#ISOJ

Table of Contents

Volume 1, Number 2 Fall 2011

Editors' Note

Welcome to the second issue of the first volume of the #ISOJ, The official research journal of the International Symposium on Online Journalism. The journal was officially launched in April at the 12th International Symposium on Online Journalism in Austin, Texas at the University of Texas at Austin.

This second issue features six articles from the research papers that were peer-reviewed and selected for presentation at the April 2011 symposium. We are happy to include these articles in this journal as they represent papers that received the highest judging marks among all the other papers in the research competition this year.

This issue focuses on the impact of social media in journalism, the sociological nuances impacting organizational structures and processes in newsrooms, and the interactive features of today's news sites.

The journal aims to demonstrate the quality and uniqueness of the research that is being conducted today in online journalism from scholars around the world. Our aim is that this journal can serve as a living archive that records the trends and challenges in online journalism today and document the research work of the International Symposium on Online Journalism.

Cheers,

Amy Schmitz Weiss
and
Rosental Calmon Alves
Co-editors

Journal Details

About the Journal

Co-Editors-in-Chief:

Rosental Calmon Alves
Amy Schmitz Weiss

About Us

#ISOJ The Journal of the International Symposium on Online Journalism is an international journal devoted to advancing the scholarship in the area of journalism and innovative technologies. Articles included in the journal are based on original research, methodologies relevant to the study of journalism and innovative technologies (online, tablets, mobile platforms, etc.), critical syntheses of research and theoretical perspectives on journalism today. The journal maintains a social scientific and broad behavioral focus.

Disclaimer

The editors cannot be held responsible for any errors or consequences that arise from the use of information contained in the #ISOJ Journal. The views and opinions in the journal do not reflect those of the publisher or editors.

Copyright and photocopying

Contact

Rosental Calmon Alves
rosental.alves@austin.utexas.edu

Amy Schmitz Weiss
aschmitz@mail.sdsu.edu

Gatejumping: Twitter, TV News and the Delivery of Breaking News

ORIGINAL ARTICLE - ISOJ 2011

Dale Blasingame
Texas State University – San Marcos

The diffusion of Twitter has changed the gatekeeping process and flow of information in television news. Because of Twitter, the power of news delivery is now in the hands of many different newsroom employees – who this study labels "gatejumpers" – who, in the past, were not employed in roles of storytellers. This study qualitatively examines how Twitter has altered the "gates" in television newsrooms in San Antonio, Texas, the country's 37th largest television market, and quantitatively analyzes whether television stations and employees are effectively using Twitter as a tool to deliver breaking news.

The increasingly familiar phrase "Web first" is a rallying cry for newspapers still trying to adapt to the digital world. It means stories are published first to the Web before they are published online. It is a reminder of the massive changes in the industry and a signifier of the differences in routines for journalists. While that particular saying may not be uttered much in television newsrooms, the mindset is still there. All journalists, no matter which medium, are reminded that news happens in real time and cannot wait until the 5, 6 or 10 p.m. newscasts or morning paper to be released to the public. For instance, when a gunman walked into the Discovery Channel headquarters in Washington, D.C. in September of 2010, the news did not wait to break on NBC, CBS, ABC, MSNBC, CNN or Fox News. It broke on Twitter – through a stream of real-time tweets from inside the Discovery building. Twitter users even captured the first picture of the gunman and the SWAT team arriving at the scene (Farhi, 2010).

Journalists are taking note of the resources citizens are using to pass along information to the public. Such examples show that the mindset of "Web first" needs to be updated. Indeed, Twitter has emerged as the go-to tool for journalists to provide instant dissemination of information from several different sources, both official and unofficial (Hermida, 2010).

The majority of television newsrooms across the United States are currently using Twitter with high frequency. According to a recent study by the Radio Television Digital News Association (2010), or RTDNA, and Hofstra University, 77% of television newsrooms have a Twitter account, with more than 70% saying they either use the micro-blogging service constantly or, at the very least, daily.

Many consider gatekeeping theory to be the core theory of guidance in the news business. Some, Berkowitz (1990) for instance, used gatekeeping as a predictive measure; this study, however, will use gatekeeping as a descriptive framework to explain how Twitter is affecting the news business. Previous research, Hermida (2010) for example, has alluded to the changes in gatekeeping brought about by social media. This study explains how Twitter is changing the typical flow of information, how television newsrooms are delivering the news and, in addition, which newsroom employees are delivering the news. It does so through an examination of breaking news coverage. Based on the author's decade of experience in television news, the typical flow of a breaking news story (often interchangeably called a spot news story) is as follows: an assignment editor hears about the event over a police scanner and dispatches a photographer to the scene to get initial information and shoot video and interviews; the photographer is sometimes accompanied by a reporter – if not, and the spot news event warrants it, a reporter will be sent to the scene; information is then relayed to a producer, who then writes a script for the anchorman or anchorwoman to deliver to the audience.

Brogan and Smith (2010) coined the phrase "gatejumping" to describe marketing talents on the Web. According to Brogan and Smith (2010, p. 41), gatejumping is finding "a better way to do things while everyone else is too busy to notice." For instance, whereas traditional radio is a gatekeeper industry, podcasts are gatejumpers. *People* Magazine is a gatekeeper, while gossip blogger Perez Hilton is a gatejumper (Brogan & Smith, 2010). This study applies the term gatejumping to the news business and uses the term in a more literal sense. Twitter allows for news to jump the traditional flow of gates and reach the audience. When Twitter is used in its most efficient and effective manner, it is possible for a newsroom employee who is traditionally only involved in the earliest of gatekeeping decisions to now have a direct relationship with the audience.

It is important to keep in mind this study documents a phenomenon that currently does not have a conclusion. Studies like this take a snapshot of current-day communication for the basis of communication history - whether Twitter remains a key role in television news or not.

Literature Review

Gatekeeping theory is one of the oldest theories in the history of mass communication research (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). At its core, gatekeeping is the decision process that determines why one story makes air or print and another does not. Shoemaker et al. (2001, p. 233) defined gatekeeping as "the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media." Shoemaker et al. (2001) also noted that gatekeeping involves more than simple story selection. It includes how messages are told to the public, how much time each story receives on the broadcast or how much space it receives in a newspaper and the tone of each story (Shoemaker, et al., 2001). In

addition, Shoemaker et al. (2001, p. 233) defined gatekeepers as "either the individuals or the sets of routine procedures that determine whether items pass through the gates."

While gatekeeping theory is a core theory of mass communication, its initial purpose was food related. German psychologist Kurt Lewin (1947) developed gatekeeping theory in 1947 while conducting research on different factors that would entice women in Iowa to buy more meat products for their households. Lewin's (1947) original work found that women are in charge of the "gates" in the home through which decisions pass. These decisions ultimately determine which food will be grown or purchased and served at the dinner table. Lewin (1947, p. 145) noted his theory of gates "holds not only for food channels but also for the traveling of a news item through certain communication channels in a group." That idea sparked decades of research that continues today.

David Manning White took Lewin's theory of gates and applied it to newspapers. White (1964) studied the decisions of a wire editor to determine why certain stories made the next day's paper and why other stories did not. White (1964, p. 163) found the process might involve several gatekeeping steps taken by several people, from "reporter to rewrite man, through bureau chief to 'state' file editors at various press association offices" – however the final say came from the last gatekeeper, the editor. White (1964) found the editor's decision-making process to be highly subjective and based on the editor's own personal experiences and attitudes.

Berkowitz (1990) suggested a refining of gatekeeping theory as it applies to television news. He found that television gatekeeping differs from that of a "lone wire editor sitting next to a pile of stories and making decisions based on either newsworthiness or personal preferences" (Berkowitz, 1990, p. 66). Instead, Berkowitz (1990) learned television gatekeepers base decisions on gut instincts about what makes a good television newscast and gatekeeping

in television is much more of a group process when compared to newspaper gatekeeping. Berkowitz (1990) found television news stories face several gates before making air. He also suggested certain types of stories could prevent other types of stories from making air. For instance, "spot news closed the gate on planned event stories" (Berkowitz, 1990, p. 66).

More recently, researchers began examining new media effects on gatekeeping theory. Singer (2001) looked at the differences in story selection between the print and online versions of newspapers. Singer (2001) found, at least in 1998 (the time of her data collection), that newspapers' online editions were much more focused on local content than the print editions. More pertinent to this study, Singer stated that online editions cause newspapers to surrender some of their traditional gatekeeping functions. According to Singer (2001, p. 66), "providing a link to 'wire.ap.org,' the online version of the Associated Press, is quite a different thing from selecting which wire stories are of such significance or interest that they merit inclusion in the day's paper." Singer (2001, p. 66) went on to note that if newspapers continue this trend online, "Mr. Gates may find himself out of a job." In other words, Singer hinted that online journalism could eventually kill the need for gatekeeping. In her 2001 work, Singer touched on two other topics important for the purposes of this study. First, she used the term 'shovelware' to describe content that appeared in the print edition of a newspaper and was simply shoveled onto the Web with no changes except for the mark-up language needed to become a part of the Web. Second, Singer (2001, p. 78) noted each Internet user "can, and does, create in essence a 'Daily Me' consisting of items important to him or her." Singer (2001, p. 78) said this "personalized world view is right at the user's fingertips, in the same medium in which the online newspaper also exists."

Bruns (2003, p. 2) expanded on this idea of news consumers going online to bypass traditional news outlets and, instead, turning

"directly to first hand information providers." Bruns (2003) suggested the World Wide Web has put gatekeeping decisions in the hands of anyone with information, not just journalists. In addition, these responsibilities are also passed down to the user, who acts as a gatekeeper while surfing the World Wide Web (Bruns, 2003). Because of the immense amount of information available online and the lack of concern over space (which is prevalent in print and television newsrooms), Bruns (2003) suggested a new approach for online news: 'gatewatching.' According to Bruns, gatewatchers are not reporters. Instead, a gatewatcher is a combination of a traditional gatekeeper and a news/information aggregator. Bruns (2003, p. 8) stated, "Gatewatchers fundamentally publicize news (by pointing to sources) rather than publish it (by compiling an apparently complete report from the available sources)."

In their study of bloggers, Hayes, Singer and Ceppos (2007) said this trend toward news aggregation on the Web is a double-edged sword. According to the study (Hayes, Singer & Ceppos, 2007, p. 270), aggregation "excludes as well as includes, and much of what is excluded may be valuable to civic knowledge." They acknowledged that the same is true of journalists, saying, "Aggregation is, in essence, a gatekeeping role" (Hayes et al., 2007 p. 270).

As for the ethics of online journalism, Singer (2003) noted the current lack of a rulebook. She found many journalists believe the Web needs its own guidelines, while others think traditional rules can and should be enforced upon the online world. Singer (2003) mentioned two particular issues as the biggest ethical dilemmas of online journalism, one of which is particularly relevant to Twitter: the capacity for speed. Singer (2003, p. 152) noted critics of online journalism believe it to be "untrustworthy because of its emphasis on getting information fast rather than getting it right." Without gatekeepers for quality control, Singer (2003, p. 153) said some believe "the quantity of the news product increases, but its quality is likely to be diluted." On the other hand, "the potential for speed

makes professional judgment regarding the news more vital than ever" (Singer, 2003, p. 153). Singer found the new journalist helps the audience make sense of the news that exists while not deciding what they should or should not know.

Definition of Twitter

Twitter is on an astonishing four-year ride. Evan Williams and Biz Stone launched the free service in August 2006 (Farhi, 2009). However, it was not until its exposure at the South By Southwest Interactive Festival in March 2007 in Austin, Texas, when Twitter skyrocketed onto the national (and international) scene.

Twitter is classified as a micro-blog, as well as a "new media technology that enables and extends our ability to communicate, sharing some similarities with broadcast" (Hermida, 2010, p. 298). Users are able to send messages, called tweets, with a maximum of 140 characters to the people who choose to follow them. Many tweets contain links to articles, videos or other media. Twitter also allows users to reply to others (in public and, if the other user is following you, in private via a direct message, or DM) and search for real-time information. By September 2010, Twitter surpassed 145 million registered users (Van Grove, 2010). The service unofficially hit the 20-billion tweet mark in July 2010 (Ostrow, 2010) and a recent Pew Center poll found 85% of Americans knew of Twitter ("Political Knowledge," 2010).

Recent numbers show Twitter tends to skew toward an older audience. More than 40% of its users are 35-49 years old (Farhi, 2009). Those users are prime viewers of news and information. In fact, analysts say Twitter users are "two to three times more likely to visit a leading news Web site than the average person" (Farhi, 2009, p. 30).

Media personalities use Twitter as a source of delivering news and opinion, sharing links and interacting with viewers. And there is quite the audience available. Rachel Maddow (@Maddow), host of MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show," currently has 1.7 million followers on Twitter. More than 149,000 people subscribe to tweets from "CBS Evening News" host Katie Couric (@KatieCouric). Even local news anchors and reporters develop decent-sized follow-ings. Kim Fischer (@TxNewsGirl), a reporter at KXAS in Dallas, has 3,900 followers. However, one of the most prolific journalist-tweeters works behind the camera. Jim Long (@NewMediaJim) is a photographer for NBC News. On average, he delivers 40 tweets a day to his 41,000+ followers. Most of his tweets are replies to people who follow him.

In its brief history, Twitter has already contributed in breaking sev-eral huge stories. Reports of Michael Jackson's death comprised 30% of tweets in the hours following on June 25, 2009 (Cashmore, 2009). When a US Airways jet crashed into the Hudson River, news reached the public through a tweet and a picture from a Twitter user 15 minutes before mainstream media were on the airwaves (Beau-mont, 2009). Iranian citizens protesting 2009 election results used Twitter as a voice that reached millions around the world (Morozov, 2009).

Technologies such as Twitter have created new means for news organizations to communicate with viewers or readers. Picard (2010), however, viewed this as a double-edged sword for the news organization itself. Picard (2010, para. 15) said "the content that news organizations produce (at a cost) is distributed by others, thus removing the need or desire for many people to seek out the origi-nal sources of the information." Picard believed this could eventu-ally have a disastrous effect on moneymaking efforts of the news organization. Picard (2010) also noted that, as of now, social media tools like Twitter appear to be more valuable to news organizations in large, metropolitan areas than small-town news outlets.

While examining press coverage of Twitter, Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss (2010, p. 2) noted Twitter is still at a stage where it could turn out to be the "app de jour that will fade from the limelight, or it could become a staple of daily life." Their study found speed of delivery to be one of the repeated messages of Twitter press coverage (Arceneaux & Schmitz Weiss, 2010). As quoted by Arceneaux and Schmitz Weiss (2010, p. 7), Associated Press writer Sam Dolnick said the "lightning-quick updates" available via Twitter provide "further evidence of a sea change in how people gather their information in an increasingly Internet-savvy world."

In addition, Hermida (2010, p. 300) found "indications that journalism norms are bending as professional practices adapt to social media tools such as micro-blogging." Using the Iranian elections mentioned above as an example, Hermida (2010) noted that news organizations were promoting minute-by-minute blogs that contained a mixture of Twitter messages, unverified information and traditional news accounts of what was happening in Iran. Hermida (2010, p. 300) also noted that a few months before the Iranian elections, the BBC included "unverified tweets filtered by journalists" as part of its breaking news coverage of the Mumbai terror attacks. The network said it was merely monitoring and passing along information as quickly as it could. Hermida (2010) concluded this process of filtration only maintains and enforces the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists, even when applied to new media like Twitter.

Based on previous research and the author's personal experiences in the television news industry, this study proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: *How has Twitter changed the levels of gates and allowed non-anchor newsroom employees to become gatejumpers, or de facto reporters, particularly during spot news situations?*

RQ2: *What are the main functions of Twitter accounts in television newsrooms?*

Methodology

To answer the first research question, this study used a qualitative case study approach. A day with major breaking news in San Antonio, Texas, the 37th largest television market in the country, was qualitatively selected to highlight the effectiveness and efficiency of Twitter in a breaking situation.

To answer the second research question, data were collected from one market (San Antonio) and quantitatively analyzed, much like Berkowitz' (1990) gatekeeping study. Accounts of all known working journalists in the newsroom (anchors, management, producers, reporters, photographers, assignment editors), weather (meteorologists, producers), traffic and web editors and official station accounts from San Antonio were selected for this study. Accounts were found via a combination of personal knowledge, lists on station websites, Twitter lists established by Twitter users and conversations with newsroom employees. As a last resort, a simple scroll-through of the "following" lists of each user turned up a few accounts. A cut-off date of September 23, 2010 was established to finalize the list. A total of 60 accounts were followed: 24 from KSAT, 22 from WOAI, seven from KENS and seven from KABB.

In addition, some journalists had their accounts set to private and did not respond to requests to follow them. They were not included in this study.

Next, Twitter lists for each of the four stations were created and each journalist's Twitter account was attached to its respective station list. Though not an essential step, this helped eliminate confusion and speeded up the coding process.

Ten days worth of tweets were selected for coding. A website called "random.org" was used for date selection. September 1, 2010 and October 15, 2010 were chosen as the start and end dates for possible selection. Random.org generated the following dates for coding: September 2, September 9, September 15, September 17, September 21, September 23, September 28, October 8, October 11 and October 13. In all, 2,293 tweets were collected for analysis.

The data were coded using a variation of guidelines developed by University of Texas professor Dominic Lasorsa ("Social Media," 2010). Lasorsa (2010) outlined five categories he and his students use to code tweets for classroom exercises:

● Breaking news (alerts or updates as news happens)

● Self-promotion (publicizing a story on that particular station)

● Lifecasting (daily chitchat about personal issues)

● Seeking information (a request for story tips or updates)

● Retweet (someone else's message that is forwarded to others)

After an email conversation with Lasorsa, his guidelines were modified for the purpose of this paper. Each tweet was coded into one of five categories. These categories are essentially the same as Lasorsa uses, except for the replacement of one category. New names were applied to some of the categories:

● Breaking News (alerts or updates as news happens)

● Promotion (publicizing a story on that particular station or the website)

● Daily Chatter (chitchat about personal issues)

● Viewer Participation (a request for story tips, photos or updates)

● Non-breaking news (news items that are pertinent to the moment, but not breaking)

A total of 2,293 tweets were collected for analysis. Two graduate students performed a coding sample of 230 tweets, or 10%, with 98% reliability using Holsti's intercoder reliability formula. One of the graduate students then solely coded the remaining 2,063 tweets.

Results

As stated above, a case study approach was used for the purposes of this paper. A date with significant breaking news was selected to highlight the effectiveness of Twitter in terms of real-time news delivery from a variety of sources.

On the night of July 28, 2010, the San Antonio Police Department responded to a triple-murder suicide on the city's northwest side. The shooting happened around 8:30 p.m., an hour and a half before the late-evening newscasts. However, the city of San Antonio, or at least those following the accounts of pertinent journalists, learned of the story on Twitter.

At 8:32 p.m., KABB's assignment desk (@KABBDesk) sent the first tweet with a mention of it, citing police scanner chatter of a shooting.

"SAPD scanners say officers are heading out to the 17000 block of Fawn Crossing for a multiple shooting scene." - @KABBDesk

This information was delivered 28 minutes before KABB was on the air with its 9 p.m. newscast. At 9:04 p.m., four minutes after the newscast started, KABB reporter Grace White (@Grace__White)

announced on Twitter that she just arrived and provided the first picture of the crime scene. Move ahead 16 minutes to 9:20 p.m. and KSAT photographer Johnny Garcia (@DoublePunching) arrived. Forty minutes before KSAT's newscast was to go on the air, Garcia provided two more pictures and a link to a map of the crime scene.

"On scene at shooting in The Woods of Deerfield subdivision http://twitpic.com/29l9h6" - @Grace__White

"BREAKING: Shooting at Woods of Deerfield neighborhood. Location: http://j.mp/9QGaxD http://twitpic.com/29ldij" - @doublepunching

One minute later, the KSAT station account (@KSATNews) sent Garcia's pictures to its followers, but did not use the retweet function. At 9:23 p.m., KENS anchorwoman Sarah Lucero (@SarahLuceroKENS) asked her followers if anyone knew what was going on at the Villages of Deerfield, the neighborhood where the crime scene was located. Lucero said there was word four people were shot – the first details to emerge via Twitter. Another two minutes later, at 9:25 p.m., KENS anchorman Jeff Vaughn (@JeffVaughn) cited "early reports" (i.e., chatter on the police scanner or unconfirmed information from the scene) that four people were shot in the home.

"What's going on in the Woods of Deerfield neighborhood off Bitters & Huebner…4 pple (SIC) said to be shot" - @SarahLuceroKENS

"Breaking: Shooting in North #SA, near Bitters & Huebner. Early reporters are 4 victims inside Deerfield home. Latest on @KENS5 @ 10." - @JeffVaughn

KSAT's station account then tweeted a link to a web story at 9:26 p.m., saying four people had been shot and promising full coverage

on the 10 p.m. newscast. All of this happened more than a half hour before the 10 p.m. newscasts went on the air.

The journalists' Twitter accounts went silent until 10:17 p.m., when KABB's White began tweeting information from a police news conference held at the scene. A few minutes later at 10:26 p.m., WOAI reporter Leila Walsh (@Leila_Walsh) submitted the first tweets from a WOAI employee about the shooting. Walsh tweeted details that emerged from the news conference until 10:34 p.m..

"Police: children of one of the victims were playing outside when they heard gunshots. Kids went indoors and saw shooter with gun." - @LeilaWalsh

Finally, between 10:43-11:04 p.m., the KABB, KENS and WOAI station accounts tweeted links to web stories with more information about the event. By this point, police were clearing the scene and reporters went home. The story was considered over for the night, until follow-up angles were pursued the next day.

Data for the second research question were collected from the 60 accounts of journalists (including the four station accounts) for quantitative analysis. A total of 2,293 tweets were selected for coding over a random sample of ten days. Coding results are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of data coding of tweets from San Antonio journalists over a ten-day period, broken down by five categories

Station	Breaking	Promotional	Chit-Chat	Participation	Non-Breaking
KABB	70 (27%)	134 (52%)	20 (8%)	2 (1%)	32 (12%)
KENS	24 (8%)	122 (38%)	164 (52%)	2 (1%)	5 (1%)
WOAI	11 (3%)	308 (72%)	83 (19%)	2 (1%)	23 (5%)
KSAT	219 (17%)	297 (23%)	728 (56%)	11 (1%)	36 (3%)
Overall	324 (14%)	861 (38%)	995 (43%)	17 (1%)	96 (4%)

Tweets from the four official station accounts were isolated and analyzed for comparison as part of the second research question. A total of 851 tweets from these four accounts (@KABBFOX29, @KENS5, @NEWS4WOAI and @KSATNews) were coded for purposes of this study. All numbers in Table 2 represent just the four accounts that are the official representations of the individual stations.

