DT: I love people who work with creators.

[00:21:17] BB: Got it. I know that's super broad.

[00:21:19] BB: Now, people who work with creatives like PR people or they represent them. They do hair and makeup. Clarify.

[00:21:26] DT: I think if you're closely tied to the inner workings of the creator economy, then feel free to reach out. I don't cover creator economy as much as I'd like to, but I still do. So I'm not going to cover every startup that exists there but talent agents or managers or influencer, marketing experts, things like that, people who are just working with creators and influencers on a regular basis. If you have some sort of expertise that you can communicate to me, then I will just keep you in mind for future stories.

[00:22:05] BB: Okay, sounds good. Daysia, is there something that we can promote, emphasize, highlight, just praise you for as we just wrap up here? We just want to give you a little spotlight.

[00:22:16] DT: Yes. No, just read my byline. If you're going to pitch me, read me because that's one thing that I just do want to emphasize, actually. Read me.

[00:22:28] BB: Yes, please.

[00:22:29] DT: Notice when I cover things only once. You don't have to pitch me about that again.

[00:22:34] BB: Yes. It's one and done, but it's a trend if it's three. Look for the three. Daysia, thank you so much for being on today. Everyone, this is the fabulous Daysia Tolentino, Culture and Trends Reporter, NBC news. Thank you so much, Daysia. I hope you get some good trend emails that are real.

[00:22:55] DT: Me, too. Yes. If anyone from the big platforms, always feel free to connect with me.

[00:23:03] BB: There you go. There you go.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:23:06] ANNOUNCER: Thanks for listening to this week's Coffee with a Journalist episode, featuring Daysia Tolentino from NBC News. For more exclusive insights about the journalists on this podcast, subscribe to our weekly podcast newsletter at onepitch.co/podcast. We'll see you next week. Until then, start great stories.

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