Table 2
Results of data coding of tweets from the official station accounts of the four San Antonio television stations over a ten-day period, broken down by five categories

Station	Breaking	Promotional	Chit-Chat	Participation	Non-Breaking
KABB	26 (17%)	122 (81%)	1 (1%)	0	1 (1%)
KENS	1 (1%)	104 (99%)	0	0	0
WOAI	0	296 (100%)	0	0	0
KSAT	36 (12%)	257 (86%)	4 (1%)	2 (1%)	1 (0%)
Overall	63 (7%)	779 (92%)	5 (1%)	2 (0%)	2 (0%)

After data from Table 2 were run through a chi-square test, a χ^2 (12, 851) = 73.297, p = .00, found a significant difference between the

numbers of tweets in the five coding categories (as shown in Table 3). Because the numbers are so heavily weighted to one category, it is obvious there is a difference between the promotional category and the other four categories. In other words, all four San Antonio television stations use Twitter primarily for the same reason: promotion.

Table 3
Results of the statistical analysis test with chi-square results

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2 sided)
Pearson chi-square	73.297a	12	0
Likelihood ratio	94.483	12	0
N of valid cases	851		

a. 12 cells (60.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.

Discussion

The above case study perfectly illustrates the potential of Twitter as a device to deliver information in a breaking news situation. It also shows how information on Twitter does not pass through the traditional flow of "gates" before reaching the audience. Under the traditional flow of information, newsroom employees like assignment editors, photographers and reporters are all early gatekeepers in standard newsroom operations. If the norm holds true, they collect information that is approved by other newsroom employees before it is delivered to the audience. The majority of the time, the information is also delivered to the public by a higher-level gatekeeper, i.e. an anchor. However in the triple-murder suicide, it was the traditionally early gatekeepers, now called gatejumpers, who were responsible for delivering the majority of information on Twitter to the public. An assignment editor broke the story, a reporter and photographer both provided the first pictures and maps from

the scene, and reporters also tweeted details from the official police news conference. Conversely, the only time any late gatekeepers joined the process, when both anchors from KENS tweeted, it was to show they did not know what was going on by asking if the public had any information. It should also be noted that the most powerful gatekeepers in a traditional newsroom setting, management, did not issue one tweet during this breaking news situation. With Twitter, any newsroom employee involved in the process delivers news. Therefore, each individual employee is just as important a gatekeeper as the next. The pecking order of traditional gatekeeping is irrelevant to a Twitter audience.

The case study shows that news is delivered to viewers in real time, if viewers want to receive it in that method. The thousands of people following Twitter accounts of the four San Antonio television stations (KSAT: 6,500, WOAI: 5,200, KENS: 1,950 and KABB: 1,300) are discovering the news in their city as it happens. One may argue that the news delivered via Twitter is oftentimes incomplete and disorganized, but critics have issued those same complaints about the television news product itself for years. On this particular night, for someone living in the Villages of Deerfield neighborhood, the scene of the triple murder-suicide mentioned in this study, Twitter was a quick and effective means of knowing what was going on down the street. Even if one does not live in that neighborhood, many news viewers want to know what is happening in their city. Twitter again delivered toward that goal. Hermida (2010) uses the term "awareness system" to describe the phenomenon of knowing what is going on everywhere, without being everywhere.

While the case study details an example of how Twitter can affect the flow of information, it would be foolish to suggest this is what happens on a daily basis in television newsrooms. In fact, data analyzed for this paper show the case study, while a shining example of Twitter's potential, is far from the norm.

On the ten days selected for coding, only 14% of the tweets of journalists in San Antonio were coded as breaking news. The greatest number of tweets, 43%, was coded as daily chit-chat, which is to be expected on a social medium like Twitter. However, the large number of promotional tweets needs to be examined closely. Those tweets, which accounted for 38% of the total number, were mainly from a service called "Twitterfeed," which newsrooms use to automatically generate a link that is sent to their Twitter followers any time a story is published on their station websites. In other words, these tweets are issued without a station employee using Twitter or one of its platforms. Some newsrooms would likely argue these Twitterfeed tweets are informational, since they do contain the headline and first couple of words of the published story. Oftentimes the words are cut off in mid-sentence though, which is a common complaint.

This issue is even more striking when only the tweets of the official station accounts are analyzed (Table 2). The data show all four station primarily use Twitter for one reason: to promote an upcoming newscast or a story on a station website. One station, WOAI, had 100% of its tweets coded as promotional. This station does not have an employee who contributes to the official account or interacts with viewers in any way. A second station, KENS, had only one tweet from its station account not listed as promotional. However, even that one tweet contained a plug for the station's website. KSAT and KABB were both much better in utilizing Twitter as a tool for breaking news, but the percentages were not significantly different from WOAI and KENS. This is a major area of improvement for a station looking to gain a stranglehold on the Twitter market in San Antonio.

Make no mistake – this analysis does not insinuate all links are promotional in nature. In reality, links are an integral part of what makes Twitter work as a medium. The problem is with automatically generated tweets from services like Twitterfeed, which repre-

sent a minimal-effort approach to Twitter by newsrooms and often contain only a headline and a link. In other words, you have to go somewhere else (the station's website) to get value from that tweet. It is this author's opinion that there is a huge difference in quality between Twitterfeed tweets and a station or newsroom employee providing actual details or updates to a story in a tweet that also includes a link for more information. Those particular types of tweets were coded as "breaking news" or "non-breaking news" for purposes of this study.

While this study focuses on Twitter as a content delivery platform, it is also important to note that Twitter is also a constantly updated source of news. There is the recognition that the public itself are now gatejumpers. When people see breaking news happen, they have the ability to deliver the news on Twitter just an employee at a news station would. Recall the 2009 plane crash in the Hudson River (Beaumont, 2009). A man on a ferry who took a picture delivered that breaking story first to the world. This notion that people no longer have to rely on news outlets to receive news is likely troubling for news organizations to hear.

Twitter also allows journalists to know what is going on in their own community. A producer at WBZ in Boston found what turned out to be her station's lead story in two newscasts by monitoring conversations from school district employees during a snow storm (Potter, 2011). Situations like this happen quite often in newsrooms across the country. So stations that choose to ignore Twitter are, essentially, ignoring potential story ideas. Imagine the reaction if employees hung up on a viewer who had a news tip or failed to reply or forward an e-mail with a story idea. Disciplinary consequences would likely follow. Yet those scenarios are no different than a station choosing to ignore Twitter.

Finally, it is important to note that television news viewership is on the decline. A recent Pew Research Center poll ("Americans

Spending," 2010) found television news viewership dropped 10% from 1991 to 2010. In comparison, the same poll found online news consumption is now more a more popular source of news than radio newscasts or newspapers ("Americans Spending," 2010). If viewership is declining, television stations must go to where the consumers are and provide reasons for them to convert into viewers. An aggressive Twitter account is one tool that could facilitate that change. The notion of television news viewing being a passive event, as it was in the past, is quickly evaporating. It is up to television newsrooms to adapt to the changing conditions or be left behind by their consumers.

Conclusion

The diffusion of Twitter has the potential to change the entire process of news delivery. It has put the power of news delivery in the hands of many different newsroom employees, thus altering the flow of information and gatekeeping procedures. The "Web first" mentality is no longer good enough. The hunger for real-time news delivery is out there, so stations must adapt to "Twitter first." However, this study also shows stations have much work to do in using Twitter as a tool to deliver breaking news and allowing their employees to become gatejumpers, instead of using it purely for promotional purposes. After sharing these results with Mark Briggs, author of *Journalism 2.0* and *Journalism Next*, Briggs said (via Twitter, of course), "The key is to respect the relationship with users. I like the 80/20 rule, where 80% of time you add value, 20% you promote." This could be the standard stations use as they begin to truly embrace Twitter as a platform for content delivery.

This analysis is not without limitations, though. The largest, perhaps, is the nature of the topic. There is a possibility Twitter will fall out of favor and journalists will move on to the next big thing in social media. This is listed as a limitation, but research like this will still be valuable since the "next big thing" will likely build on Twit-

ter's momentum. Also, several of the days selected as part of the random sample were Fridays, where content typically focuses on weekend plans, movies, concerts, etc. Future research would limit random selection of days to Monday through Thursday to correct this.

It is my recommendation that future research on this topic focus on the power of social media, be it Twitter or other technologies. Will these social media help television news avoid the mistakes of newspapers, which fought and resisted the digital world until it was nearly too late? How can television newsrooms build brand loyalty through these social media? Will training be done to help all newsroom employees understand the power of gatekeeping and become effective and trusted gatejumpers? These are questions that will shape the future of television news.

References

Arceneaux, N. & Schmitz Weiss, A. (2010). Seems stupid until you try it: Press coverage of Twitter, 2006-9. *New Media & Society,* 12(8). doi: 10.1177/1461444809360773

Beaumont, C. (2009, January 16). New York plane crash: Twitter breaks the news, again. *Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/4269765/New-York-plane-crash-Twitter-breaks-the-news-again.html

Berkowitz, D. (1990). Refining the gatekeeping metaphor for local television news. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 34, 55-68.

Brogan, C. & Smith, J. (2010). *Trust agents: Using the web to build influence, improve reputation, and earn trust.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Bruns, A. (2003). Gatewatching, not gatekeeping: Collaborative online news. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy*, May 2003, 31-44.

Cashmore, P. (2009). Michael Jackson dies: Twitter tributes now 30% of tweets. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2009/06/25/michael-jackson-twitter/

Farhi, P. (2009). The Twitter Explosion. *American Journalism Review*, April/May 2009. Retrieved from http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=4756

Farhi, P. (2010, September 2). Twitter breaks story on Discovery Channel gunman James Lee. The *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/09/01/AR2010090105987.html?hpid=topnews

Hayes, A., Singer, J. & Ceppos, J. (2007). Shifting roles, enduring values: The credible journalist in a digital age. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 22(4), 262-279.

Hermida, A. (2010). Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4, 297-308.

Lasorsa, D. (2010, April). Social media in the classroom: Twitter and journalists [Web log comment]. Retrieved from http://aejmc.blogspot.com/2010/04/social-media-in-classroom-twitter-and.html

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics: II. Channels of group life; social planning and action research. *Human Relations*, 1, 143-153. doi: 10.1177/001872674700100201

Morozov, E. (2009, June 17). Iran elections: A Twitter revolution? The *Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2009/06/17/DI2009061702232.html

Ostrow, A. (2010). Twitter hits 20 billion tweets. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/07/31/twitter-hits-20-billion-tweets/

Pew Research Center (2010). Americans spending more time following the news. Retrieved from http://people-press.org/report/652/

Pew Research Center (2010). Political knowledge update. Retrieved from http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1668/political-news-iq-update-7-2010-twitter-tarp-roberts

Picard, R. (2010). Blogs, tweets, social media, and the news business. Retrieved from http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=101884

Potter, D. (2011). Finding news on Twitter. Retrieved from http://www.advancingthestory.com/2011/02/21/finding-news-on-twitter/

Radio Television Digital News Association (2010). RTDNA/Hofstra survey shows TV station involvement on Facebook, Twitter soaring over last year. Retrieved from http://www.rtdna.org/pages/posts/rtdnahofstra-survey-shows-tv-station-involvement-on-facebook-twitter-soaring-over-last-year941.php

Shoemaker, P.J., Eichholz, M., Kim, E., & Wrigley, B. (2001). Individual and Routine Forces in Gatekeeping. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Spring 2001, 233-246.

Singer, J. (2001). The metro wide web: Changes in newspapers' gatekeeping role online. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, Spring 2001, 65-80.

Singer, J. (2003). Who are these guys? The online challenge to the nation of journalistic professionalism. *Journalism*, 4, 139-163.

Van Grove, J. (2010). Twitter surpasses 145 million registered users. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/09/03/twitter-registered-users-2

White, D.M. (1964). The "gatekeeper": A case study in the selection of news. In Dexter, L. & White, D.M. (Eds.), *People, Society and Mass Communications* (pp. 160-172). New York: The Free Press.

Dale Blasingame is the social media director at Beacon SEO, a search engine/social media optimization company in San Antonio, Texas. Prior to that, he spent nine years as a news producer at News 4 WOAI in San Antonio, where he won two regional Emmy awards. He was a newsroom leader in recognizing the advantages of social media for television stations. Dale recently received his master's degree from Texas State University, where he specialized in new media studies and teaches media writing.

daleblasingame@gmail.com

Experiments in Location-Based Content:
A Case Study of Postmedia's Use of Foursquare

Timothy Currie
University of King's College. Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

In 2010, a number of North American news organizations began integrating editorial content with Foursquare, the mobile service that builds social communities around physical locations. Canada's Postmedia Network, the company that owns many big-city dailies in the country, was one of the most active adopters. This paper examines Postmedia's integration of its editorial content with the location-based service. It takes a case study approach, using in-depth interviews with staff at Postmedia news outlets to explore roles, tasks and strategies for pairing content with location. A primary conclusion is editors were placing primarily opinion pieces, not news stories into the service.

Introduction

The New York Times, The Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, Metro — and Canada's Postmedia Network — were among the major news outlets to begin experimenting with the location-based social media service Foursquare in early 2010. In January, Metro Canada became the first news organization to partner with Foursquare (Metro Canada, 2010). In March, the *Wall Street Journal* issued its "check-in heard round the world" that broke news of a Times Square evacuation (Garber, 2010).

These newspapers have been part of a growing number of news outlets trying to crack the triumvirate of journalism, location and social media. The three elements should be a natural fit: News organizations produce a stream of content filled with geographic addresses. Mobile phone users are increasingly buying smartphones

and using them to access news (Pew Research Center, 2011). In addition, news consumption is increasingly becoming a shared social experience (Pew Research Center, 2010).

Journalists have noted that Foursquare can be an important tool for news organizations. The social media service offers the promise of targeting news distribution, finding on-the-scene human sources to interview during breaking news events, finding story ideas and building social capital with users (Snow & Lavrusik, 2010; Jenkins, 2010; Bradshaw, 2010).

However, the number of Americans who use a location-based service with their mobile phone remains low at 4% (Zickuhr & Smith, 2010). Further, while mobile users have heard of Foursquare, they tend to view the service as a fun experience more than a source of useful information (Invoke, 2010).

Yet news organizations continue to experiment with the service. Most of them use the service to publish restaurant reviews as tips at Foursquare venues. Some have also left news stories as tips. Still, all of them put only a tiny sliver of the content they publish daily into Foursquare.

The purpose of this study is to better understand the criteria online editors use to select content for this location-based social media service. The study also seeks to uncover the tasks editors undertake to integrate their content with Foursquare. The research is exploratory in nature, as existing research into news organizations' use of Foursquare is scant.

This study focuses on Foursquare use within Canada's Postmedia Network. Postmedia is a chain of 12 big-city dailies operating in most of Canada's major urban markets. The study involved interviews with online editors at the three member newspapers that were placing content into Foursquare in early 2011 — the *National*

Post, the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Edmonton Journal*.

It uses the theoretical framework of gatekeeping, which offers a model for understanding how news editors choose some stories for publication and reject others.

This study proposes the following questions:

RQ1: *What criteria have Postmedia editors used to select content for Foursquare?*

RQ2: *How have editors managed their editorial workflow to produce this content?*

About Foursquare

Foursquare is a relative newcomer to the social media big leagues. It was launched in March 2009 and had more than 6.5 million users in February 2011 (Foursquare, 2011).

Users can download the Foursquare app for their smartphone and use it to explore the world around them. They check in at virtual locations called venues, where they can leave a 140-character note to friends in their network. They can also leave 200-character tips for others that suggest things to do at that location. The smartphone's GPS acquires nearby venues and presents tips from the user's friends automatically as the user travels (Figure 1).

The social media service offers a game-like experience whereby users collect points and virtual badges as they explore. Users can bookmark the things they have done and create lists of things to do in the future. Merchants can use Foursquare to offer deals to users who check in frequently.

News organizations have typically used the service to post tips at venues and provide links to articles on their websites.
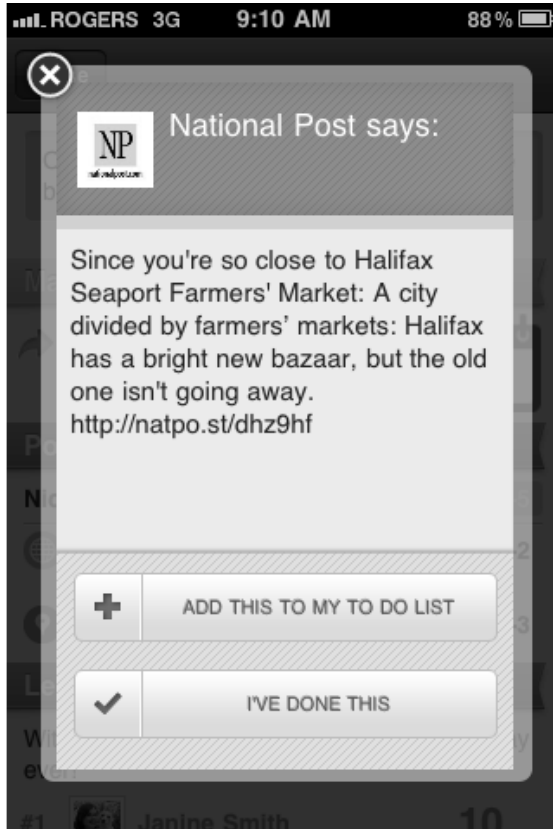

Figure 1. News content presented as a location-based alert

Literature Review

Gatekeeping theory is a useful framework for understanding how online editors choose certain content to put into a location-based service such as Foursquare. As smartphone use grows, news audiences are likely to shift their consumption to mobile channels. If a

traditional gatekeeping function governs editors' selection of news generally, there are strong indications separate gates have evolved for content in specific delivery platforms.

Gatekeeping theory was proposed by psychologist Kurt Lewin in 1947 and first applied to news processes by David Manning White (1950). White conducted a case study involving a wire editor from a small morning newspaper in the U.S. midwest and examined the editor's reasons for rejecting news stories for publication. White concluded that the decisions made by this "Mr. Gates" were "highly subjective value-judgments" — ones "based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations."

Snider (1967) duplicated White's study with the same Mr. Gates and found the editor "still picks the stories he likes and believes his readers want" (p. 427). Bleske (1991) repeated White's study with a Ms. Gates from a southern U.S. daily and found she and White's Mr. Gates classified news stories in "predictable ways" with gender playing no discernable role.

Early in the Internet age, Singer (1997) surveyed journalists in three newsrooms that were involved in publishing online and concluded that journalists saw specific value in their roles as selectors and interpreters. Further, "the gatekeeping function continues to gain strength as a vital part of journalists' self-perception (p. 87)." Singer (1998) suggested readers' increasing preference for interactive content could affect the gatekeeping role of journalists who work online. She cited limited evidence that journalists were re-evaluating their gatekeeping function as they increased the volume of their online work. Singer (2003) saw little change in journalists' roles as they increased their online publishing. However, Singer (2006) found an "evolution in online journalists' thinking" that had them "reconceptualizing their gatekeeping role … toward a partnership between users and journalists (p. 275)," a view shared by Robinson (2005).

It is important to note that much of this newer gatekeeping research focused on journalists working with audience members in a "citizen journalism" function. This is not the exact role of the Foursquare editors in this study. However, the research sheds valuable light on the change in online journalists' conception of their roles over all.

Cassidy (2005), in his survey of role perceptions of newspaper and online journalists, found that online journalists ascribed a lesser importance to "traditional" news values of interpretation and investigation. Reflecting on Boczkowski (2004), he suggested this could be due to the greater role played by the audience in online news practices. Online journalists, he stated, "may place greater importance on [audience] goals and values" when assessing newsworthiness (p. 273).

Shoemaker and Reese (1991) conceived of a hierarchy of influences on media content — individual, routine, organizational, extra-media and ideological as concentric circles. The influence at the centre is the individual one, with the suggestion that others are progressively weaker (Keith, 2011). Scholars in recent years have begun combining gatekeeping theory with this hierarchy, focusing specifically on individual and routine influences as factors in gatekeeping (Cassidy, 2006; Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010).

Routines are what Shoemaker and Reese (1991) called the "patterned, repeated practices and forms media workers use to do their jobs (p. 85)." One of routines pointed to by Shoemaker & Vos (2009) is "journalists' reliance on 'news values' as an abstraction of what the audience values (p. 53)."

The determination of newsworthiness in the age of mobile is a key area for research. Researchers have conceptualized different dimensions of newsworthiness (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), including proximity — which is likely to play a significant role for mobile — and Foursquare — editors.

Keith (2011) has suggested "routines remain so unsolidified" for online journalists that it "allows individuals to have greater influence on newer media than was originally foreseen." She has re-envisioned the model of concentric circles, imagining instead: "a dynamic system of layers, any one of which can be 'breached' by (individual) forces bubbling up from below."

The literature suggests a gatekeeping function that is evolving with the changing roles of online journalists.

Method

This article takes a case study approach to investigate the practices of a small group of people doing a very specific task. The research involved telephone interviews with six employees at four newspapers within Canada's Postmedia Network.

Telephone interviews were chosen over participant observation for two reasons: the distance between participants, who were spread across the country, and the narrow task being studied, which was expected to be only a minor part of the participant's daily job function.

Postmedia was selected because it was one of the most active news organizations using Foursquare at the end of 2010. The author made a list of major North American news organizations reported on blogs and websites to be active on Foursquare. The author also conducted specific searches within Foursquare for major North American news organizations. Postmedia was, by far, the most active news organization using Foursquare, measured by numbers of tips created. In addition, four different Postmedia newspapers were found to have a presence in Foursquare. This offered the prospect of interviewing the largest number of individuals, resulting in the most diverse range of perspectives.

Participants were identified by phoning each of the four organizations and asking for the names of people either overseeing or producing Foursquare content. These people were then contacted by email and invited to participate in the study. All of the people contacted agreed to participate in the study. All were granted anonymity in order to ensure candid responses. All of the participants were male.

The interviews took place between January 31 and March 9, 2011. Each interview lasted between 30 and 55 minutes. In one case, a follow up query was made via email.

Participants were asked 12 questions about their roles, tasks and goals regarding Foursquare use. They were asked to talk about their own experiences at the news organization, not to represent the views of their employer.

The interviews were then transcribed and coded. In the process of analysis, one interview was excluded, as the news organization was not using Foursquare for news distribution, which was the focus of this study. The resulting data source was five participants from three different newspapers — the *National Post*, the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Edmonton Journal*.

All Foursquare screenshots that appear as images in this article were taken using the iPhone Foursquare app.

Bulleted responses in sequence represent comments from different participants.

Findings

Participants described themselves using the terms "digital producer," "online producer," "social media strategist" and "community newsroom editor." Two identified themselves as managers oversee-

ing digital content. All of them were responsible for maintaining their organization's presence in other social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. One said he also edited website news content.

Three of the five participants said they worked in the newsroom. The other two said they worked in a department that straddled the newsroom and marketing departments. Three identified themselves as journalists. Of the remaining two, one cited a background of journalistic work at a college newspaper.

The interview subjects are referred in this article as participants or editors. While all five identified themselves as online editors distributing news content, only three considered themselves newsroom editors.

Overview of Foursquare Content and Audience

The three news organizations were all involved in creating Foursquare content relating to restaurant reviews. In all cases, these reviews appeared originally in the newspaper. Editors posted the reviews to their website usually the same day the review appeared in the paper. Following that, they synthesized the reviews into tips they posted to the Foursquare venues for those eateries. A typical tip looks like Figure 2, authored by the *Edmonton Journal*.
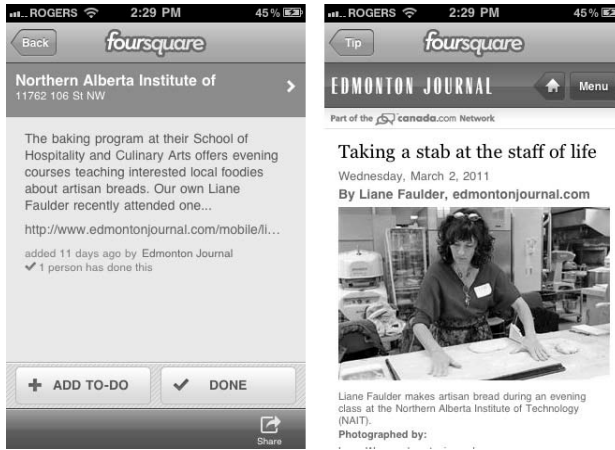
Figure 2. A typical tip pointing to website content

In this instance, smartphone users who had friended the *Edmonton Journal* and launched their Foursquare app at or near 11762 106 St. NW in Edmonton, Alberta, were immediately shown a tip on the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology venue (see Figure 1 for a representation). This tip contained a teaser to an article about the institute's School of Hospitality and Culinary Arts program. If users chose to click on the link at the bottom of the tip, they were taken via Foursquare's built-in web browser to Journal food columnist Liane Faulder's account of a bread-making class she attended there. Users could also add the tip to their Foursquare To-Do list, indicate they had Done the action mentioned in the tip or share the tip via email.

In addition to creating tips directing users to restaurant reviews, two Postmedia outlets also posted tips related to events. Editors left these tips at existing Foursquare venues or they created new venues to represent the event. The *National Post*, for example, created a venue called Toronto Blackout! as a "location" for a tip pointing to the Post's coverage of a major downtown power outage. The use of events, which lack GPS co-ordinates, as venues expands on

Foursquare's original conception of a social network tied to physical locations.

Number of Tips Posted

As of March 13, 2011 the number of tips left by each news organization was as follows:

● *National Post:* 1,704

● *Edmonton Journal:* 165

● *Vancouver Sun:* 31

These figures, however, do not necessarily represent the total number of tips left by each Postmedia outlet. Foursquare allows users to delete their tips; editors at three outlets said they do this occasionally (see Workflow below).

Frequency of Postings

The frequency with which each news organization posted tips to Foursquare varied. In the month leading up to March 13, 2011 (beginning February 13, 2011), the number of tips left by each news organization was, by week:

Table 1
Tips posted during a one-month period, February/March 2011

	Feb. 13-19	Feb. 20-26	Feb. 27- March 6	March 7-13	Total
National Post	29	26	16	10	81
Edmonton Journal	4	1	9	2	16
Vancouver Sun	0	2	3	1	6

Popularity

A simple overview of the most popular tips on March 13, 2011, as determined by Foursquare based on users' Done mentions, are represented in Figure 3, showing left to right, the *Edmonton Journal, Vancouver Sun* and *National Post*.
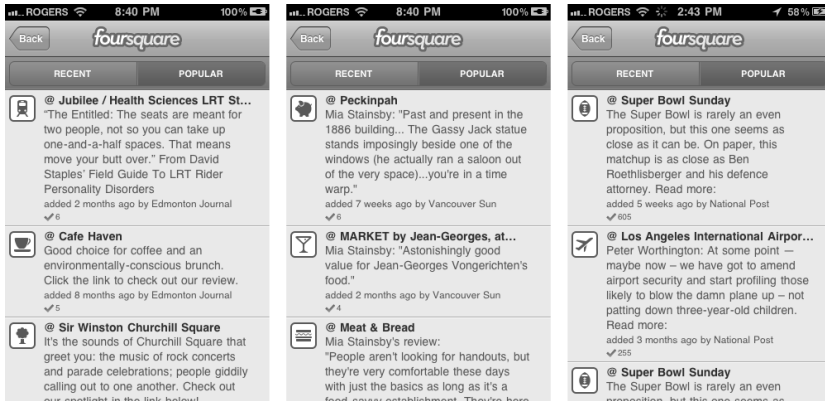
Figure 3. popular tips for each news organization, by Done mentions

The Edmonton Journal had six on its most popular story, Vancouver Sun also had six and the *National Post* had 605.

The number of people who click Done in Foursquare after having viewed the tip is listed at the bottom of each tip, beside the checkmark. This number may differ from the number of people who actually click the link and read the article; this metric is usually counted independently as unique page views by each news organization's website analytics software. It is also likely significantly lower than the number of people who view the tip in the first place. Foursquare users who view the tip can click Done, view the full story, do both or do neither.

Followers

The number of users ("Friends" in Foursquare) following each news organization on March 13, 2011 was:

● *National Post*: 44,948

● *Vancouver Sun:* 2,828

● *Edmonton Journal:* 2,701 Friends in Foursquare, like most social networks, are users who joined a network at some point in time. Being a Friend doesn't necessarily mean a user reads a Friend's tips, checks Foursquare regularly or uses Foursquare at all anymore.

All of the editors interviewed said they considered the data reported by Foursquare to be only a broad measure of user activity. Most said they were more interested in the interaction carried over from Foursquare to other social networks such as Twitter or Facebook (see Goals below).

Successful Content

Editors at the three news organizations were asked in the interviews to describe one or two examples of their Foursquare content that they viewed as successful. Their responses showed a range of applications:

National Post

> One that has done exceedingly well is: We had one of our columnists write about airport screening. His line was: 'At some point — maybe now — we have got to amend airport security and start profiling those likely to blow the damn plane up — not patting down three-year-old children'. I took that line and I dropped it onto all of the top 20 major U.S.

airports. We're pretty much the top tip at all of those airports. People are checking in; they see that and they go 'Yeah!' (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)
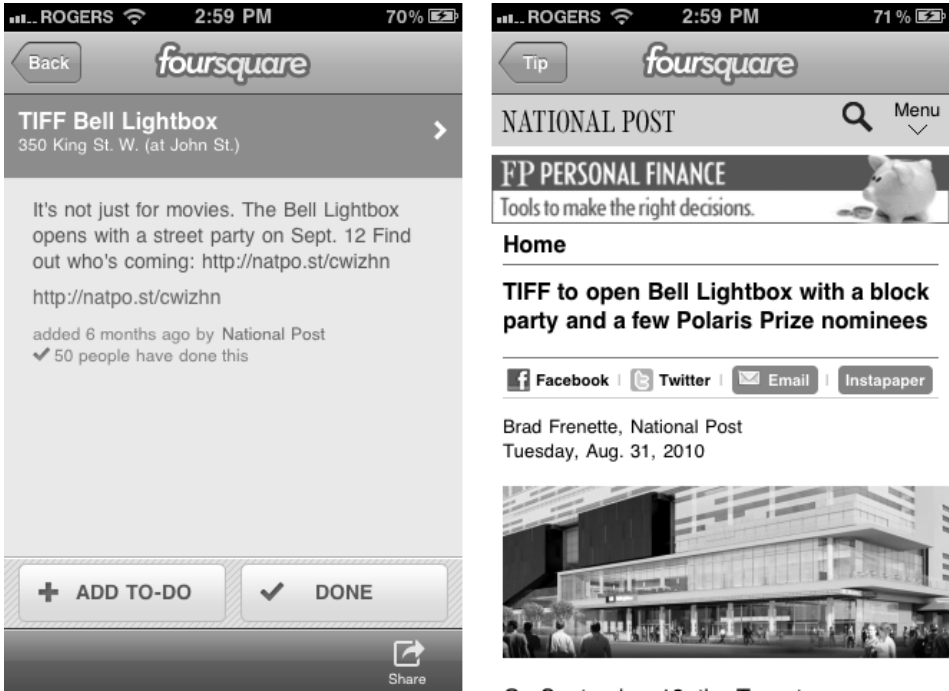
Figure 4. A tip left by the National Post during TIFF

Our big coming out party was really TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival), where we had a very specific event (Figure 4) . We wanted to cover it in a different way. So we got reporters and editors to submit (to us) their insider guide to TIFF. Then we planted this information at the most relevant locations — the places where we thought it would be most likely to be seen and used by people who were checking in. (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)

Edmonton Journal

> What we noticed is that when we have major events — people coming in from out of town, for example the Grey Cup (Canadian football championship) — there's a lot of people coming in from places like Toronto, Vancouver and the U.S. who are used to that location-based platform. We thought: let's see what the uptake is and start putting up more Foursquare posts during these events. Our Foursquare click-through and interactivity rates went up 1500%. That just means it went from, you know, 5 to 50. But the potential is there. (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)
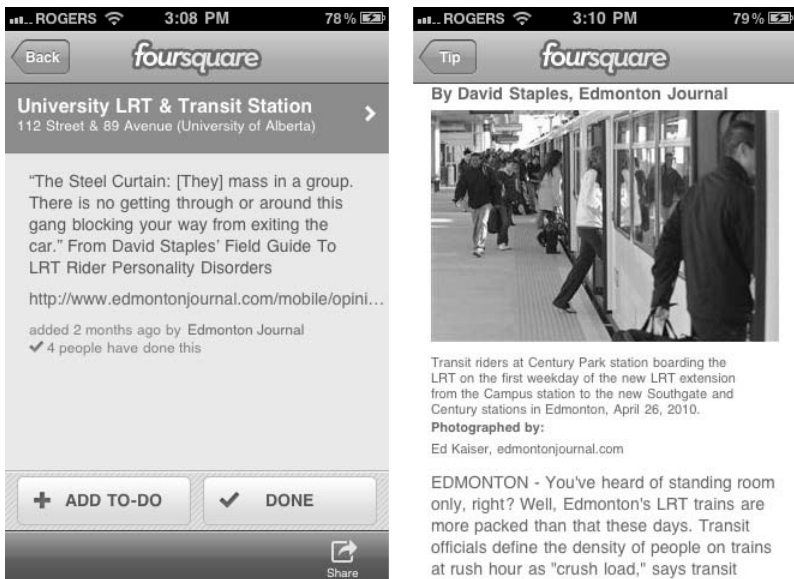
Figure 5. A tip left by the *Edmonton Journal* at transit stations

One that actually worked out really well was David Staples' guide for LRT (light rapid transit) riders, which was humorous and bullet-form enough that it would be an interesting read. It was also eye-catching enough that it would work for Four-

square coverage (Figure 5). We tagged that at every LRT station and it's gotten a surprising number of people pinging back on it. They see a quick, humorous quote, they click through, they read the rest. (Editor 4, personal communication, February 25, 2011).

Vancouver Sun
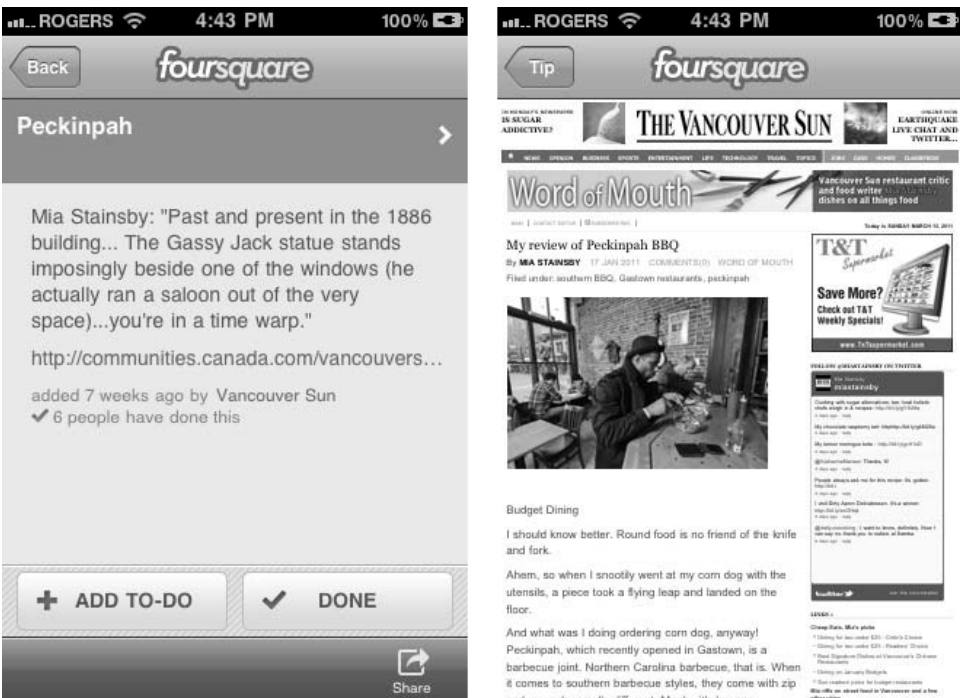
Figure 6. A tip left by the Vancouver Sun at a downtown restaurant

(Describing a tip pointing to a review at a hip downtown restaurant, Figure 6): The clientele is generally plugged in. So the information that comes into that channel will be more engaged. Of the things we do on Foursquare, that one has been our biggest referral, I think. But getting into numbers

isn't necessarily what it's all about. It's more the interaction and the feedback. (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)

Roles

Asked to describe their role in the organization, most editors classified themselves broadly as social media editors, whose job is to engage the audience, keep abreast of new technology and help colleagues use it effectively: "My role is to assess emerging technology and to find best practices — and to work with the newsroom to use them," said one (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011). Another said, "I provide editorial and development direction for our web, mobile and social media products (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)."

One put it this way: "We have pockets of individuals who are very smart in social media but we didn't have any departments that were moving in the right direction. That's kind of what my role is (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)." Another described his social media duties, saying, "It's just been to, initially, learn about it, figure out how it works and then find the pieces in the paper to put up (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

The fifth editor said, "A lot of what we're doing is drawing in new readers — people who wouldn't necessarily pick up a newspaper, but who are nevertheless interested in our news, our sources and our accuracy (Editor 4, personal communication, February 25, 2011)."

Only one participant classified himself as an online news editor. None of the participants mentioned Foursquare specifically, likely indicating the relatively minor function Foursquare updates play in their job duties. Many of the respondents said their job was to

experiment with Foursquare and social media generally. They described their jobs with phrases such as "throwing things to the wall and seeing what sticks," "being active and trying new things," and finding out "what works and what doesn't."

None of the editors called their job function newsgathering or reporting. They framed their role as being part of the process of news delivery or news distribution. Most said their role was to foster engagement or further a conversation with readers through other social media channels.

All of the participants acknowledged a marketing function inherent in their role — to spread the brand of the news organization in different social media channels and build readership (see Goals below).

Asked to characterize the relationship between this function and the news organization's journalistic function, respondents cited new means of distribution, presentation and engagement. Said one:

> I try really hard not blur the line between marketing and news. I'm a newsroom staffer and my background is in journalism ... I try not to bring any marketing into what I do, so my impetus for getting information out there is: what I would want to know as a reader. (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)

Another phrased it this way:

> I think in a lot of ways it's an extension of journalism in that it's presenting news at a different access point. We're not selling the paper so much as we're selling the content. We're selling a reliable source of information that you can't get anywhere else. (Editor 4, personal communication, February 25, 2011)

A third editor talked about appealing to people in different social spaces:

> It's a certain level of marketing of the news. It's always interesting — that (issue). It's not directly like you're creating a story. I mean it's taking something that has already been written. But it's taking what we have on the website and dicing it up and sending it out into the different venues or places that people are online. (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

Said another:

> With us, it's always been an editorial focus. It's always been about creating something people find useful, not trying to sell them stuff or get them to enter contests. It's really about having meaningful things to say to them and for them to interact with. (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)

"I'm not a journalist by background," said the fifth editor. "I don't try to dictate the content or say what were putting out through social media. It's more a way of how we're using it or what audience we're trying to reach (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)."

Goals

Respondents phrased their goals variously as "brand exposure," "getting our stories out there" and "showing that we're out in these places." One participant likened his organization's use of Foursquare to street corner newspaper boxes in the virtual sphere.

Others referred to an organizational mission to be active in emerging social media channels or spaces. Two said they were specifically looking to find new audiences on mobile devices.

Three respondents mentioned attracting readers who haven't traditionally read the newspaper.

Most talked about simply being present in social spaces where young and technologically savvy people are active. "People who use social media generally have an ear to the ground," said one. "So we want to be in that space and make sure people know that we're trying to tell stories in a lot of different ways (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)."

Another cited the need to move beyond thinking about editorial content in terms of a publication:

> What we want to do is to create an information layer based on the vast amount of content we create every day as part of our job as a news organization. Part of our mandate has been to stop relying on the concept of creating a great website that everybody will come to and start thinking more about how can we deliver what we want to the places where people already are. (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)

"It's a sense that your homepage is not going to be the place where everyone comes to," a third editor said. "It's still by far the main source of our traffic, but we need to get out where people are using their computers or their mobile phones (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

Another talked about trying to cater to user choice, saying, "It's trying to put our content where our audience is or where we think it's going to be. So our ultimate goal is just to get people reading our stuff and engaging with us in whatever medium they choose (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)."

None talked about specific targets for readership. While it's likely

that competitive companies would be reluctant to share such targets, none of the respondents mentioned that these targets even existed. "The ROI (return on investment) on this stuff is going to be five or 10 years," said one (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011).

Participants frequently mentioned the terms "engagement" and "conversation" as goals for their Foursquare posts. However, such activity is difficult to track, given Foursquare's relatively weak functionality for sharing or conversing. For example, users can't comment on a tip or post it simultaneously to Twitter.

Respondents said they looked for Foursquare use to spark engagement in other social media channels. Said one:

> A lot of the time we get feedback on Twitter, saying 'I was at this restaurant. Thanks, Vancouver Sun for putting a tip on there — it helped me order,' or whatever. Time permitting, there's a conversation to be had around that: How did you use it? Was it helpful? (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)

One editor said he looked for quality in user comments as a guide for successful engagement: "I'm not so concerned about how many check-ins we get at a certain story or click-throughs, as I am about whether people are leaving good quality tips and quality content. That's gold. Because that's interactivity (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)."

"There are some statistics we get (from Foursquare), but very few," said another. "We have to see it within the rest of our web traffic (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

Two respondents also pointed to what they saw as awkward nomenclature within Foursquare for encouraging engagement. Us-

ers can't signal agreement with a piece of content, as they can by clicking the Like button in Facebook. They can only indicate they have Done a tip. Users might choose to "do" a restaurant reviewer's suggestion to try the burger. However, it is less clear how they would "do" a tip that pointed users to a story about the federal government's legislative agenda, as was left by the *National Post* on Ottawa's Parliament Hill on September 20, 2010.

Similarly, a user clicking Done might mean only that she intended to take a piece of advice offered in an article, but didn't actually accomplish it. Labels on buttons for social media services can pose confusion for users wanting to act on journalistic content (Benton, 2011).

One editor said a goal was also to use Foursquare as a possible means of finding sources for stories, although he hadn't done this yet:

> If someone is going to write a story about the emerging cool factor of (a restaurant), then we would use Foursquare to find who the Mayors are of each restaurant and possibly contact them to say 'You basically eat here a lot' — what do you like or not like about this place? And then we could find out where else they eat and basically, use it to find sources. (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)

Workflow

Asked to describe their workflow, editors said they selected stories from either the print version of their newspaper or the online database of stories on the same day it was originally published. Then they located the story on the news organization's website — usually the mobile site — to get its URL. The editors said they read the story and then selected text for the content of the tip, which Foursquare limits to 200 characters.

Two participants said they occasionally sought out the editors or authors involved in the creation of the article in the process of crafting the tip.

All of the editors said they frequently used either the headline or the deck that was included with the original story. As one participant put it: "We've got a whole room full of talented people whose whole job is to distill stories down to their essence (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)." Occasionally, however, they pulled a specific quote from the article to highlight a lively sentiment. Two editors said they looked for a humorous phrase.

One editor also said he looked for vivid descriptions of a physical location in the article that would highlight a sense of place to the mobile user. Another said he looked for powerful descriptions of flavour in a restaurant review that would appeal to mobile users with a menu in hand. The same editor said he tried to support the action-inviting nature inherent in Foursquare (with its enticement to click Done): "What is going to be the language that I can use that's action-generating for the reader?" He added:

> I put up one (tip) for (a cafe) last month and mentioned that the owners post the menu to Twitter every day — which is something that not many other places do. But it's something people connected to social media might be a little more interested in. (Editor 4, personal communication, February 25, 2011)

Another editor said he had recently asked the travel editor at the paper to draft content specifically for Foursquare users. He wanted the editor to work with the writer to draft five short pieces of advice for getting the best experience at the place profiled in the story. The purpose was to create content the user could take action on — either by clicking the Done or To-Do buttons. For example, users might click the Done button if they bought a croissant at a bakery

recommended in a tip at the Eiffel Tower venue in Paris. Alternatively, they might click the To-Do button as they planned their trip itinerary from home. One editor explained it as: "We add Foursquare buttons onto the website. And then we can send that out on Twitter saying, 'Going to Africa? Here, add these to your Foursquare (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011).'"

Editors said another major aspect of their routine was to place the tip on an appropriate venue in Foursquare. Frequently, they said, the choice was clear, given a specific geographic location mentioned in the article, such as the street address of a restaurant. However, one editor said he also left tips pointing to general feature stories that mobile users, checking in at a relevant venue, might find interesting. For example, one editor left tips at venues for Apple stores in Canada that linked to a story about a war of words between Apple CEO Steve Jobs and Research In Motion CEO Jim Balsillie: "They've all been very popular (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

Regarding the crafting of tips for these types of stories, one editor responded, saying: "It's 'What's the most popular real-world relevant place I could put this where it would be seen by people who would care?' There's a little bit of mental gymnastics there (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)."

Another said, "It's not always obvious what the location is, so sometimes you just have to think about it (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

All of the editors said effective tips were simply good journalistic form — not a new form of writing. They described their crafting of these 200-character tips using phrases such as "an extension of good editing" and "headline writing for a different format."

A final consideration was the duration of time they should leave the

tip within Foursquare. Four editors said the user experience was a key concern for them. One said he had put numerous tips on a major performing arts venue in town, however, his organization was "starting to clog it up." The effect, he said, "wasn't starting to look so good for us anymore (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

News organizations are generally reluctant to "unpublish" online news content (Tenore, 2010). However, three editors said they occasionally deleted older tips to make their Foursquare content appear fresh. The immediacy of the mobile experience demands it, said one. Another said:

> You have to. For example, if you have a music festival and you're putting in tips about a lineup (of scheduled performers) by the time the next music festival comes around, well, you'd better have a lot of that stuff cleaned up. Otherwise, that makes for a bad user experience. (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)

One editor made the argument that transparency in publishing is better suited to the web, where the user experience has a longer tail: "It makes a lot more sense to put your archival efforts on web right now than mobile, where you really need to think about: What will people need to know when they check in here (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)?"

Story Choice

The editors placed only a tiny fraction of the daily content produced by their news organization into Foursquare. Asked how they chose this content, the editors described a range of criteria.

One editor responded first by describing the stories that don't succeed in Foursquare: "I know which ones don't (work). We're not go-

ing to put anything in that's crime. We're not going to put anything that is a fire — anything that is destructive. Foursquare is not your hard-core news (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

The same editor said the content must support the social nature of Foursquare, specifically the fun or happy mood of the people who use it. He explained further:

> Crime would just be very jarring. The way that Foursquare has been built — it's about going out. I think indicating where there have been shootings and where there are robberies would be indicating why you should stay in. It's not that we're boosters (of positive news stories) — it just doesn't seem to be the spot for it. (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

The editor suggested that being upset or shocked would dissuade users from wanting to "do" the tip or share their experience in other ways. The same observation is offered in early research suggesting that that positive emotion spawns greater amounts of social media activity than negative emotion (Benton, 2011; Gruzd, Doiron, & Mai, 2011; Berger & Milkman, 2010).

Another editor expressed a similar opinion, saying:

> If I put up something up there every time there was a decision made about the city centre airport or every time someone at (city hall) reported budget numbers it wouldn't be interesting. It wouldn't be something people on Foursquare would go to look at. (Editor 4, personal communication, February 25, 2011)

Four of the five editors said the content that worked best in Foursquare referenced articles that did not have a specific time element.

The editors used phrases such as "evergreen," "feature-y," "archival," "slow burn" and "useful to people over a longer period of time." They cited these qualities as the reasons they posted restaurant reviews and travel stories:

"The restaurant reviews are the easiest," said one. "It's about a location; nothing is really going to change about that (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)."

Another said, "Evergreen content is best. You can put up a restaurant review; the restaurant is not going to go out of business. You can keep it up there forever (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)."

The editors all suggested that opinion pieces work well in Foursquare. Foursquare is itself a social recommendation network and one editor said it's little surprise users are attracted to tips that provide recommendations themselves. As well, some suggested, opinions are more likely to encourage the user to click Done in agreement.

Two editors said that while mobile users have immediate information needs, there aren't enough Foursquare users to make the effort of posting frequent updates at various venues — such as clubs and concert halls — worthwhile. As a result, they have altered their approach over time.

One said he has become more selective:

> (We had thought) it was going to be constant check-ins to places ... (Now) if something is going to be at an art gallery for two months, then we can provide a review. But we're getting away from trying to be so date-specific. (Editor 2, personal communication, February 23, 2011)

Another concurred:

> When we first started, we threw up a lot of social calendar stuff: There's a band playing here — check them out. It may have been to our advantage to keep it up there because it's popular, but the value diminishes very quickly on those types of things. (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)

Three of the editors, however, said they had experienced considerable success with events such as festivals or sporting events that operate within a specific timeframe for a least a couple of days. One editor said that's enough time to use other social media such as Facebook and Twitter to drive traffic to Foursquare: "Then people have a direct call to action that makes sense to them. There's a start and a finish date. It's something they can get excited about (Editor 5, personal communication, March 9, 2011)."

Another editor said tips relating to music festivals work well — as long as they are deleted after the event is done: "The last thing you want is to have a presence on Foursquare where someone is checking in eight months after (an event) and seeing 15 tips about it (Editor 3, personal communication, February 25, 2011)." Older content poses a glaring conflict with mobile users' desire for immediacy, he suggested.

Being present where — and when — people talk online is crucial, said another editor. If people are at a certain location physically, a news organization should be present there in Foursquare. One respondent said:

> It's got to be current ... We're going to put more time getting information out there about a hot restaurant or a new restaurant or a movie that's coming out with a lot of buzz rather than something that's been out a while. So I think you have to know your audience on the platform and cater news

> content to it. (Editor 1, personal communication, February 22, 2011)

This study involved a specific social media service and involved a very small number of participants. Further research is needed to draw conclusions relating to other social media services or to news organizations' use of location-based services generally.

One editor said he made an effort to place content into Foursquare that wasn't published elsewhere by the news organization. He cited a project in which he worked with a reporter to geo-locate the best Christmas light displays in town.

Two editors said they worked to make the format of linked stories easier for people to read on small mobile screens through the use of bullet lists.

Discussion

This study involved a specific social media service and involved a very small number of participants. Further research is needed to draw conclusions relating to other social media services or to news organizations' use of location-based services generally.

Recent studies investigating gatekeeping have focused on journalists' interaction with the audience and the creation of user-generated content. The role of the editors in this study is more akin to the role of the wire editor in White's original study, who was making selections from a collection of existing stories authored by journalists — not working to create content with audience members.

White's wire editor operated as single gate. However, as the editors in this study mentioned, they are increasingly operating in multiple delivery channels — increasing the number of gates.

Editors at these Postmedia outlets were choosing articles to post as Foursquare tips that aligned with fairly specific criteria — even if these criteria weren't explicitly defined. The editors looked for articles that contained strong opinions likely to inspire agreement and activity, either by clicking the Done or To-Do buttons in Foursquare or beginning a conversation in other social networks. They looked for articles that referenced a specific location — but not every article about every location. They were interested in articles that could be placed on venues where people gathered socially. Editors indicated they favored articles that concerned restaurants, music and theatre festivals, sports events, transportation hubs and educational classes.

Editors were choosing stories and then finding venues on which to place them. But some were also choosing specific venues where people gathered socially and searching out relevant articles to place as tips.

Workload and concern for the user experience also factored in editors' choice of content. They saw articles about events as being attractive to social media users. However, they had concerns about keeping this content fresh and usable to Foursquare users. The implication was that they preferred to post tips referencing stories that lacked a specific time element and, consequently, stayed relevant for users over long periods of time.

There was also an indication that editors were looking for stories about people — not things or institutions — to align with the social nature of the service, and the emotional disposition of people who are out on the town.

In crafting the tips, editors were spending effort finding flavorful descriptions — concerning the location itself and also the meal reviews that formed the bulk of the tip content. Editors also expressed considerable interest in writing tips aimed at inspiring action.

Many of the respondents said their job was to experiment with social media and try new things — some evidence of weak routines and support for the framework provided by Keith (2011). The emphasis the editors placed on proximity as a news value also suggested that the influence of routines in the gatekeeping function might be weaker than for other journalists.

The results suggest there are avenues for more research in the gatekeeping function of online journalists, especially concerning whether individual and extra-medial (audience) influences play a greater role. As well, it is likely that proximity will be a much more important area of study for the assessment of newsworthiness as editors create more content for mobile devices.

Ultimately, the relevance of Foursquare itself is likely to be challenged in the wake of the Fall 2010 launch of Facebook Places, a similar service. The competition in this space is an indication that news organizations are likely to continue to diversify their channels for distribution. Consequently, the study of gatekeeping in these channels is even more important.

References

Benton, J. (2011). "Like," "share," and "recommend": How the warring verbs of social media will influence the news' future. Retrieved from http://www.niemanlab.org/2011/02/like-share-and-recommend-how-the-warring-verbs-of-social-media-will-influence-the-news-future/

Berger, J. & Milkman, K.L. (2010). Social transmission, emotion, and the virality of online content. Retrieved from http://opimweb.wharton.upenn.edu/documents/research/Virality.pdf

Bleske, G. (1991). Ms. Gates takes over: An updated version of a 1949 case study. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 12(4), 88-97.

Boczkowski, P.J. (2004). *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bradshaw, P. (2010). 4 uses for Foursquare for journalists. Retrieved from http://onlinejournalismblog.com/2010/04/26/foursquare-for-journalists/

Cassidy, W.P. (2005). Variations on a theme: The professional role conceptions of print and online newspaper journalists. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 82(2), 264-280.

Cassidy, W.P. (2006). Gatekeeping similar for online, print journalists. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 27(2), 6-23.

Deuze, M. (2003). The web and its journalisms: Considering the consequences of different types of newsmedia online. *New Media Society*, 5(2), 203-230.

Foursquare. (2011). About Foursquare. Retrieved http://foursquare.com/about

Garber, M. (2010). Location, location, etc: What does the WSJ's Foursquare check-in say about the future of location in news? Retrieved from http://www.niemanlab.org/2010/05/location-location-etc-what-does-the-wsj's-foursquare-check-in-say-about-the-future-of-location-in-news/

Gruzd, A., Doiron, S. & Mai, P. (2011). Is happiness contagious online? A case of Twitter and the 2010 Winter Olympics. Paper presented at the 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Kauai, Hawaii. Retrieved from http://anatoliygruzd.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/HICSS44_Gruzd_Twitter_Happiness.pdf

Ingram, M. (2010). Will Foursquare badges really help newspapers? Retrieved from http://gigaom.com/2010/04/26/will-foursquare-badges-really-help-newspapers/

Invoke Solutions. (2010). Social Commerce Report. Retrieved from http://www.slideshare.net/invokesolutions/invoke-live-social-commerce-report.

Jenkins, M. (2010). Uses for Foursquare in news reporting. Retrieved from http://zombiejournalism.com/2010/07/uses-for-foursquare-in-news-reporting/

Keith, S. (2011). Shifting Circles: Reconceptualizing Shoemaker and Reese's theory of a hierarchy of influences on media content for a newer media era. *Web Journal of Mass Communication Research*, 29. Retrieved from http://wjmcr.org/vol29

Lewis, S.C., Kaufhold, K. & Lasorsa, D.L. (2010). Thinking about citizen journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 4(2), 163-179.

Metro Canada. (2010). Metro and Foursquare announce groundbreaking partnership. Retrieved from http://www.metronews.ca/toronto/canada/article/430567--metro-and-foursquare-announce-groundbreaking-partnership

Mitchelstein, E. & Boczkowski, P.J. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism*, 10(5); 562-586.

Neuberger, C. & Nuernbergk, C. (2010). Competition, complementarity or integration? *Journalism Practice*, 4(3), 319-332.

Pew Research Center. (2010). Understanding the participatory news consumer. Retrieved from http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1508/internet-cell-phone-users-news-social-experience?src=prc-

latest&proj=peoplepress

Pew Research Center. (2011). State of the news media report. Re-
trieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/2011/overview-2/

Redman, E. (2010). What does Foursquare mean for newspapers?
Retrieved from http://www.editorsweblog.org/analysis/2010/02/
what_does_foursquare_mean_for_newspapers.php

Robinson, S. (2006). Gateway or Gatekeeper: The institutionaliza-
tion of online news in creating an altered technological authority.
Paper delivered at the International Symposium on Online Journal-
ism, Austin, Texas. Retrieved from http://online.journalism.utexas.
edu/2006/papers/SueRobinson.pdf

Snider, P.B. (1967). Mr. Gates revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949
case study. *Journalism Quarterly* 44(3), 419-427.

Shoemaker, P.J. & Reese, S.D. (1991). *Mediating the message.*
White Plains, NY: Longman.

Shoemaker, P.J. & Vos T.P. (2009). *Gatekeeping Theory*. New York:
Routledge.

Shoemaker, P., Eichholz, M., Kim, E. & Wrigley, B. (2001). Individu-
al and routine forces in gatekeeping. *Journalism and Mass Commu-
nication Quarterly*, 78(2), 233-247.

Singer, J.B. (1997). Still guarding the gate?: The newspaper jour-
nalist's role in an on-line world. Convergence: The International
Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 3(1), 72-89.

Singer, J.B. (1998). Online journalists: Foundations for research
into their changing roles. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communi-
cation*, 4(1).

Singer, J.B. (2003). Campaign contributions: Online newspaper coverage of election 2000, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(1), 39-56.

Snider, P.B. (1967). Mr. Gates revisited: A 1966 version of the 1949 case study. *Journalism Quarterly*, 44(3), 419-427.

Snow, S. & Lavrusik, V. (2010). 7 ways journalists can use Foursquare. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/05/14/journalists-foursquare/

Tenore, M.J. (2010). 5 ways news organizations respond to 'unpublishing' requests. Retrieved from http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/104414/5-ways-news-organizations-respond-to-unpublishing-requests/

White, D.M. (1950). The 'Gate Keeper': A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 383-396.

Williams, B. A. & Carpini, M.X.D. (2004). Monica and Bill all the time and everywhere: The collapse of gatekeeping and agenda setting in the new media environment. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(9), 1208–1230.

Zickuhr, K. & Smith, A. (2010). 4% of online Americans use location-based services. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Location-based-services.aspx

Tim Currie is Assistant Professor of Journalism (Online Journalism) at the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. He is co-editor of the textbook The New Journalist: Roles, Skills, and Critical Thinking (2010). He has authored guidelines for re-tweeting and personal social media use for the Canadian Association of Journalists. He has a bachelor's degree in history from Queen's University (Kingston), a journalism degree from King's and a master's degree in communications and technology from the University of Alberta. He has led the school's online journalism instruction since 1999, after having worked in print and broadcast as a reporter and editor. His research interests are journalism education, newsroom practices and social media use.

tim.currie@ukings.ca

Friends Who Choose Your News:
An Analysis of Content Links on Facebook

ORIGINAL ARTICLE - ISOJ 2011

Brian Baresch, University of Texas Austin
Lewis Knight, University of Texas Austin
Dustin Harp, University of Texas at Arlington
Carolyn Yaschur, University of Texas at Austin

This study examines the external links that Facebook users post on their pages. Studying links on Facebook indicates the other sites users are looking at and the type of content they deem important, which in turn illuminates the spread of information at this end of the online news system. Researchers coded the extent, genre and character of shared links and responses. Frequent linkers on Facebook have distinctive genre, topic and source patterns particular to their interests. Findings could help better understand how news spreads through online social networks via active surveillance and discussion leaders and their repurposing of content.

In 2008, *The New York Times* (Stelter, 2008) quoted an unidentified college student as saying that he or she can stay abreast of the news without looking for it: "If the news is that important, it will find me" (para. 7). The article described a practice becoming more common, especially among young people: sharing news and links to articles among themselves and, moreover, relying on their connections to keep them informed. Stelter termed this strategy the "social filter" (para. 6) and contrasted it with the better-known "professional filter" (para. 4) that characterizes the traditional relationship of news providers to their audiences. In Clay Shirky's formulation (Benton, 2009), "the audience is now being assembled not by the paper, but by other members of the audience" (para. 27).

The description of the less methodical, more serendipitous strategy encapsulated in the iconic quote above speaks to a new kind of

news consumption strategy, a new kind of consumer, a "stumbler," so to speak, who gets nearly all his or her news through incidental or socially selected exposure. A primary vehicle for exposure to news is the social network site Facebook, which claimed 500 million users as of 2010 (Facebook 2010).

The shift to "stumbling" has implications for researchers in various fields. An overall shift in affinity groups from institutions to informal social networks (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) creates challenges for theorists in sociology, media effects, and agenda-setting research. The lesser reliance on "legacy" media institutions, in particular, creates questions of institutional authority for sociological researchers, and the distributed nature of the audience and the variety of pathways from producer to reader/viewer/listener/user creates significant challenges for media effects researchers. Researchers have to pay close attention to emergent news-consumption strategies made possible by new communication technologies. And of course the question of whether and how the citizenry is staying informed is a perennial for democracies.

This exploratory study examines the links to outside content that Facebook users post on their pages. It expands the literature about social networking sites to include external information Facebook users share, as opposed to content (status updates, photos) users generate within Facebook itself. Knowing what links are posted on Facebook can give an impression of what other sites Facebook users are looking at and the type of content they deem important, which in turn illuminates the spread of news articles and memes at this end of the online news system.

The Shifting Media Landscape

Certainly news consumption is shifting from a few dominant sources to a more varied diet. In a recent Pew Center study (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel, & Olmstead, 2010), 99% of respon-

dents said that on a typical day they get news from at least one platform: a print newspaper, a television news broadcast, radio, or the Internet. The upheaval comes in the details: 92% said they typically get their news from more than one platform. Six in 10 respondents combine online and offline sources, and nearly two-thirds (65%) don't have a favorite news website.

Yesterday's news-absorbing routines are pretty much gone. Where once we read the newspaper at the breakfast table and watched the evening news after work, and considered ourselves fully informed, now "[t]he process Americans use to get news is based on foraging and opportunism. They seem to access news when the spirit moves them or they have a chance to check up on headlines" (Purcell et al., 2010, p. 2). In December 2010, 41% of Americans cited the Internet as the place where they got "most of their news about national and international issues"; this cohort was 17% larger than a year earlier (Pew Research Center, 2011). In terms of news generally, the online news audience outnumbers that for newspapers; 46% of those surveyed said they get news online at least three times a week, and 40% said the same of newspapers.

Foraged news can be a hodgepodge, lacking the cohesion and hierarchy of a comprehensive news report produced by a team of professionals—but it also tracks the individual's interests more closely than a newspaper or TV report does. Instead of the daily news, each person may assemble the "Daily Me" (Hapgood, 1995), information that is both specialized and idiosyncratic.

The very nature of what we call news itself appears to be in a state of transition. Now that information is essentially everywhere—anyone with an Internet connection or a smartphone can access hundreds of news and information sources online within seconds—anyone who so chooses may "be peripherally aware of information as it flows by, grabbing it at the right moment when it is most relevant, valuable, entertaining, or insightful" (boyd, 2010, para. 2). This cre-

ates not only a potentially rich environment for the news consumer but also a challenge for established news organizations.

"Legacy" media—newspapers and magazines, TV news, and radio—have always existed in a broadcast model: We talk, you listen. This structure takes attention for granted, assuming everyone will tune in as a matter of course (boyd, 2010). Attention is the new currency: The news watcher is no longer a captive audience. News is no longer a scarce resource. To win influence, or eyeballs for advertisements, news producers (and distributors, including social-media sharers) must compete for attention (Jarvis, 2008).

Content is no longer being hocked, but links are. People throughout the network are using the attention they receive to traffic in pointers to other content, serving as content mediators. Numerous people have become experts as information networkers. (boyd, 2010, para. 12)

Purcell et al. (2010) found respondents who "rely on the people around them to tell them when there is news they need to know. Half of Americans (50%) say that describes them very well or somewhat well" (p. 40).

We might say, metonymically, that this represents a shift from an ink economy to a link economy. In the ink economy, one had few choices for news: One or two local newspapers, the nightly television news, radio, newsmagazines, and (in later years) cable-television news channels. This content was broadcast without the receiver's input, and it was difficult to share: A newspaper article could only be passed along physically, and a TV broadcast not at all, except in the late 20th century if one happened to have recorded it on a bulky (by today's standards) videocassette.

In the link economy, on the other hand, sharing information is as easy as sending a link in an email, or posting it on Twitter, or click-

ing "Share" on Facebook. A news consumer with accounts on Facebook and Twitter and access to news alert systems or RSS feeds can receive information constantly and pass it on easily, becoming a node in the social information network. Careful cultivation of one's Facebook friends, Twitter follows and offline social contacts results in a sort of ambient information effect (Hermida, 2009) in which the user can direct his or her attention to news at the time it is needed or wanted.

In the past few years, membership in social network sites (SNSs) and alternative channels such as Twitter have exploded; Facebook alone grew from 100 million users in August 2008 to a claimed 350 million in December 2009 (Bunz, 2009) and then 500 million in 2010 (Facebook, 2010), and in a Pew study (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009), 19% of Internet users said they use Twitter or another service to share or read personal updates. People have myriad ways to connect and communicate with one another outside traditional one-to-many media channels.

The specifics of the media environment strongly affect how people get exposed incidentally to news (Lee, 2009). With so much information in the environment, people may feel overwhelmed, so they rely on filters. In the past, large news organizations functioned as "gatekeepers" (see e.g. White, 1950) selecting news from the stream of information reaching the organizations' reporters and editors. Now, with the free-for-all Web, citizens need to keep from becoming overwhelmed (Hermida, 2009), and they are turning to different kinds of gatekeeping.

According to interviews and recent surveys, younger voters tend to be not just consumers of news and current events but conduits as well—sending out e-mailed links and videos to friends and their social networks. And in turn, they rely on friends and online connections for news to come to them. In essence, they are replacing the professional filter—reading *The Washington Post*, clicking on CNN.

com—with a social one (Stelter, 2008, para. 4).

In a sense, the social filter is simply a technological version of the oldest political tool: word of mouth. For young people, at least, it may have become the dominant means of news delivery (Ingram, 2008).

Evidence is mounting that social network services are becoming de facto news services. Facebook has become a leading referrer for visits to news and media sites, ranking second or third for a number of sites (Olmstead, Mitchell, & Rosenstiel, 2011). New plug-ins at Facebook appear from early data to be increasing referrals to other websites, especially media sites (Calderón, 2010). The news and politics site Talking Points Memo reports that between March 2009 and March 2011 referrals from Facebook increased from a negligible number to 5.9% of all visits (Marshall, 2011). The online publishing company Lijit (2010) compared site visits from search, social media referrals and other Web links and found 19.7% came from social media; of those, 44% were from Facebook.

"Likes" on Facebook and other social media platforms such as Twitter are becoming more important for businesses in and out of the news media. The e-commerce platform company ChompOn (2011) estimated that "likes" on Facebook are each worth $8 for its clients in terms of the immediate next sale.

Incidental Exposure

Most views of learning from the media conceptualize it as an active process in which people are motivated to find information about a subject (Tewksbury, Weaver, & Maddex, 2001, p. 534). But incidental exposure has repeatedly been found to generate learning. An early television study (Blumler & McQuail, 1969) found that "unselective viewers" of television news broadcasts—those who did watch political programs but without the intent to learn from them—

were better informed and more interested in an upcoming election than indifferent non-viewers. In the digital age, one of the attractions of the Web from its early days has been serendipity—following links and finding unexpected sites and information. To distinguish between intentional and unintentional learning online, Tewksbury et al. (2001) applied the uses and gratifications model, which posits that people use media to fulfill different goals:

> Most Internet use is goal directed, and acquiring current affairs information is rarely a primary goal. ... We may be overstating the case a bit, but the point is that for many people news seeking is not a core media habit. We believe these people may encounter news more frequently on the Web than they would offline (Tewksbury et al., 2001, pp. 536-537).

To learn more about what and how Facebook users are sharing both news and other types of information through external links, this exploratory study examines the content of links Facebook users post on their pages. It specifically asks:

RQ1: *To what extent are Facebook users using links to share information with their network of Facebook "friends"?*

RQ2: *What is the nature of the information (genre and topic) of the links being shared within Facebook friend networks?*

RQ3: *What modes of media are being deployed for displaying the information that the links are attached to?*

RQ4: *What are the original source types for the links?*

RQ5: *What is the response to the links from Facebook friends within the network?*

Method

A team of researchers conducted a content analysis of links posted by individual Facebook members who had agreed to allow the research team access to their Facebook pages. Accessing and examining Facebook users' content proves challenging for researchers because of the privacy offered to site users. Just as the Internet has pushed researchers to rethink and creatively redesign methodological tools, the challenges for this research demanded a creative method for identifying Facebook users. The method drew from literature in selective sampling and snowball sampling.

Researchers performed two major steps in the data collection process. Step one included constructing a sample matching U.S. demographics of Facebook users (Facebook, 2010). According to iStrategyLabs (2010), of the 103 million U.S. users, 54% were female, 43% were male and 3% were unknown. Facebook (2010) reported that the largest age group of users were ages 35 to 54 (29%), followed by 18- to 24-year-olds (25.3%), 25- to 34-year-olds (24.8%), 13- to 17-year-olds (10.4%), and 55 and over (9.5%). Only 1 percent of the using population's age was unknown. Researchers excluded all users under the age of 18 in order to focus only on adult users.

To approximate this population and account for race, ethnicity, geographic location, education, and socioeconomic and psychographics, the researchers devised a characterized, stratified snowball sample (Corbett, 2010; Maiya & Berger-Wolf, 2010) with each researcher attempting to find corresponding percentages of participants from each of their Facebook friends lists.

The researchers used Facebook's direct messaging tool to send an initial invitation on June 1, 2010, to participate in a Facebook-related survey, with a follow-up request sent a week later. Included in the survey was a request for permission to "friend" the partici-

pants on Facebook, in order to analyze their links. The initial invitation was sent to 200 contacts. The snowball method propagated a total of 304 respondents for the survey. Of those respondents, 98 responded "yes" to the friending question, giving researchers permission to conduct the content analysis.

A Facebook research group page was set up and friend requests were sent to the respondents willing to participate. The 98 who participated were randomly assigned to five researchers who coded the content analysis portion of this study. Those in the age groups 18 to 24, 25 to 34, and 35 to 54 each represented 25–30% of the initial sample, while those 55 and older constituted 10%. The initial sample was evenly also divided between men and women.

A codebook that included 23 variables was created to analyze posted links to external websites, such as news sites, organizations, and YouTube. Links to internal Facebook content, such as photos or Farmville, and location services, such as Gowalla or Foursquare, were excluded.

Coders collected and coded links from participants' Facebook profiles, working backward from noon on September 14, 2010, until either 15 links per person had been coded or noon June 1, 2010, had been reached. Intercoder reliability was tested on all 23 variables using a Web-based ICR tool, ReCal. Krippendorf's α scored 94% for overall coding reliability. Twelve variables were coded for the research questions, with Krippendorf's α scores for V10a (92%), V10b (88%), V10c (95%), V10d (88%), V10e (89%), V10f (82%), V11 (95%), V12 (93%), V15 (90%), V16 (91%), V17 (93%) and V18 (96%). V1 through V9 were coder, participant demographic, day and date information; V13 and V14 were qualitative variables not included in the content analysis.

V10a–f examined RQ3, the modes of media—text link, video, etc.—used in user links. V11 examined the genre portion of RQ2, and

V12 examined the topic portion. V15 and V18 examined RQ4, the original source types for the links; V16 and V17 examined RQ5, network friends' responses to the links.

The 98 participants included 20 Korean Facebook users whose content was not in English. One coder coded these 20 participants, however, these participants were not used for this U.S.- and English language-centric paper. Once this culling was completed, frequency tests and cross-tabulations were performed to analyze the data for the remaining 78 participants.

Results

Posting External Links

RQ1 asks to what extent Facebook users share information through links. Thirty-eight of the 78 participants (49%) posted a total of 328 links. Of those 38 participants, 23 (61%) were women and 15 (39%) were men. The overwhelming majority were links that the participant apparently found on their own; only 6% were reposts from another Facebook user.

Sixteen (42%) of the participants posted at least 15 links during the study period; the remaining 22 posted between one and 14 (recall that 40 participants posted none). The researchers did not count links past 15, so the posting frequency of the more prolific posters was not recorded.

The 25–34 age group was the largest group of posters, at 18 (47% of the total). It was followed in descending order 35–54 with 11 (29%), 18–25 with seven (19%) and 55-plus with two (5%). With so few respondents in the 55 plus age group, this group was merged with the 35–54 group for further analysis.

Genre and Topic of Links

To answer RQ2, which asks what genre and topic Facebook users share with their friend networks, the researchers coded both the primary content of the linked material (written article, video, photographs, audio, interactive, or other) and other content present but not primary in the links. Researchers also coded for topic (politics, sports, arts/entertainment, health, technology, interpersonal, current events, other) and genre (news, feature, commentary, satire, comedy, general interest, products, other). One of the topics examined, sports, was barely represented, so it was merged into the arts and entertainment topic.

The leading genres linked to were general interest and news (21% each), followed by products (17%), commentary (10%), satire/comedy (9%), features (7%) and all others (15%) n = 328. Topics were lead by sports/art/entertainment (40%), current events (15%), health/technology (10%), politics (9%) and all others (27%) n = 328.

Women posted more links in all topics and genres other than politics and satire/comedy (58%, *n* = 320, *p* < .001).

Links in the feature genre were mostly posted by women (83%; *n* = 23, *p* < .001), as were links to news items (73%; *n* = 66, *p* < .001). Links to products were also much more prevalently posted by women (71%) than men (*n* = 55, *p* < .001). Links to satire/comedy were predominantly a male genre (66%; *n* = 10, *p* < .001).

Age group 35 plus (64%) dominated political links, with age group 25 to 34 at 29% and 18 to 24 at 7% (*n* = 28, *p* < .01). Sports/art/entertainment links are more likely to be posted by age group 25 to 34 (52%) than 35 plus (42%) or 18 to 24 (6%; *n* = 127, *p* < .01).

The users also were not using links to promote themselves; only a few (7%) were to material created by the participants themselves.

Modes of Media

RQ3 asked what modes of media (i.e., text, video, photos, etc.) that Facebook users link to. The most numerous primary type of content in a link was text (45%), followed by video (22%), photos (11%), audio (5%), interactive (4%) and all others (8%).

Men posted more video links (59% of the total) as a primary source for media type than women (n = 73, p < .01). Women posted more photo links (87%) as a primary source for media (n = 38, p < 001). Women also had more photos present in their links (64%) than men did (n = 144, p < .001). While women had more audio files present in their links (73% of total audio files) than men (n = 30, p < .001), men used audio more as a primary medium (87%, n = 15, p < 001). In another reversal, men had more interactive media—opportunities for the reader to respond or interact with the site, such as a commenting function or interactive graphics—present in their links (60% of total interactive links) than women (n = 144, p < .001), but women had more interactive media as a primary source in their links (71%, n = 14, p < .001).

Significant differences were also found by age. Ages 35 and up posted more links with photos as a primary media type (76%) than ages 25 to 34 (18%) or ages 18 to 24 (6%; n = 38, p < .001). Age group 35 plus (67%) had more written articles present in their posted links compared to age group 25 to 34 (29%) and age group 18 to 24 (4%; n = 42, p < .01), but age group 25 to 34 (54%) posted more links with articles as their primary media type than did age group 35 plus (34%) or age group 18 to 24 (12%; n = 146, p < .01). Age group 35 plus (51%) posted more links with interactive media present and as a primary media type than did age group 25 to 34 (42%) or age group 18 to 24 (7%) n = 158, p < .01. Ages 35 and up also posted more links to political material (64%) than ages 25 to 34 (28%) or age 18 to 24 (8%) n = 28, p < .01.

Original Source Types

RQ4 asked what the original sources of these external links were, for example, online news organizations and YouTube. Link sources were varied; the researches coded for certain popular types of source (e.g., CNN, *The New York Times*), but barely half fell in those categories. Video social networks such as YouTube and Vimeo accounted for 18%, online newspapers for 15%, music sharing sites for 7%, and broadcast news sites and blogs for only 6%; 49% of the links were coded as "other."

Women out-posted men in all link source categories other than video sharing social networks (58%, n = 319, $p < .001$).

Video is the primary medium in more links by men (59%) than women (n = 73, $p < .01$). Photos are present in more material linked by women (64%) than men (n = 146, $p < .001$) and as the primary medium is linked by more women (87%) than men (n = 38, $p < .001$). Women also post more of the links with audio present (73%) than men do (n = 30, $p < .001$), but men post more of the links with audio as the primary medium (87%; n = 15, $p < .001$). In contrast, men also post more links (60%) with interactive presence than women do (n = 144, $p < .001$), but women post more (71%) of the links in which interactive is the primary medium (n = 14, $p < .001$).

The age group 35-plus was more likely to post links to the items with photo as the primary medium (76%) than age groups 25 to 34 (18%) and 18 to 24 (5%) combined (n = 38, $p < .001$). Age group 35 plus also posts more (52%) of the links to items with interactive presence than age groups 25 to 34 (40%) or 18 to 24 (8%; n = 144, $p < .01$). Interactivity as a primary medium is also found more in links by age group 35 plus (50% of the total) than age groups 25 to 34 (43%) or 18 to 24 (7%; n = 14, $p < .01$).

Women provided more of the links to newspapers (71%) than men did (n = 48, p < .001), also broadcast and cable-news sites (72%, n = 18, p < .001), blogs (72%, n = 18, p < .001), and music sites (60%, n = 22, p < .001); men linked more (68%) to video sharing social networks (n = 57, p < .001).

Twice as many links to broadcast and cable-news sites came from age group 25 to 34 (67%) than from the other age groups combined; (35-plus 22%, 18 to 24 11%; n = 18, p < .05).

Responses from Friends

RQ5 asks how others respond to links posted on Facebook with comments and likes. Participants and their contacts posted a total of 700 comments on the links studied, a mean of 2.1. Links posted by women got more comments on average (2.6) than those by men (1.5; p < .01). The links also received a total of 287 likes, a mean of 0.9. Again, women's links drew more likes on average (1.1) than men's (.64; p < .05).

Discussion

This exploratory study sought information about what and how Facebook users are sharing both news and other types of external links. Findings from this content analysis were that fewer than half (49%) of the participants posted links during the three-month period they were being tracked. Setting a limit of the 15 most recent posts during the three-month tracking period, participants that did post links posted an average of 10 links.

Links to materials with photos was most prevalent (32%), but photos were less often the primary medium (11%). Written material dominated as the primary medium of posted links (45%), but was present only 13% of the time when not the primary medium. However, video social network sites (18%) were linked to more frequent-

ly than any other specific type of online destination.

News and general information were the two leading genres, but sports/arts/entertainment was the primary linked topic of choice.

Comparing linking patterns to Facebook's general use patterns (iStrategyLabs, 2010), gender statistics of user linking follow general usage statistics within the U.S., with female Facebook users posting more links to share information with their network of Facebook friends than males. This study's findings of link usage among age groups did not completely match up with Facebook's general usage statistics concerning age groups (Facebook, 2010). This analysis found that age group 25 to 34 posted more links than age groups older than 35, which is contrary to general use figures, but age group 18 to 24 link and general use statistics were similar. Of course, this was a small sample of users.

Facebook of course is itself an interactive medium, with users able to pass along and comment on others' links. In this sample, reposting was barely a blip; only 6% of links were reposted from another user using the network's "share" function. With respect to comments and likes, nearly half (49%) of the links got no comments at all, and of those that did, the modes were one and two comments (12% each), but some discussions reached more than 10 comments, and one had 26. Links posted by women received both more comments and more likes than those by men.

Conclusions

It is important to the health of a democratic society and the business of journalism that we know more about this emergent form of news behavior and its implications for news media, which will have to continue to adapt in order to stay in business. The media were once seen as an "integral institution of governance" (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008) but are losing prominence; practitioners of journalism

must understand their audience in order to meet its needs.

The researchers wish to emphasize the exploratory nature of the present study. The research was conducted without a monetary budget nor online analytical tools such as logging software and online crawlers. It does, however, offer a glimpse into the linking nature and content of Facebook users who serve as information hubs within their Facebook networks.

Future studies may make use of analytical technology for more detailed examination of online friend networks and the information that flows on them, especially through networks' application programming interfaces (APIs), which allow access to the services and some data residing therein. This allows for more detailed examination of characteristics of influential members—those whose shared links are most likely to be passed along further. Regarding logging software, a study in progress by Menchen-Trevino (2010) offers a model for studying individual behavior in the social-news nexus. The researcher has recruited participants to allow customized software called Roxy to collect their Web browsing data. "The content of websites with sensitive personal information ... will NOT be logged" (para. 7). This method offers a way to track and examine patterns in individual browsing behavior.

Along with the small and non-generalizable sample, an important limitation of the present study is the rapid evolution even within the Facebook network; the nature of the news feed and changes in privacy capabilities create challenges for researchers aiming to replicate others' methods or to establish methods for others to emulate. This phenomenon, of course, is not limited to Facebook. All the same, any illumination of the busy but mostly opaque social-information system helps our understanding. These limitations do not take away from the value this exploratory glimpse offers into the uses of Facebook as a means for disseminating news.

References

Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707-731.

Benton, J. (2009). Clay Shirky: Let a thousand flowers bloom to replace newspapers; don't build a paywall around a public good. [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.niemanlab.org/2009/09/clay-shirky-let-a-thousand-flowers-bloom-to-replace-newspapers-dont-build-a-paywall-around-a-public-good/

Blumler, J. G., & McQuail, D. (1969). *Television in politics: Its uses and influence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

boyd, D. (2010, February 25). Streams of content, limited attention. Retrieved from http://uxmag.com/features/streams-of-content-limited-attention

Bunz, M. (2009, December 2). Facebook gets new privacy settings—and 350 million users. [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2009/dec/02/digital-media-facebook-privacy-settings-open-letter-mark-zuckerberg-350-users

Calderón, S. I. (2010, May 5). Some early data shows Facebook plugins increasing Web sites' traffic. [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.insidefacebook.com/2010/05/05/some-early-data-shows-facebook-plugins-increasing-sites-traffic/

ChompOn. (2011). What is the value of a social action in online commerce? Retrieved from http://www.chompon.com/chompon_social_action_value.pdf

Corbett, P. (2010). Facebook demographics and statistics report 2010—145% growth in 1 year. Retrieved from http://www.istrat-

egylabs.com/2010/01/facebook-demographics-and-statistics-report-2010-145-growth-in-1-year/

Facebook. (2010). Press room: Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics

Fox, S., Zickuhr, K., & Smith, A. (2009). Twitter and status updating. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/17-Twitter-and-Status-Updating-Fall-2009.aspx

Hapgood, F. (1995). The Media Lab at 10. Wired, 3(11). Retrieved from http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/3.11/media_pr.html

Hermida, A. (2009, September 15). FoJ09 talk: Twitter as a system of ambient journalism. [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://reportr.net/2009/09/15/foj09-talk-twitter-as-a-system-of-ambient-journalism/

Ingram, M. (2008, March 27). "If the news is important, it will find me". [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.mathewingram.com/work/2008/03/27/if-the-news-is-important-it-will-find-me/

iStrategyLabs. (2010). Demographics and statistics report 2010. Retrieved from from http://www.istrategylabs.com/2010/01/facebook-demographics-and-statistics-report-2010-145-growth-in-1-year/

Jarvis, J. (2008, June 18). The link economy v. the content economy. Retrieved from http://www.buzzmachine.com/2008/06/18/the-link-economy-v-the-content-economy/

Lee, J. K. (2009). Incidental exposure to news: Limiting fragmentation in the new media environment. (Doctoral dissertation. University of Texas at Austin). Retrieved from http://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/

Lijit (2010). Lijit Networks announces results of 2010 publisher tools analysis. Retrieved from http://www.lijit.com/company/press/releases/03022011

Maiya, A. S., & Berger-Wolf, T. Y. (2010). Sampling community structure. Retrieved from http://arun.maiya.net/papers/maiya_etal-sampcomm.pdf

Marshall, J. M. (2011). Facebook & TPM (social media geeks only). [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2011/03/facebook_tpm_social_media_geeks_only_1.php

Menchen-Trevino, E. (2010). Technology & the social. Retrieved from http://www.ericka.cc/btc/

Olmstead, K., Mitchell, A., & Rosenstiel, T. (2011). Navigating news online. Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/facebook_becoming_increasingly_important

Pew Research Center (2011). State of the media 2011. Retrieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/2011/

Purcell, K., Rainie, L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel, T., & Olmstead, K. (2010, March 1). Understanding the participatory news consumer. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx

Stelter, B. (2008, March 27). Finding political news online, the young pass it on. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/27/us/politics/27voters.html

Tewksbury, D., Weaver, A. J., & Maddex, B. D. (2001). Accidentally informed: Incidental news exposure on the World Wide Web. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, 533-554.

White, D. M. (1950). The "gate keeper": A case study in the selection of news. *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, 383-396.

Brian Baresch is a Ph.D. candidate in journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. His research explores how the people formerly known as the audience are spreading and adapting news and information in their social networks, and the implications that this new news ecosystem has for society. His research also encompasses news framing, media sociology, cultural influences on news reporting, and racial and cultural coding on opinion websites; other interests include media law and ethics. He has more than 20 years of experience as a professional and freelance editor for newspapers and other publications. He has a master's degree in journalism and a bachelor's degree in political science, both from the University of Kansas.

editer@utexas.edu

Lewis Knight is a Ph.D. student in journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. He has worked in radio and televsion since 1977 and owns a video production company that he founded in 1992. He has also taught video and advertising classes at the Art Institute of Houston and sat on the professional advisory board of that school for three years. He earned his master's degree at Texas State University–San Marcos and his bachelor's at Rowan University. He is an accomplished producer/director with expertise in Media 100-NLE, Final Cut Pro, After Effects, Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign. He is proficient on Avid, Flash, DreamWeaver, ProTools, and other graphic and multimedia tools.

lewis@klpnet.com

Dr. Dustin Harp, Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Texas at Arlington, studies the intersections of journalism, new media, women and marginalized voices. Her research appears in top mass media journals and includes studies examining the marginalized status of female political bloggers, the discursive constructions of U.S. vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, the intersection of journalism and virtual worlds, and how minority youth use

media for political purposes. Much of her work comes from a feminist and critical perspective and she often considers how women are represented in mediated discourses and ways in which they have been situated as producers of news and knowledge. This interest has led to studies of the new digital environment and citizen participation in that sphere. Her book, "Desperately Seeking Women Readers: Newspapers and the Construction of a Female Readership" (Lexington, 2007), argues that historically news organizations thought of men as citizens while they constructed women as consumers to be sold to advertisers. She previously taught at the University of Texas at Austin.

dustinharp@mail.utexas.edu

Carolyn Yaschur is a Ph.D. student in journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research centers on visual communication. In particular, she is interested in how photojournalistic images are created and the effect they have on audiences. Focusing on the way in which digital media and the influx of citizen photojournalists have changed the field, she also studies photojournalists themselves—how their altered roles and routines impact their attitudes and work. She taught basic photography and photo editing at the University of Missouri while getting her master's degree there. An award-winning photojournalist, Yaschur has worked at newspapers across the country and covered events such as the Olympics, the Kentucky Derby and the Alaskan Iditarod.

cyaschur@yahoo.com

Stopping the Presses:
A Longitudinal Case Study of the *Christian Science Monitor* Transition from Print Daily to Web Always

ORIGINAL ARTICLE - ISOJ 2011

Jonathan Groves, Drury University
Carrie Brown-Smith, University of Memphis

Though many news organizations have talked about going "Web-first" in response to sweeping change rocking the media landscape, the Christian Science Monitor took the mantra beyond platitudes. In 2009, the Monitor became the first nationally circulated newspaper to replace its daily print edition with its website and a weekly print magazine. This study examines the paper's effort to grapple with this transition and the way it altered news routines, and offers insight for other organizations seeking to implement change. The study also documents a shift in the Monitor's news-gathering and coverage as immediacy and page views rose as critical measures of success.

Though many traditional news organizations have talked about going "Web-first" in response to sweeping economic and technological changes rocking the media landscape (Brown, 2008; Groves, 2009), the *Christian Science Monitor* took the mantra beyond platitudes. In 2009, the *Monitor* became the first nationally circulated newspaper to embrace digital innovation by replacing its daily print edition with its website and a weekly print magazine. As other news organizations (e.g. the *Detroit News*/Free-Press) are experimenting with decreased print frequency and expanded online distribution, the *Monitor*'s effort to grapple with this transition is worthy of examination for lessons learned.

This longitudinal study involved three week-long on-site visits to the *Monitor*'s primary newsroom in Boston, Mass., for ethnographic observation and interviews, and included an online survey of the

newsroom staff. The first visit took place in December 2009, nine months after the transition began; researchers followed up with visits in July 2010 and January 2011 to gather longitudinal data.

Informed by theories of organizational culture and leadership as well as diffusion of innovations, this study reveals how elimination of the daily print edition gave the *Monitor* more room to develop new routines to better adapt to the Web imperatives of always-on immediacy and greater attentiveness to audience. However, newspapers, like all organizations, are resistant to change (Kets de Vries, 2001; Sylvie & Witherspoon, 2002), and the *Monitor*'s transition was not without its difficulties. Many staffers resisted what they saw as the devolution of the *Monitor*'s serious journalism into pandering to the lowest common denominator with lighter news to capture the audience's attention. This analysis reveals these and other opportunities and challenges for news organizations attempting radical transformations to adapt to digital and economic imperatives.

Literature Review

Since the rise of the Internet as a disruptive news medium, newspapers have watched their circulations and ad revenues decline as audiences gravitated away from traditional news sources (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2011). This shift has prompted them to what business management and organizational change scholars call a "critical moment," or a widespread acceptance by all stakeholders that something must be done to better meet customers' changing demands and revitalize a failing business model (Kets de Vries, 2001). This level of change is difficult to achieve when the organization remains saddled with the need to produce the legacy product. By eliminating the daily print edition, the *Monitor* opened itself up to innovation, with greater opportunities to experiment with new routines.

Innovation theorists talk about the need for a nimble organization, one that focuses on emergent strategy driven by experimentation, rather than deliberate strategy requiring detailed planning before execution (Christensen & Raynor, 2003). Once successful strategies are developed, though, it is critical that they spread throughout the culture.

The diffusion of innovations paradigm from Rogers (2003) provides a well-tested framework for making sense of how organizations adopt or reject innovations, defining diffusion as "the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (p. 5). Innovations are adopted at different rates by organizations, depending upon how individuals perceive the innovation's advantages and compatibility with the existing system, as well as its complexity (Rogers, 2003). Other critical factors are trialability, or how well an innovation may be experimented with, and observability, or how well those in the organization see the results of the innovation. Interpersonal relationships are a key part of this diffusion: A change agent enters the existing system to introduce the innovation, and with the help of opinion leaders, spreads the innovation throughout the organization.

Another critical factor affecting the diffusion of innovation is organizational culture. Scholars of organizational change have found that deciphering culture is critical to understanding how an organization can effectively transform itself to meet external challenges (Schein, 2010). Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as a set of shared assumptions that have been learned by a group to solve its basic problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Some of these assumptions have proved practical or effective in the past but are less so when circumstances change, as they have in newsrooms.

Schein (2010) defines three layers of culture:

> 1) Artifacts, or processes and physical structures, such as the layout of the newsroom and the daily newsgathering routines.

> 2) Espoused values, or the beliefs the organization explicitly articulates.

> 3) Underlying assumptions, which are often unspoken or even unconscious values but represent some of the true motivations for behavior in an organization. Argyris (2004) makes a similar distinction: espoused theories, or what people say about their goals when asked directly, and theories-in-use, which are the unspoken operating values governing their actions.

Scholars must identify these components of culture to understand what factors might be facilitating or inhibiting change (Schein, 2010). For example, news organizations that espouse the importance of the Web but tend to continue to reward reporters whose work appears on the front page over those who contribute multimedia or other Web efforts will, not surprisingly, notice that reporters devote more time and energy to the print product (Brown, 2008).

Another critical aspect of organizational culture is leadership. Leaders set an example for others and communicate their underlying assumptions in terms of what they reward and what they punish; the direction and intensity of their attention; what types of things are measured and evaluated; their allocation of resources; and through whom and how they promote, hire and recruit (Schein, 2010).

Research indicates that organizations that adapt to changing environment by building on existing strengths and values are often the most successful (Schein, 2010), and news organizations are no

exception. Research on change in newsrooms has found that jour-
nalists are resistant to changes they perceive as being in conflict
with the core values of the profession and may passively or actively
block their adoption (Brown & Groves, 2010; Singer, 2004, Stamm
& Underwood, 1993). Journalists draw fundamental aspects of
their identity from their commitment to core values of accuracy and
independence, among others, and to their mission of providing in-
formation to citizens in a democratic system (Kovach & Rosenstiel,
2007). This strong sense of identity also serves to defend journal-
ism from critics and to provide it with bona fides as a true "profes-
sion" (Schudson, 2001; Zelizer, 2004). Many people first get into
journalism because of their attraction to these core values, and they
are further reinforced as part of the socialization process in journal-
ism education and on the job (Schudson, 2001 & 2003).

Case studies of news organizations undergoing major changes
(e.g. Daniels & Hollifield, 2002; Gade, 2004; Gade & Perry, 2003;
Singer, 2004) have found that journalists, as trained skeptics, are
suspicious of changes espoused as being good for journalism but
suspected of being more about the bottom line. For example, Gade
and Perry (2003) studied a cultural change attempted by public-
journalism movement supporter and then-editor Cole Campbell at
the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Journalists began the process fairly op-
timistic, but after four years, surveys showed that many staffers had
become negative and believed that the underlying motivations were
not rooted in the values of public journalism. Instead of allowing the
organization to connect more effectively with the community, these
initiatives were more about increasing circulation and advertising,
staffers said (Gade & Perry, 2003).

Similarly, Singer (2004) found that journalists were suspicious about
underlying motivations for change in her study of four converged
newsrooms, even though managers did not frame the change in
terms of the bottom line. One might expect that one of the major
conflicts in converged newsrooms would be the differences be-

tween former print and broadcast competitors, but because they shared core values, the staff integrated fairly well. Instead, the main source of resistance was changes that they felt threatened these values. One of the survey respondents she quoted said that any change brought about to raise profits and not improve journalism was never going to be accepted by the newsroom, no matter what top managers said or did to encourage people.

More recent studies (Brown, 2008; Brown & Groves, 2010; Groves, 2009) have found that the threat to core journalistic values remain a top concern in newsrooms, but there is also a growing acceptance that change is necessary and concern for the bottom line is no longer anathema to journalists. Survival anxiety in newsrooms is high as the entire industry has been rocked by budget cuts, high debt loads, declining ad sales, and digital competition (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010), and this brings with it the powerful motivation needed to transcend comfortable routines (Schein, 2010). Over the past several decades, researchers have shown how journalists routinize their work to meet deadlines and fulfill time and space requirements (Fishman, 1980; Gans, 2004; Tuchman, 1978), but journalists are perhaps more open than ever before to the idea of change because of economic realities facing the industry. Still, underlying assumptions about the prestige of print often remain powerful barriers to true transformation (Brown, 2008).

Once the values and culture are understood, Rogers' framework allows researchers to understand how innovation filters through an organization. Rogers (2003) frames the innovation-decision process among individuals and units as a five-step process: knowledge, or learning about the innovation; persuasion, or understanding the perceived characteristics of the innovation; decision, or adopting/rejecting the innovation; implementation; and confirmation. This structure will be used to organize the organizational narrative over the 13-month study period.

In the implementation and confirmation stages, old routines are modified, and new ones develop. One of the most important elements of news routines in this study includes the set of standards through which journalists can decide what is worthy of coverage from the obviously vast range of possibilities. These standards traditionally include prominence, proximity, conflict/controversy, timeliness, the unusual (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), and impact (The Missouri Group, 2010). The animating idea behind these standards is that journalism should tell the public what it needs to know in order to govern itself and to hold government and the powerful accountable (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). American journalism still adheres to the general notion that these standards help further objectivity by minimizing the personal biases of journalists about what news is important, although many journalists do understand that they can produce their own types of subtle biases, such as playing up conflict over compromise (Brown, 2008).

This research seeks to build on this literature on organizational culture and change as well as decades of past research on newsroom processes and routines to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: *How did the Monitor's organizational culture affect its effort to transition to the Web?*

RQ2: *How are news processes/routines changing as the Monitor shifts from a daily print publication to a Web-only/print weekly?*

RQ3: *How has the emphasis on "Web first" affected the types of topics the Monitor covers?*

RQ4: *How is the Monitor bringing the enduring values of journalism to life in its daily routines and practices?*

Methodology

This study relied on ethnographic observation, interviews, and an online survey of staff, and involved three week-long on-site visits to the *Monitor* newsroom, spread over the course of 13 months. Researchers attended meetings, shadowed staffers, and observed the news-production process at work. A cross-section of staffers from all levels and departments were interviewed, including some on both the editorial and business sides of the organization. Researchers also collected organizational e-mails and other relevant documents as well as all articles in the journalism trade press for analysis. The researchers then analyzed the data for key themes.

Top managers have been identified in the organizational narrative, but individual interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality to encourage honesty and openness. The longitudinal design allowed for the observation of how change and innovation spread through the organization over time and how responses evolved or stayed the same.

A case study is an appropriate methodological approach for examining newsroom change because it allows for the in-depth study of phenomena in its real-life context (Jankowski & Wester, 1991; Yin, 2003). Practically speaking, a single case allowed for a greater depth of exploration into multiple phenomena, given the constraints of resources and time. As Dyer and Wilkins (1991) argue, single case studies are also valuable because they allow the researcher to offer deeper description and locate the fundamental meanings behind events. Open systems theory explains that an organization has many internal and external stakeholders that must establish congruence in needs and responsibilities for the organization to adapt and perform effectively, and researchers must carefully examine each of these and their relationships in an immersive context to understand the organization (Harrison, 2005).

Findings

All organizations' cultures are products of their past (Kets de Vries, 2001; Schein, 2010), and it is important to understand the *Monitor*'s history, which informs its values and approach to change. The *Monitor* has a deep connection to the First Church of Christ, Scientist, which founded the paper and still provides much of the funding for the newspaper's operations, although aside from one article each day, the content is otherwise not religious in nature. The paper was founded on August 8, 1908 with a short, hand-scrawled missive from church founder Mary Baker Eddy (Canham, 1958). She also crafted the mission: "To injure no man, but to bless all mankind," which remains on the "About" page of csmonitor.com and in the weekly magazine's information box. Her motivation stemmed in part from the "yellow journalism" of the day, as several major newspapers had written misleading articles about her and the church. Eddy sought to offer an alternative to this sensationalism, and to this day staffers often define themselves as what they are not: Not obsessed with conflict, not adding to the froth of unsubstantiated opinion.

The first part of an organization's culture as defined by Schein are its artifacts, or its organizational and physical structures and routines. Soon after the paper's founding, the newspaper's offices were constructed in downtown Boston in an ornate edifice next to the Mother Church, the denomination's home sanctuary (Canham, 1958). Today, the church's tolling bells are still audible from the newsroom. In its 112-year history, the paper has won seven Pulitzer Prizes, which hang outside the newsroom's main conference room, and more than a dozen Overseas Press Club awards. The commitment to core journalistic values is connected to the mission of the organization. The roots run deep for many employees, who grew up with the *Monitor* in their households. Many are church members and feel a sense of journalistic mission connected to their faith, especially since the paper was created at the behest of the church's

founder. This weaving of personal faith and journalistic commitment affected how many employees perceived the Web-first change effort over the course of the year. As one staffer said,

> Many of us are Christian Scientists, and for those of us that are, we really have a sense of mission that goes beyond the journalistic mission...the real challenge is to take this new form given to us, and forge it to our purposes, not let it forge its on us. (personal communication, July 2010)

An excerpt from the introduction of Monitor's stylebook reveals the subtle intertwining of faith and profession:

> To blaze its own path of clean, constructive journalism, broad in appeal, high in character, powerful in helpfulness, the Monitor tries hard to develop stories that are not routine, articles that are original, interesting, and important to human progress. ... Our aim is to bring light rather than heat to a subject. The purpose is to heal. When ex- posing evil, we don't call names or sling adjectives; we record acts and official charges. Warmth, compassion, even humor, can help the Monitor serve as 'a most genial persuader.' (p. 2, Monitor, 1997)

This commitment is echoed on the website's About page on csmonitor.com:

- We're unrelenting but fair.

- We're excited by what's new and developing — yet always mind- ful of the history behind us.

- We're broad in scope but written for the individual.

● And we make a point of resisting the sensational in favor of the meaningful. (Monitor, 2011)

Visitors to the main newsroom must have a badge to access the third-floor offices. The newsroom is an open space, with low-walled cubicles, making most editors and writers visible. Most of the organization's editors are based in the Boston headquarters, working with correspondents and staff writers in bureaus around the United States and the world. Most bureaus consist of one staffer, although the *Monitor*'s Washington office has eight, including a bureau chief.

In Boston, the top editors have separate offices along a far wall of the newsroom, although the Web editor and managing editor usually work from cubicles among the other employees in the newsroom proper. People work quietly, communicating through e-mail, instant messaging, and telephones. Several televisions hang around the newsroom tuned to the major cable news networks, although the volumes are turned down. Each cubicle has the occupant's name on a nameplate. A number of dry-erase boards dot the newsroom, with tidbits of information, such as names of foreign correspondents or schedules of cover stories for the *Monitor*'s weekly magazine.

Prior to the transition, the organization had a mid-day deadline and published one newspaper each weekday. Because the newspaper relied on mail delivery to reach its subscribers, the newsroom developed a strategy of introspective journalism over the years to differentiate itself. To compensate for the delayed delivery cycle, the *Monitor* focused on a more reflective take and took a bigger picture approach to covering the news. Though it had had a Web site for years, the routines prior to 2009 — like those of many other print dailies (Brown, 2008; Groves, 2009) — remained focused on the production of the daily newspaper. Until 2007, the newsroom had separate managing editors for the Web site and the newspaper; those positions were later merged.

John Yemma, a former *Monitor* reporter and business editor who had spent 20 years working at the *Boston Globe*, returned as editor of the *Monitor* in July 2008 (Cook, 2008).In an interview with the Monitor at the time, he affirmed the commitment to Eddy's founding principles, saying Eddy

> founded the Monitor during the era of 'yellow journalism,' when objectivity, accuracy, and fairness were in short supply. Now, at a time when news organizations are struggling to establish a sustainable economic base, the Monitor's role is more crucial than ever in providing careful reporting, compassionate analysis, and a clear-eyes view of the world. (Cook, 2008)

At the time of his hiring, the Web staff had already begun experimenting with sites built with the Wordpress content-management system to provide more interaction than was available under the organization's previous K4 publishing system, which was geared toward print (J.Orr, personal communication, December 1, 2009). Soon afterward, the newsroom began investigating a new overall content-management system.

 The second key component of organizational culture is its espoused values (Schein, 2010). In interviews, many staffers referred to "*Monitor* values" or "*Monitor* journalism." These espoused values described a type of journalism that is contextual, explanatory, and solutions-oriented — journalism that avoids sensational or alarmist tones. Several quoted Eddy's original mission as a guiding principle for their work. A few samples from five different staffers over the course of the study period reveal how many conceive of "*Monitor* journalism":

> The *Monitor* story before was a very particular kind of story. You always looked for a larger analytical story on any given news point. You just didn't do the news story, you know.

You always did something larger than that, and you always looked for — to be, you know, to be more analytical about it. (personal communication, December 1, 2009)

... I think that Monitor journalism is basically like bringing an uplifted sense to what's happening in the world today and what the main currents of thought are. I think that's the most important thing. ... and news is important, but there's just so much being done on the news of the day, and not enough being done on what's behind it. And so, I think good Monitor journalism takes the time to investigate those deeper things that are more important, that are instigating some of the little things that are popping up every day. (personal communication, December 4, 2009)

We talk about being solution-based journalism. We don't go into the fray; we try to push the discussion in a new way that is productive. (personal communication, July 2010)

...a lot of us at the *Monitor* ... perhaps are more mission-oriented than at other places. Maybe it's not quite that way, but, at least for me, it feels like the type of journalism that we strive for, and that we were always known for, is worth fighting for. (personal communication, January 10, 2011)

I grew up reading the *Monitor*, and I valued the, well, values of what we stand for. I like the solutions-based journalism and responses to world issues; and yeah, so I really admire it. ... seeking solutions to problems, staying away from sensationalism, analysis and thought- ful kind of assessment of what's going on rather than jumping to snap conclusions and going for, not so much a focus on breaking news, but more on understanding the reasons, the causes behind the news of the day — I mean, that's what we aspire to. (personal communication, January 7, 2011)

In meetings about content, whether for the Web or the print products, staffers also mentioned the idea of a "*Monitor* story" to ensure that the ideal was kept in mind. Unlike other newspapers, the structure of the *Monitor* places the editor and the publisher on equal footing. The editor reports to a board of directors; the publisher reports to a separate board of trustees, although both managers often meet with each other's boards. Such structures reinforce the importance of the news operation and its connection to the larger mission set forth by Eddy.

Given the primacy of "*Monitor* journalism" to the organization's identity, the second major espoused value is the need to make these values come to life on the Web so that the organization can survive, not only financially, but in terms of finding a larger audience for this form of solution-based, serious journalism. One staffer, who has been at the paper for more than 30 years, said that the Web transition was a big morale booster because despite what he saw as a winning product, in print it had a deeply declining circulation and reach (personal communication, July 2010). The *Monitor* has thus set concrete goals and defined some new espoused values for the Web era. For example, page views were determined to be a key early metric of success after the print daily was eliminated; departments were given monthly targets to meet. By July 2010, staffers were also talking about the importance of engagement and stickiness as the next critical metric, or getting people to interact with content and stay on the site longer, although this concept was less well defined and measured. Staffers were asked to increasingly value immediacy, jumping on breaking news or trending topics quickly, to write more and shorter stories, and to master search engine optimization, particularly in headlines, to give their stories Google juice. As will be shown in greater detail later in the paper, these new values were constantly reinforced in news meetings and in interactions between managers and staffers.

Finally, the third component of organizational culture is underlying assumptions, or the often unspoken motivations for behavior. At the *Monitor*, the core underlying assumption that affected the digital transition was a deep-seated sense that the Web is fundamentally incompatible with *Monitor* values and that the increased attention to traffic and metrics was undermining the craft of journalism and the editorial judgment that fuels quality. Despite what many said was their hope that the paper could offer a more serious take on the issues preoccupying the American public as surfaced by Google trends, one editor talked of feeling like a "carnival barker" pandering to the lowest common denominator. Nearly all of those interviewed said they recognized that not just the *Monitor* but the industry had reached what scholars of organizational change call a "critical moment" in which they have to change to survive (Kets de Vries, 2001). It was clear, however, that for all the talk about how the Web could be a new venue for journalism values, many resisted change because they believe meaningful journalism is difficult or impossible to achieve online. Also, the attention to metrics was undermining their craft, like controlling an artist's work by popular opinion.

Going Web first: Knowledge/Persuasion

Like other newspapers, the *Monitor* had seen a noticeable decline in circulation in recent years. Its daily circulation peaked at more than 220,000 in 1970; it was 52,000 when the change to Web-first was announced in October 2008 (Clifford, 2008). Within three months of taking the helm, Yemma announced plans to eliminate the daily print newspaper to become a Web-first operation (Clifford, 2008). The organization would continue to publish a weekly maga-zine, but its emphasis would be the Web. At the time, the organiza-tion's Web site was getting 3 million page views per month; Yemma hoped to reach 20 million to 30 million per month within five years to offset cuts in the church subsidy. The church had provided about $12 million a year to the news organization, but that amount was to be cut to $4 million by 2013 (Clifford, 2008).

In preparation for the transition, Yemma worked closely with *Monitor* publisher Jonathan Wells. By December 2008, the organization had tallied responses from customer-service lines and e-mails: 50% were positive, 14% were negative, and the remainder wanted to know more about the change (J. Yemma, personal communication, November 30, 2009). The organization also converted 93% of its subscriber base to the new print weekly.

The *Monitor* identified a unique value proposition, or an updated mission to guide its strategy in the months ahead: "Explaining world news to thoughtful people who care about solutions." At the time the study began, interviewees were familiar with the statement and could quote all or some of the phrase. But several saw it as repackaging of Eddy's original mission, which many could quote verbatim.

In the first part of 2009, management offered voluntary buyouts to staffers and held a town-hall meeting to take questions and discuss severance packages. The leaders had set an April 30 deadline to complete its newsroom staff reduction. In a February 2, 2009, memo to staff from Yemma, a question-and-answer section made clear the connection between cuts and the new mission:

> Q: If after Feb. 16 you need to reduce the staff further with layoffs, how will you decide which staffers get laid off?
>
> A: We are first looking at the jobs and tasks necessary to carry out our core publishing mission. That mission, of course, is changing as we move to a Web-first strategy with a weekly print edition. We know that we will have to do without certain positions and will have to narrow our editorial focus. In general, if the work associated with a particular position is no longer needed, that would be a position we would not continue to staff. (memo, Februrary 2, 2009)

As the *Monitor* published its last daily edition, Yemma sent the fol-

lowing email memo to the staff:

> To the staff:
>
> No need to bury the lede. This is a momentous day. After we clear the final pages of the daily print *Monitor* today, we are in uncharted waters. Everything we do from this point is new to us and new to the world of journalism.
>
> We'll try things, think about whether they worked, adjust, and try again. We are all moving into this new Web-first + Weekly world together. Years from now our successors at the *Monitor* — and probably a lot of people at other news organizations — will be using techniques that we have pioneered.
>
> With apologies for King Harry's un-PC language:
>
> "And gentlemen in England now a-bed Shall think themselves accursed they were not here"
>
> Our goal, of course, is to carry out our 100-year-old mission, ex- pand our reach, and secure ourselves financially. It won't be easy. But we have all the tools and support necessary to succeed. We are part of something bigger than ourselves, part of an unfolding demonstration of eternal Love for mankind. (memo, March 25, 2009)

(J. Yemma, personal communication, March 25, 2009).

The newsroom staff was cut to 75 through attrition and voluntary buyouts. The changes did not come without criticism, even from some former staffers. William A. Babcock, a former senior international news editor for the *Monitor*, wrote an essay chronicling the church's missed opportunities to protect the daily newspaper, noting,

> ... as the current church board of directors plans to launch a new weekly edition of the print newspaper and beef up the *Monitor*'s online presence, it's difficult to be optimistic. After a century of publication, the *Monitor* could have been a beacon — the sort of illuminating presence America's Founding Fathers envisioned in our nation's marketplace of ideas. It is sad, if not tragic, that a church allowed this journalistic light to be extinguished. (Babcock, 2009)

Shortly after the launch, Yemma and online editor Jimmy Orr began pushing a new initiative: shorter stories with more frequent updates. Previously, most *Monitor* stories included multiple sources and ran about 800 to 1,200 words. Now, the leadership wanted stories for the Web that were no longer than 500 words. If possible, writers were to produce multiple takes; newsroom leaders emphasized increased updating would help improve page-view counts (J. Yemma, personal communication, December 3, 2009). Orr, a former chief Internet communications strategist for President George W. Bush and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, himself blogged regularly as part of a feature called The Vote blog. By July, the blog accounted for 20% of the site's traffic (memo, July 4, 2009).

By August, page views had reached 7.5 million, with 2.5 million to 3 million unique visitors (Mitchell, 2009). In September, the organization hired a consulting firm to provide advice on search-engine optimization. The changes introduced at this time came primarily from the top, with Yemma, Orr, and managing editor Marshall Ingwerson serving as the primary change agents (Rogers, 2003). The majority of the newsroom was focused on the Web operation; less than a quarter of the staff was dedicated primarily to the print operation on the organizational chart at the time the study began.

The newsroom developed a four-pronged approach of innovation to growing its online audience:

● Increasing the frequency of updating from journalists, with two shorter blog posts a day.

● Using search-engine optimization (SEO) techniques in headlines and posts to improve positioning in organic Google searches and Google News.

● Monitoring Google Trends for hot topics and occasionally assigning stories that offer the *Monitor*'s nuanced take on issues people are interested in and talking about.

● Using social media (Twitter, Facebook, and Digg) to extend the Web-site presence and content to other audiences.

December 2009: Decision

By the first week of immersive observation, the Web-first culture had begun to take hold, and page views had hit 9.5 million. The weekly magazine had performed better than expected; after starting with 43,000 subscribers at launch, the paid subscriber base had grown to 68,000 by December 2009. A third product, known as the Daily News Briefing, was breaking even as well with 1,900 paid subscribers. It culled the best of the *Monitor*'s original Web content into a three-page PDF file e-mailed to subscribers.

Despite the quantitative successes, several interviewees expressed concerns and frustrations about some of the changes, as they felt writing headlines optimized for Google short-changed readers, and providing shorter, more frequent content was far removed from the *Monitor*'s original mission. One editor noted,

> I mean, we're up there with all the different newsiest online organizations [in Google]. The down side would be, we're doing a lot more sort of culture war stuff — headlines with [Sarah] Palin in it and like gee-whiz electronic gadgetry stuff

> — simply to get traffic. Little blogs that might be a good read but don't really have much reporting — if any — are sort of what gets all the traffic; that, and photos of the day. So it's a little disheartening to be traipsing through the jungle, risking your life in the areas that I cover for my readers, if that's not going to get any traffic at all. All management seems to care about is traffic. (personal communication, November 29, 2009)

All employees had access to the daily Omniture reports showing how stories performed in terms of page views, the primary measure of success in the newsroom. Workplace schedules had been adjusted to meet the rolling deadlines for the Web site, ensuring coverage from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. each weekday. A skeletal staff of editors handled duties through the weekend. The newsroom was also about to change from its K4 print-focused publishing system to eZPublish, a content-management system designed for the Web, which would allow editors to add links and photos, and publish stories without having to go through the Web team.

Despite resistance in the newsroom, a few opinion leaders had begun to embrace the idea. One editor, for example, had begun keeping a spreadsheet of how stories performed on the Web to try to understand which topics and writers engaged readers.

Another summed up the internal tension mentioned by many in interviews:

> The underlying thing about the whole transition is that if you do good work but no one sees it, what is the point? So even if you have to do something that's populist in order to draw readers, but then those readers come and they'll see other things that are good, then, that is the premise on which, I think, we now operate. (personal communication, December 1, 2009).

In addition to shorter reports, the Web-first environment saw the evolution of "roundups," curated content from a variety of Web sources to help readers sort through the news. More topical blogs had been added to the site as well, and the national desk had instituted a requirement that all stories adhere to the 500-word limit. On the international desk, the 500-word limitation was introduced as a guideline, and some writers did exceed the limit. On the whole during this week, national stories tended to perform more strongly than international.

Reporters were encouraged to use individual Twitter accounts and Facebook pages to spread their stories, a recommendation that sparked some dissension from bureau reporters who questioned whether it was worth the investment of time. Daily news budget meetings began with a review of page-view reports and talk of what worked well on the Web. As the move to Web first took hold, Orr emerged as a primary change agent, along with Yemma. Orr often challenged traditional assumptions and routines, pointing out different stories or themes as possibilities to increase traffic. When news of Tiger Woods' infidelities hit, Orr noted the trends in budget meetings. He experimented with different types of blog posts and content, and often, blog posts would appear among the most viewed stories on the Web site.

Several staffers said in interviews the organization had begun covering topics that would not have appeared in the daily print edition, such as the unfolding circumstances surrounding Michael Jackson's unusual death and the story of a man who had faked the disappearance of his son on an experimental balloon.

> ... now we can see exactly which story they're reading and how much. And you know — surprise, surprise — it's the Tiger Woods, it's the Sarah Palin. Those are the ones, you know. Good stories are not assured of doing badly, but you're going to hit more, you're going to get better page

views more consistently, with the stuff that's kind of — can tend to be fluff. So then the challenge of course is to decide whether you're just going to take a hit and not do it, or whether you're going to try and find something you can say about that, that adds to the conversation in a positive way. Not a positive spin, but something that adds information (personal communication, November 29, 2009).

Search-engine optimization (SEO) strategies were instituted as well, and how-to memos were circulated. Some editors mentioned headlines optimized for Google often do not always meet good editorial standards. As part of the Web-first strategy, editors also spent more of their time tracking trends in Google and Yahoo. Another opinion leader, who expressed some worry and skepticism, said:

I feel like we're in a process, and it's hard to tell how far we're gonna swing in that pendulum and where the right place is to be on that. So I'm willing to sort of suspend some of my previous biases about who we are and what we should be, to let this play out and see how this works. (personal communication, December 1, 2009)

One survey respondent put it this way:

While keeping up with new techniques and a multimedia approach is important, we need to maintain good, old-fashioned journalistic standards as top priority. The race-to-the-bottom that occurs when the goal is to run whichever stories get the maximum number of 'hits' is a huge risk when you go to an all-Internet edition. The 'cult of real time,' i.e. the breathless need to update a story every hour, often comes at the cost of context, analysis and reflection. (survey, January 2010)

Though editorial staffers had opened up to the Web-first idea, the Web staff remained separated, physically and psychologically, from the national and international news desks. Some Web staffers referred to feeling like "second-class citizens," although that sense had begun to change. Previously, requests for Web summaries and other Web-specific content would go ignored; by December 2009, news staffers had become more responsive to such queries. "I think we have a little bit more [stature], probably because we've been able to demonstrate success," one Web team member said (personal communication, December 2, 2009). "We've been able to bring in a ton of traffic."

The weekly magazine, referred to as "the weekly" by most of the staff, features more of the long-form journalism that most of the staff consider "*Monitor* journalism." At this point, editors and writers viewed assignments for the weekly as a respite from the daily grind of the Web site. When working on an article for the weekly, staffers on the national and international desks were temporarily freed from Web responsibilities.

By the end of the first study week, a few themes had emerged. Some worried whether the organization had sacrificed quantity for quality. As one staffer said of the Web: "Hopefully, we can be in it, but not of it." The number of stories handled by editors — in the form of updates, roundups, and blog posts — had increased sharply from the days of the print newspaper, although most of the pieces were shorter. Still, many people noted the increased workload in interviews. Also, the national and international desks became more competitive in terms of page-view results.

Though the Web team and the editorial desks had been separate, the differences had lessened gradually as more editors were forced to embrace a Web-first ethic.

July 2010: Implementation

In July 2010, more than one year into the digital transition, there were some signs that despite some ongoing underlying resistance, the staff was settling into the new routines and, in some ways, finding gratification in the paper's increased audience.

Editor Yemma likened the process of adjusting to change to the stages of grief and noted that it is an industry-wide phenomenon in the newspaper business. He said there was huge resistance at first, particularly for older staffers, but that people became gradually more accepting over time and came to recognize that the changes were not as threatening to their values or professional identity as originally thought. He noted that he saw a similar process when working at the Globe, and added that he felt many at the *Monitor* had already "read the writing on the wall" by the time he arrived there.

One mid-level editor went so far as to seek out the researcher to note how much better he felt about the new expectations since having first been interviewed in December 2009: "I'm really gratified. The higher efficiency is really rewarding. We have gotten really nimble, we feel more responsive and relevant…. Yemma said we would get more efficient, and we really have…We are out of the middle of the storm" (personal communication, July 2010). He felt that while stories were less meaty and less original, he was surprised at the good that had come out of being more responsive to readers, allowing the paper to increase its relevance, as well as his own ability to edit more stories more quickly than he ever thought possible. Similarly, another staffer said that the staff size was first decreased in her department, there was initial panic, but "once you get the routine down, it's OK."

A staffer said that March 2010, about one year in to the transition, was a significant moment, bringing "a huge sigh of relief" as "there

is a feeling there's been some responsiveness on management's part as to how heavy the workload had gotten." Daily story counts for departments were reduced slightly or not heavily enforced, she said, and she felt that traffic goals were not being increased as much as they had initially thought they might be; on the international desk, a request for an additional staffer did result in an intern being hired.

What some described as not only acceptance but excitement about the quest for traffic and its instant gratification led to a shift in how staffers felt about writing for the magazine. While it was still prized as a place for long-form journalism and "*Monitor* values," magazine editors had had an increasingly hard time getting staffers to write for it, especially cover stories that require a significant investment of time. In some cases, staffers would not return calls to magazine staffers. Part of this was a sense that with the increasingly fast pace of output for the Web, it was hard to fit in the magazine stories, but part of it was also a concern about what slowing down the publication cycle would mean for an individual's or a department's all-important numbers. Editors were reluctant to have more than one of their reporters pulled out of the rotation to focus on magazine work because it would of course lessen their ability to contribute traffic-generating stories.

Even some of the staffers who had been at the *Monitor* for more than a decade expressed some enthusiasm for the change, often noting that the transition was much less wrenching than the *Monitor*'s failed experiment with broadcasting in the late 1980s and early 1990s. One said, "I'm at the end of my career, at least in theory. I feel like anything is possible. It's injected some new vitality into my thinking" (personal communication, July 2010). Another said that after investing his career there, he didn't want to be one of the ones to turn the lights out on the newsroom. He noted all news organizations are trying to figure out what works in the new-media world, and in some ways, the new mandates were allowing the *Monitor* to

get its edge back again. "This time, I can cope, learn, deal, whatever you want to call it," he said (personal communication, July 2010).

However, there were still some pockets of resistance to change and anxiety about what it meant for the *Monitor* in July 2010. One staffer said that the change had not played out as much as been fought out. Many continued to express concerns that the hunt for page views was driving poor journalistic choices. One person on the business side of the organization said:

> It's hard, if you've been working here for 30 years, to realize that people are not reading what you are writing. That is tough for peo¬ple. Change is a real struggle. Power has shifted dramatically from editors deciding what is important… It's a hard mindshift to take, that readers are not as interested in what you want them to be inter¬ested in. Maybe they really are more interested in Paris Hilton than the deficit, even if you don't like it. You are giving up that control…. the real cultural challenge is just the idea that the customer knows best, that the customer knows anything…yes, we can't just chase page views at any cost. But the newsroom has to give up the idea that they can just do whatever interests them. So if readers want a weekly column about what is going on the White House, give that to them, even if that's not what you feel like doing. This makes me very concerned…the Web allows you to have an iterative process and change very quickly, and that's what the Web competition is do¬ing, but journalists just don't want to do that (personal communication, July 2010).

The *Monitor* did, however, maintain a spirit of experimentation and evolution, even if the process wasn't as quick as it may be in Silicon Valley. For example, the Green Blog, an environmental blog written by Eoin O'Carroll, a member of the Web staff, was canceled in March 2010. Yemma explained in an e-mail to the *Columbia Jour-*

nalism Review:

> … in a world in which editors manage ever-more constrained resources, no decision is ever made for just one reason. We felt confident about moving in the direction I've outlined and we also wanted Eoin, our blogger, to contribute in other ways. He is one of our most valuable Web specialists and has played a key role, for instance, in the implementation of our new content management system. That was a high priority with us.
>
> The Bright Green blog has been updated much less frequently because of Eoin's other duties. It seemed logical, then, to discontinue it, since best practice with blogs is frequent updating (Brainard, 2010).

Shortly after the July visit, Orr left the paper to take a job with the Los Angeles Times, and Dave Scott, an award-winning international editor, took over as online editor. In a memo introducing the change, Yemma noted of Scott:

> He lived *Monitor* values in the field and supports them in the newsroom. He understands what makes *Monitor* journalism unique. And he knows that the entire news industry is in an unprecedented period of transition that requires new survival skills, creativity, flexibility, experimentation, and collaboration. That requires a continued emphasis on increasing our traffic along with a new emphasis on deepening reader engagement (memo, July 2010).

Several staffers also confirmed their trust in Scott. One said, "he has a ton of credibility in the newsroom," (personal communication, July 2010). However, some executives on the business side were a little concerned about Orr's departure, noting that Orr "gets it" in the way many others don't, especially the need to balance the drive

for page views with engagement and an overall understanding of metrics and how to achieve them.

Indeed, Orr was willing to confront and challenge traditional assumptions. One editor noted Orr "broke a lot of eggs, which you had to clean up" but in doing so, he took the newsroom forward. "He had this great energy, was always pushing boundaries. A lot of what he did got people worked up, especially longtime reporters and editors, but we needed that to some extent" (personal communication, July 2010).

Orr himself saw his role as fighting an uphill battle to get journalists to understand that it is not about what they like, it's about what the readers like. However, he noted that the *Monitor*'s relatively small size and bureaucracy, in proportion to its journalistic heft, in many ways made it easier to push change forward.

January 2011: Confirmation

Almost two years into the change, SEO and a Web-first philosophy had become part of the newsroom routine. "Riding the Google wave" had become a common phrase, as staffers had figured out how to write quickly and freshly on topics trending on the Internet. The strategy had reaped page-view gains, and the newsroom had become adept at experimenting with different strategies to increase traffic. Some ideas, such as quickly adding wire stories not produced by *Monitor* staff to chase trending topics, worked but were seen as artificial means of inflating numbers. Though success had bred converts, some reporters and editors had not lost all skepticism.

> …there have been times when I think we send mixed messages. Like we all talk about *Monitor* journalism, but it's like, we'll do anything to get hits. And we'll give up our core values to get them. So I always feel like there's a mixed mes-

> sage going on around here. (personal communication, January 10, 2011)

> Sometimes I feel like the content is shaping itself rather than us shaping the content. (personal communication, January 10, 2011)

> Scott's appointment to online editor reaffirmed a commitment to *Monitor* journalism in the eyes of several interviewees in the newsroom. "I feel like he's been there and done that on the editorial side in terms of having journalism background. … So he's got a lot more respect and credibility when he goes and asks you to do something," one staffer said (personal communication, January 9, 2009).

Though the weekly and Daily News Briefing numbers had remained flat, page views had continued to grow over the year. In November and December, the site experienced monthly page views of 19.4 million, and the *Monitor*'s stories regularly received top ranking on Google searches and Google News.

Scott's appointment to online editor reaffirmed a commitment to *Monitor* journalism in the eyes of several interviewees in the newsroom. "I feel like he's been there and done that on the editorial side in terms of having journalism background. … So he's got a lot more respect and credibility when he goes and asks you to do something," one staffer said (personal communication, January 9, 2009).

As Yemma had mentioned in his memo announcing Scott's appointment, the online editor began focusing on the idea of reader engagement; rather than just concentrating on page views, he began investigating time spent on site as a measure of success. He worked with the Web staff to create new content vehicles called "multipliers" that some felt were more in line with traditional *Monitor* values. Adding new vocabulary to the newsroom lingo indicated a

certain comfort level with the concepts. Such "multipliers" included photo galleries of multiple images on specific topics and links to related *Monitor* content. Reporters also began developing online quizzes, spread over multiple Web pages, on news topics. Several staffers saw such efforts as educational and befitting of the traditional *Monitor* mission. Writers and bloggers regularly produce "lists" related to news trending topics; each item is featured on a separate page.

Many in the newsroom reported feeling more "settled" than before, in part because page views had increased so sharply and people began to believe that the 25 million page-view goal was possible and sustainable over the long term. One editor noted success had eased some anxiety in the newsroom: "I think things have settled down. It's easier to have a conversation because our numbers are up" (personal communication, January 6, 2011).

With the implementation of eZPublish, the creation of Web content had become democratized throughout the newsroom, and the noneditorial Web staff had been reduced to five people, as some former Web people had taken on writing and editing roles. And even staffers whose job descriptions were focused on the weekly had begun produce quizzes and blog posts for the Web, a change from a year earlier.

> …everybody feels this ownership now, and it's been, it's been great for us in terms of traffic and it's been great for us in terms of workload, especially now that we've got this new technology system. And it also gives us space to experiment with new ideas (interview, January 11, 2011).

The first part of every budget meeting remained dedicated to discussing page-view reports. Two content items, the lead story and the "upper left," had been added to the home page on the Web to focus on *Monitor*-specific content throughout the day, and a run-

down of candidates for these slots had become part of the budget-meeting process. These items, combined with multipliers, were meant to transform search traffic into destination visitors, people who come to read *Monitor* news and filter through the site's offerings.

In November 2010, the organization also enabled comments on the site to increase participation. The comments were placed on a separate page from the stories, requiring an additional click; for the most part, the organization had not experienced a rash of negative commentary, as other news sites have experienced (Perez-Pena, 2010). The news librarian served as in-house monitor for the comments; she would respond when a comment had been flagged by a number of users as offensive. The newsroom had also begun affiliation agreements with bloggers outside of the organization to expand its reach.

Other facets of the Web efforts have been modified, however. A daily podcast interview with *Monitor* correspondents and a weekly Webcast with Yemma were discontinued because of low numbers and lack of revenue. A push for increased Twitter and Facebook use by reporters had slowed by the final study week, although a Web staff member now dedicated much time to managing the organization's Facebook page.

The weekly magazine is still held in high regard by those in the newsroom as the place where serious journalism, the long-form journalism that the *Monitor* is known for, is done. The weekly meeting has a slower pace and features little talk of page views and Web performance. At weekly critique meetings, editors flip through the magazine and critique photo selection and writing style. More time is spent focusing on the content; the Web is rarely mentioned. The newsroom is now preparing for a reader survey to find out who is reading the weekly and what kind of content they want out of the magazine; it is applying the same kind of audience feedback from

the Web site to the magazine.

For many in the newsroom, success comes in the form of page views, which holds the keys to the future of the organization. One staffer said:

> It's just digits; it's numbers. That's the sad truth of it, is that a lot of the decisions are now made by numbers, and I get it, but you know, it's not as romantic as you'd like. But you know, we get big numbers, and that's doing our job well. And we've been lucky enough, I think, to get — to keep increasing, to keep pushing that needle further every month (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

Conclusion/Discussion

In many respects, the *Monitor* has embraced the emergent strategy of innovative organizations to remain competitive (Christensen & Raynor, 2003). It is regularly experimenting with new techniques to increase Web traffic, and is constantly refining metrics, albeit perhaps at a somewhat slower pace than organizations like the Huffington Post that never had a legacy product to weigh down its mentality, as a person from the business side of the organization noted (personal communication, July 2010). It is willing to dispense with multimedia offerings that fail to garner page views. Such an iterative environment has led to success in page views, although the ad revenue promised by such successes has, importantly, not followed yet.

Since March 2009, the innovation of Web-first journalism has spread throughout the newsroom. It was introduced as a top-down initiative, with page-view demands and staff cutbacks. As page views rose, success validated and embedded new routines, turning implementation into confirmation (Rogers, 2003; Schein, 2010).

In answering RQ1, the *Monitor*'s culture is rooted in its history, mission, and connection to the First Church of Christ, Scientist. Though the organization emphasizes it is not a religious publication, its multimillion-dollar subsidy from the church and number of employees who are church members inextricably tie the church and its values to the organization. The original mission, "To injure no man, but to bless all mankind," remains a guiding principle.

Staffers are especially proud of the paper's long-time commitment to serious news, exemplified by the seven Pulitzers it was won. But the reality of more frequent updates has resulted in less original reporting and fewer *Monitor*-originated interviews that some staffers believe are compromising the core values and thus tarnishing the brand. One editor summed up the struggle of frequent updating, still apparent almost two years in:

> So I have to do it six, seven times [a day], you know — to think of stories that bring what I would consider our *Monitor* values to a topic that is not where we normally would have been, and we're doing it because the public is interested in this topic. So, what do we have to say about it that's interesting, or clearer, or sheds some new perspective on what's going on here? And it's hard. You know, we weren't accustomed to having to be that instantaneously re¬sponsive, and we don't have the luxury of saying, "Well, you know that story is really not for us." And when we've got page-view targets that we're all assessed to hit every month, you've gotta come up with something on what people want to read about. And it's just a lot of work (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

However, many staffers also recognize that the Web does not mean forsaking these values and can in fact enhance them; in some ways, the *Monitor* staff sees itself as leading the way online by showing how it can add the kind of well-verified context and nu-

ance to stories other outlets can't or won't. By the end of the study period, several staffers felt more frequent stories did not necessarily mean less depth; sometimes one longer story may now be a series of three shorter posts instead, as the reporter gradually learns more about the issue. In addition, the weekly offers regular real estate and institutional support for in-depth, investigative pieces and provided an outlet for traditional *Monitor* journalism to sustain job satisfaction.

In answering RQ2 and RQ3, the newsroom has focused its success on page-view goals and the new metric of reader engagement, as measured by time spent on site. To meet these goals, staffers have developed new routines to "ride the Google wave" and pursue trending topics. In the past, the news organization wrote stories based primarily on reporter and editor choice, much as traditional organizations had done to fill time and space requirements (Gans, 2004; Tuchman, 1978). But the *Monitor* began filing shorter items and posts, with fewer sources, more frequently. Often, four or five posts on a hot topic could appear within a day's time to keep the readers coming back for more. Most of the 75-person newsroom remained focused on producing content for the Web.

With such a focus, most of the newsroom had to shift from a mono-chronic, singular deadline focus to a polychronic environment with multiple deadlines, a move that can often create some anxiety (Schein, 2010). Several scholars have connected how time and space constraints affect the routinization of newswork (e.g. Tuch-man, 1978; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In this instance, the elimi-nation of the daily newspaper freed the organization from the con-straints of the print product, something that has hindered change efforts at other newspapers as they moved to the Web (Brown, 2008; Groves, 2009). Here, falling back on traditional routines was not possible because the Web site became the primary platform. New routines had to be created, and with success in the form of page views, these new routines became embedded, although some

resistance remained.

These Web-first innovations were introduced by Orr as the primary change agent. He proved the success of blogging and frequent updating with his The Vote blog, and his team incorporated SEO strategies to garner more page views for stories. They served as the proving ground, providing observability in the Rogers paradigm. Soon, opinion leaders in other parts of the newsroom began implementing those ideas, especially with the new eZPublish content-management system in place reducing complexity and allowing for trialability. With experimentation proliferating throughout the newsroom, staffers began to see the advantages and compatibility with their goals. With all of these facets in place, the innovation decision took hold throughout the social system.

One tangible result of the changing routines is the effect on content. Some *Monitor* staffers voiced concerns that quantity was winning out over quality in the quest for page views and unique visitors. During the study periods, the *Monitor* tackled stories such as Tiger Woods' infidelities, sinkholes and ski-chairlift accidents in Maine — topics that several staffers said would not have been covered in the past. But many agreed such changes are necessary for survival, and many felt that the Web was making the *Monitor* more relevant and, by increasing the number of people likely to read its content, more influential and capable of having nationwide impact.

Much of the acceptance of the change comes through rationalizing the effect of their work. Although the work comes in shorter blog posts and shorter pieces, many of the reporters and editors have come to accept the "rolling story" idea, that the story evolves over a series of posts, rather than as a single story with three or four sources.

> …now, I may have 90 minutes to get a blog up, and I'm
> happy to get one source to call me. You know? Now, I could

wait for more sources, but if I do, I miss the trend. And I gotta make the trend. So, you, you get faster; but you also sacrifice comprehensiveness. Now, you know, every journalist has faced this since time immemo¬rial. I mean, this is nothing new in the sense that we all face dead¬lines, and we all have to, we all have to get out stuff quickly. It's just, it's just a bigger leap for us, because before … the deadline was so paper-driven that we had time to kinda think about stuff. And we don't now (personal communication, January 10, 2011).

Rogers' framework (2003) is useful when considering RQ4. The enduring values of journalism outlined by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) — especially the importance of verification and the pursuit of truth — fit well within the *Monitor*'s original founding mission. But the focus on survival and the quest for page views initially subverted those values in the eyes of many in the newsroom. Yemma and Orr became prime change agents to introduce the innovation of Web-first journalism to a resistant newsroom that worried about the impact of quantity over quality. Several worried that pursuing a strategy focused on page views would ultimately endanger the journalism that had won Pulitzer Prizes in the past.

However, the newsroom faced a crisis point (Kets de Vries, 2001; Schein, 2010): The church's subsidy would be cut within five years, and the organization had to be able to sustain itself. Over the years, the print paper's circulation had gradually eroded, and the mail delivery of the paper took the *Monitor* out of the national consciousness. Despite Pulitzer prizes and respect from academics and fellow journalists, the publication did not reach the vast majority of Americans; business-side executives said one of their primary challenges in securing advertisements and subscribers was educating people unfamiliar with the *Monitor* that it is not a religious publication. This stressor forced changes despite resistance. Several interviewees expressed a sense of anxiety and helplessness during December 2009 study weeks. They did not like the idea of aban-

doning the values, but they had no alternate solutions to secure survival.

With Yemma and Orr leading the way, some key opinion leaders embraced Web-first and tried to bring *Monitor* journalism to the Web. By hitting page-view goals each month, staffers began to believe that they could succeed and become relevant in a new age. With the Web, the organization began to tap into a wider audience, and with the number came a sense among many in the newsroom that *Monitor* journalism could take a new form. There came an acceptance of this new shorter, less-deep journalism because the organization — with millions of page views and unique visitors — became more relevant. When people searched for news topics on Google, the *Monitor* was now among *The New York Times*, CNN and other national news organization on the first page of results.

This new sense of confidence was bolstered by the appointment of Scott, an editor more in the mold of the traditional *Monitor* journalist, with deep ties to the organization's journalistic commitment. The new normal of the newsroom then became finding a way to reconcile the new routines with the traditional mission established by Eddy in 1908. By moving a longtime international editor to the online spot, the news organization re-emphasized its commitment to tradition while looking ahead.

Despite the new online editor's roots in the organization, a culture of innovation had taken hold at the organization, and he remained committed to finding new ways to expand page views — within the bounds set by the traditional mission. As a result, new forms to deepen engagement arose, such as the "multipliers" (quizzes, photo galleries, and related links), and new experimental efforts continued to evolve. Unmoderated comments were added, and the newsroom struck up affiliation agreements with select guest bloggers to expand content and traffic.

The news organization was also willing to abandon new-media efforts that did not reap expected traffic, a key quality for sustainable innovation (Christensen, Anthony & Roth, 2004). The *Monitor* quit dedicating time and resources to a daily podcast because of lack of traffic and sponsorship, and a weekly Webcast that featured Yemma was stopped after a few months. But those strategies that succeeded, such as SEO techniques, blog affiliation agreements, and frequent updating, became embedded in the culture.

References

Argyris, C. (2004). *Reasons and rationalizations: The limits to organizational knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Babcock, W. (2009, April 9) A sad legacy: Director let daily print Christian Science *Monitor* fold. MinnPost. Retrieved from http://www.minnpost.com/community_voices/2009/04/09/7926/a_sad_legacy_directors_let_daily_print_christian_science_monitor_fold

Brainard, C. (2010, March 9) Monitor-ing the environment: The CSM cancels green blog in favor of a broader approach. *Columbia Journalism Review* Observatory blog. Retrieved from http://www.cjr.org/the_observatory/monitoring_the_environment.php

Brown, C. (2008). *New media and enduring values: Managing change at a daily newspaper in the digital age*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Missouri

Brown, C. and Groves, J. (2010). New media, enduring values: How three news organizations managed change in an era of uncertainty. *Electronic News* (4): 3.

Canham, E. (1958). *Commitment to freedom: The story of the Christian Science Monitor*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Christian Science Monitor (1997). *Christian Science Monitor style-book*. In-house binder.

Christian Science Monitor (2011). About the Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved from http://www.csmonitor.com/About/The-Monitor-difference

Christensen, C.M., Anthony, S.D., and Roth, E.A. (2004). *Seeing what's next: Using the theories of innovation to predict industry change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Christensen, C.M. & Raynor, M.E. (2003). *The innovator's solution: Creating and sustaining successful growth*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Clifford, S. (2008). Christian Science paper to end daily print edition. *New York Times*.

Cook, D. (2008, June 9). John Yemma named Monitor editor. Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved from http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/2008/0609/p25s08-usgn.html

Daniels, G.L., & Hollifield.C.A. (2002). Time of turmoil: Short- and long-term effects of organizational change on newsroom employees, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79: 661-680.

Dyer, W.G. & Wilkins, A.L. (1991). Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: A rejoinder to Eisenhardt. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(3): 613-619.

Fishman, M. (1980). *Manufacturing the news*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Gade, P. (2004). Newspapers and organizational development: Management and journalist perceptions of newsroom cultural change. *Journalism Monographs*, 6 (1), 3-55.

Gade, P., & Perry E. (2003). Changing the newsroom culture: A four-year case study of organizational development at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 80(2). 327-347.

Gans, H.J. (2004). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time* (25th anniversary edition). Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.

Groves, J. (2009). *"Understanding the change to integration: An organizational analysis of a small newspaper."* Doctoral Dissertation, University of Missouri

Harrison, M. I. (2005). *Diagnosing organizations: Methods, models and processes*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jankowski, N.W. & Wester, F. (1991). *The qualitative tradition in social science inquiry: Contributions to mass communication research*. In K.B. Jensen & N.W. Jankowski (Eds.), *A handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research*, (44-74). London and New York: Routledge.

Kets de Vries, M. (2001). *The leadership mystique*. London: Prentice Hall Financial Times.

Kovach, B., and Rosenstiel, T. (2007). *The elements of journalism*. New York: Three Rivers.

Missouri Group, The (2010). *Telling the story*, fourth edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Mitchell, B. (2009, Aug. 5). Circulation, page views up at Christian Science Monitor, but solvency not yet in sight. Poynter.org. Retrieved from http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/business-news/newspay/97632/circulation-page-views-up-at-christian-science-monitor-but-solvency-not-yet-in-sight/

Perez-Pena, R. (2010, April 12). News sites rethink anonymous online comments. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/12/technology/12comments.html

Project for Excellence in Journalism (2011). State of the News Media 2011. Retrieved from http://stateofthemedia.org/

Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010). State of the News Media 2010. Retrieved from http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.org/2010/

Rogers, E. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations*, 5th edition. New York: Free Press.

Schein, E.H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership*, 4th edition. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism. *Journalism*, 2(2), 149-170.

------ (2003). *The sociology of news*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Shoemaker, P., and Reese, S. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influence on mass media content, second edition*. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers USA.

Singer, J. B. (2004). Strange bedfellows? The diffusion of convergence in four news organizations. *Journalism Studies* 5(1) 3-18.

Stamm, K. & Underwood, D. (1993). The relationship of job satisfaction to newsroom policy changes. *Journalism Quarterly* 70(3), 528-541.

Sylvie, G. & Witherspoon, P.D. (2002). *Time,change and the American newspaper*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking journalism seriously: News and the academy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jonathan Groves is an assistant professor of communication at Drury University in Springfield, Mo., and is founder of the Ozarks Community Journalism Foundation. He spent 14 years as a reporter and editor at newspapers in Arkansas and Missouri before earning his Ph.D in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2009. He has presented several studies at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and has served as a consultant for media organizations including the Springfield (Mo.) News-Leader and the Baxter Bulletin (Mountain Home, Ark.). In addition to his management experience as an assistant managing editor, he holds a master of business administration from Missouri State University and a graduate certificate in organizational change from the University of Missouri. He helped develop Drury's social-media certificate program, one of the first in the nation.

jgroves@drury.edu

Carrie Brown-Smith is an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Memphis and the director of the Teen Appeal, a citywide high school newspaper program. She worked as a daily newspaper reporter and editor and as the traveling curriculum program manager for the Committee of Concerned Journalists before receiving her Ph.D in journalism at the University of Missouri in 2008. Her research focuses on organizational change in newsrooms, preserving core values while adapting to new media in journalism, and social media, and she has developed a new social

media curriculum for the journalism school. She has published research in the Electronic News journal and has been invited to present her work at meetings of the Kiplinger Fellows at Ohio State University, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, College Media Advisers, the 6th Annual Curtis B. Hurley Symposium, and other venues. She has a Master's degree in communication from the Annenberg School at Penn and an undergraduate degree in journalism and conservation biology from the University of Wisconsin.

carrielisabrown@gmail.com

The Active Recipient:
Participatory Journalism through the Lens of the Dewey-Lippmann Debate

Alfred Hermida, University of British Columbia, Canada
David Domingo, Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain
Ari Heinonen, University of Tampere, Finland
Steve Paulussen, Ghent University, Belgium
Thorsten Quandt, University of Hohenheim, Germany
Zvi Reich, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel
Jane B. Singer, University of Iowa, USA
Marina Vujnovic, Monmouth University, USA

Professional news outlets are providing numerous opportunities for the public to contribute. This study draws on the perspectives of Walter Lippmann and John Dewey to examine how journalists view participatory journalism. Based on interviews with journalists from two dozen newspaper websites, as well as a consideration of those sites, we suggest that news professionals view the user as an active recipient of the news. As active recipients, users are framed as idea generators and observers of newsworthy events at the start of the journalistic process, and then in an interpretive role as commentators who reflect upon professionally produced material.

"Vision is a spectator, hearing is a participator," (Dewey, 1927, p. 219)

Calls for the public to participate in some shape or form in journalism have become almost standard on news websites. Visitors to news sites are consistently urged to send in a photo, comment on a story or share a link on a social network. In the journalism of the 21st century, news organizations are providing more opportunities than ever before for the public to contribute to professionally edited

publications. Online news sites routinely provide tools to enable the news consumer to do something that goes beyond just reading the news (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman & Hermida, 2010).

This study draws on the perspectives of writer Walter Lippmann and philosopher John Dewey on the role of the media in democratic societies to frame how professional journalists view participatory journalism. It explores whether the Internet's participatory potential is bringing about a shift in established modes of journalism and opening up the media to new voices, leading to what might be considered a more democratic and representative media space.

One of the motivations behind the adoption of participatory mechanisms by established media, and newspapers in particular, has been "to connect more effectively with changing usage patterns and the 'real' needs and preferences of their public" (Paulussen et al, 2008, p. 132). We hope to locate participatory journalism within the ongoing discussion begun in the 1920s by Lippmann and Dewey about the nature of democracy, the media and the ability of citizens to debate and decide on complex issues.

The Lippmann-Dewey Debate

The Lippmann-Dewey philosophical discussion on democracy and the media is often characterized as a binary debate. Alterman (2008) depicts it as "one of the most instructive and heated intellectual debates of the American twentieth century" (2008, p. 52), describing Walter Lippmann as "the archetypal insider pundit" and John Dewey as "the prophet of democratic education" (2008, p. 53). The interchange between the two men continues to be relevant to the role of the media because of what Bybee calls the "interconnections of citizenship, media, and democracy" (1999, p. 30). He argues that the actions and decisions of citizens are linked to "the politics of how we know" (1999, p. 30). In other words, how journalists decide and report on the news.

Journalists in modern Western societies see themselves as central
to the proper functioning of democracy. News practitioners see it as
their responsibility to ensure that citizens have the credible informa-
tion necessary to govern themselves wisely (Gans, 2003; Kovach
and Rosenstiel, 2006). Both Lippmann and Dewey shared a com-
mon belief in the crucial role of the press in a vibrant democracy.
But Lippmann (1965) thought that modern society had become too
complex for the public to understand and be able to make informed
decisions. He envisioned a role for the press as the bridge between
the uninformed masses and powerful insiders who help formulate
the policies of elected decision-makers. The function of the jour-
nalist, then, is to "evaluate the policies of government and present
well-informed conclusions about these key debates to the public"
(Champlin & Knoedler, 2006, p. 121).

While Dewey agreed with much of Lippmann's critique of the fu-
ture of democracy, he diverges on his view of the public and role
of the press. Dewey viewed journalists as the teachers of the pub-
lic; Lippmann saw them as leaders of the citizenry (Champlin &
Knoedler, 2006). Dewey (1976) saw the public as capable of ratio-
nal thought and decision-making, with the active participation of citi-
zens as essential for a healthy democracy. In this context, the job of
the journalist is to engage and educate the public in the key policy
issues of the day, enabling them to participate in the democratic
discourse. "The essential need," wrote Dewey, " is the improvement
of the methods and conditions" (1927, p. 208).

According to Schudson (2008), Lippmann's view of journalism is
the dominant kind today due to the professionalization of journal-
ism during the 20th century. Newspapers became finished products
with virtually all their editorial content authored by individuals —
professional journalists (Stephens, 2008). Lippmann (1965) used
a visual metaphor for democratic communication that just as easily
applies to journalism. Whipple argues that "by emphasizing vision,
the democratic process for Lippmann becomes something in which

citizens do not actively participate, but passively watch — they become spectators rather than participants" (2005, p. 160). Journalism largely developed as a spectator activity, with an elite group in control of the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p. 233).

Dewey, however, adopted a different metaphor — the ear, rather than the eye. For him the difference between being a spectator and a participant was the difference between watching and hearing. In contrast to Lippmann, Dewey emphasized conversation as the ideal form of human communication through which individuals construct the truth (Schudson, 2008). If citizens are "naturally active participants, not passive spectators" (Whipple, 2005, p. 161), then the ability of news consumers to take part in the production of their news and information environment offers a way to test Deweyan assumptions of participation.

Lippmann, Dewey and Participatory Journalism

While Lippmann viewed journalism as a hierarchical system of providers and consumers, Dewey viewed journalism as a much more collaborative system for conversation, debate, and dialogue. The two perspectives provide a framework to understand how news professionals view participatory journalism – whether journalists see themselves as an elite group who should evaluate and present analysis to a spectator public or whether journalists believe they should provide ways for citizens to interact and participate in the news (Champlin & Knoedler, 2006).

Proponents of participatory models of journalism (Gillmor, 2004) argue that the democratic role of journalism in a changing society needs to be redefined. These critiques address the top-down approach of the professional journalistic gatekeeper and reimagine journalism as a conversation with citizens that encourages them

to take an active role in news processes. Alterman goes as far as describing new media platforms such as blogs as representing "a revival of the Deweyan challenge to our Lippmann-like understanding of what constitutes 'news' and, in doing so, might seem to revive the philosopher's notion of a genuinely democratic discourse" (2008, p. 55).

Definitions of participatory journalism tend to be based on a normative assumption of the behavior of citizens, drawing from Dewey's view of the public as doing more than simply reading the news. Terms such as participatory journalism, citizen journalism and user-generated content are often used to describe what Bowman and Willis define as "the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information." They add a public interest element to the definition, positing that the "intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires" (2003, np).

The underlying assumption behind the notion of participatory journalism is a shift from passive consumption to active engagement, embracing a "Deweyan participatory approach to the information environment" (Whipple, 2005, p. 175). Indeed, a Deweyan ethos underlies much of the rhetoric on participatory journalism. Jenkins has evoked the emergence of a participatory media culture that "contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship" (2006, p. 3), while Gillmor (2004, p. 136) has labelled the public as the "former audience" to stress that citizens should not be considered as a passive group of consumers. Allan argues that the way news organizations are trying to refashion their relationship with the public suggests that "where Lippmann's ideas once seemed to hold sway … now it is Dewey's conception of participatory initiatives rooted in everyday (virtual) communities of interaction that chimes with the ethos of citizen-led media" (2010, p. 70).

For this article, we wanted to understand how journalists think about the role of the audience in a participatory media culture that challenges long-established journalistic norms and practices. We draw on the perspectives of Lippmann and Dewey on the role of the media and its relationship to the public to frame how professional journalists view participatory journalism.

There are a number of terms used to describe the ability of citizens to contribute in a myriad of ways to professionally edited publications, such as user-generated content or citizen journalism. We have chosen the term participatory journalism (Domingo et al., 2008; Deuze, 2006; Bowman & Willis, 2003) to encompass the processes through which journalists and audiences are taking part in the gathering, selecting, publishing, disseminating and interpretation of the news featured within an institutional product such as the newspaper website.

Research in this area indicates that, so far, journalists have been reluctant to open up most of the news production process to citizens (Domingo et al, 2008; Hermida and Thurman, 2008). The notion that participatory journalism could give the public significant influence over the news process is widely inconceivable in the profession (Thurman & Hermida, 2010).

Methodology

Our study is based on semi-structured interviews with more than 60 news professionals drawn from about two dozen leading national newspapers, together with a consideration of the newspaper websites themselves (see Appendix A for a list of newspapers). The interviews were based on a common list of questions and conducted in 2007 and 2008 by a team of researchers.

A textual analysis of the transcriptions of the recorded interviews was conducted to identify themes and key ideas related to a set of

core issues of interest to the researchers. These included journalis-
tic rationales for opening up their websites to user input, the role of
users as perceived by our interviewees and overall journalistic self-
perceptions and ideologies. While participatory tools have evolved
since the fieldwork was conducted, it remains important to under-
stand how journalists view and frame the audience

We selected newspapers in 10 Western democracies - Belgium,
Canada, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Spain, the
United Kingdom, and the United States – because of the contribu-
tion of journalism to the democratic need for an informed citizenry
(Gans, 2003; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2006). Our focus is particu-
larly relevant to this paper that considers the intersection between
discourse and democracy (Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1989), and
what Gillmor (2004) describes as the shift of journalism from a lec-
ture to a conversation.

Findings

Our study found that all the newspaper websites were providing
areas for readers to participate in the news. All sites offered similar
generic types of participatory journalism formats, comparable to the
technical processes identified by other researchers (Hermida and
Thurman, 2008). However, the generic participatory formats mask
the diverse attitudes of journalists working with this material as well
as the uneven ways in which those journalists are implementing
and managing participation options. We wanted to investigate to
what extent audiences had the ability to contribute and influence
the making of the news.

We categorized the participatory formats into the five stages of
news production: access and observation, selection and filtering,
processing and editing, distribution, and interpretation. Our ap-
proach breaks down the common components of the communica-
tion process, building on earlier work (Domingo et al., 2008). Tra-

ditionally, journalists have maintained jurisdiction over the first four stages, with audiences involved at the interpretation stage, essentially reacting to professionally produced closed news products. By breaking down participation formats, we were able to systematically analyze opportunities to contribute to the news process (see Table 1).

Access and Observation

The primary way users were able to contribute at the access and observation stage of news production was through submitting text or audio-visual material. Newspapers adopted a range of tactics, either directly soliciting material on a specific issue or story, or providing generic email addresses to submit content. But it was left up to the professional journalist to decide if a story tip, photo or video was of interest and merited further attention. As one Croatian editor explained: "We publish everything that we believe is newsworthy."

By and large, we found that journalists were extending established newsgathering practices to the web, seeing the user as a source of material that journalists were unable to provide themselves. The journalists we interviewed placed greater value on soliciting audience contributions on specific stories or issues, rather than on unsolicited story ideas. "What's interesting for journalists is to have contributions that really relate to news, of the witness type," said one editor. This was a common sentiment amongst our interviewees, even at newspapers such as the *Washington Post* that offered few participation options. One of the editors acknowledged the value of having "a thousand people" telling the newspaper what is going on at a local level rather than solely relying on newsroom staff. Editors at the Belgian newspaper, Nieuwsblad.be also appreciated the significance of user submissions for local news. The newspaper offered a separate email address for each local news page on the website. "More than half the input we receive through these local email addresses is useful," said the newspaper's online editor.

Table 1
Stages of News Production

Stage	Participatory formats
Access and observation: The initial information-gathering stage at which source material for a story is generated, such as eyewitness accounts and audio-visual contributions.	Citizen media: Photographs, video and other media submitted by users, usually vetted by journalists.
Selection and filtering: The "gatekeeping" stage when decisions are made about what should be reported or published.	None
Processing and editing: The stage at which a story is created, including the writing and editing of an item for publication.	Citizen blogs: Blogs created by users hosted on the news organization's website. Citizen stories: Written submissions from readers on topical issues, including suggestions for news stories, selected and edited by journalists for publication on the website.
Distribution: The stage at which a story is disseminated or made available for reading and, potentially, discussion.	Content hierarchy: News stories ranked according to audience ratings, often based on the most read or emailed content. Social networking: Distribution of links to stories through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.
Interpretation: The stage at which a story that has been produced and published is opened up to comment and discussion	Collective interviews: Chats with journalists or invited guests, with questions submitted by readers and typically moderated by a news professional. These are usually webcast in audio or video, or transcribed live, offering a sense of interactivity and immediacy. Comments: Views on a story or other online item, which users typically submit by filling in a form on the bottom of the item. Forums: Discussions led by journalists or initiated by readers. Questions can be posed by the newsroom and submissions either fully or reactively moderated, or by readers. Journalist blogs: Authored by one or more journalists, with short articles in reverse chronological order. Journalist blogs (also called "j-blogs") often are associated with a specific topic or perspective, with the facility for readers to comment on entries. Polls: Topical questions posed by journalists, with users asked to make a multiple choice or binary response. These polls provide instant and quantifiable feedback to users.

Table developed from Domingo et al., 2008.

Submissions from the audience were also highly prized during breaking news events. At the Canadian newspaper, the *National*

Post, editors highlighted how the newsroom turned to its readers to help it report on a huge propane gas explosion that happened overnight in Toronto. "During breaking news, inviting your readers to chime in and add their observations is useful," said an online editor at the paper. "As journalists and editors, we can find that pretty handy to have." Another editor at the same paper said it didn't want "somebody's gut reaction, but somebody's testimony."

Journalists from other newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* in France and the *Guardian* in the UK expressed similar views. An editor at *Le Monde* recalled how on a recent news story, "our call for witness reports worked very well and we then established a synthesized version of events based on these reports." Users are clearly seen as sources on news stories or topics selected by journalists. An editor at the other Canadian newspaper in our study, the *Globe and Mail*, summed up this approach:

> "If a reporter is working on a story and he or she wants to get public input, we've often put a question on the website and said that if you have information or a story on this topic, please contact the reporter."

During this initial stage of news production, users were mainly framed as idea generators and observers of newsworthy events. Most of the newspapers we studied provided little room for users to decide the news, leaving the agenda-setting capability in the hands of the professionals. There were exceptions, such as the user-dominated spaces of LePost.fr in France, which was part of the *Le Monde* newspaper group, and the online edition of the Spanish free daily, *20 Minutos*. Both of these were relatively new journalistic products so may be more open to the idea of users as co-collaborators than some of the more well established newspapers in our study.

Selection and Filtering

The reluctance of editors to give users agency over the news was reflected at the selection and filtering stage of the journalistic process. None of the newspapers offered any meaningful opportunities to influence what makes the news. The few spaces where users exercised some agency over selection and filtering of news were in spaces delineated from the main website of a parent organization. The best example was LePost.fr, a spinoff website of French newspaper *Le Monde*, based almost entirely on user contributions. On the website, users are encouraged to filter news from other sources and "give them an angle", according to the editor-in-chief.

Processing and Editing

The newspapers in our study offered some opportunities for users to write the news but within clearly prescribed formats. One of the main mechanisms we identified was written submissions from readers on topical issues. These citizen stories were selected and edited by journalists for publication on the website. The space for users to contribute stories was subject to newsroom editorial controls. For example, at the Spanish newspaper *El País*, story submissions were filtered and fact-checked by journalists, before being published in a separate section of the website. Similarly, the *Het Nieuwsblad* in Belgium published citizen stories on its local pages online, though an editor explained "all user-generated news needs to be double-checked."

Journalists were more relaxed about sharing the production of soft news areas, but still exercised a degree of editorial supervision. *The Guardian* in the UK enabled readers to submit travel stories to the Been There section of its news website. Journalists then select some of the submissions to appear in the newspaper: "It goes onto the website and then in edited fashion in the paper," explained an editor. In Germany, users could post what it called "contemporary

eyewitness accounts" to a micro-site about 20th century history called Einestages, though these contributions were labelled as amateur content.

The desire to separate user material from professionally produced content was most obvious in the implementation of citizen blogs. At the time of our study, a handful of newspapers in Croatia, France, Spain, the UK and the USA provided a hosted space for users to create and publish their own content. These spaces for unfiltered and unedited material were kept separate from the content produced by professional journalists.

Opinions on the provision of citizen blogs were far from unanimous. Some editors saw value in providing users with a piece of real estate on their site as a place "to meet like-minded people to talk about things that they were interested in," as an executive at the UK *Telegraph* newspaper put it. But others were more sceptical, arguing that users could easily set up their own blog, or that it was simply not the purpose of the newspaper: "It is out of the question for us to broadly install a user blog and to offer all users the option to inscribe their name for eternity," said an editor at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper in Germany.

Distribution

At this stage of the production process, editors expressed concerns about balancing the perceived need to maintain control over the hierarchy and distribution of news, while at the same time allowing users greater agency. Most newspaper websites created user-driven story rankings based on the most-read or most-emailed stories. But the hierarchy of stories on a homepage was firmly in the hands of editors. "It is still important to provide a package of news chosen by the professional newsroom, a package that says 'this is what happened today. Here is, according to Nieuwsblad.be, the most important news of today'," said the online editor at the Belgian news-

paper.

The editors interviewed were also grappling with the growth of
social networks as mechanisms for the distribution of stories. "You
don't expect people to come to your content; you want to send it out
to people. And so everybody is scrambling to figure out, how do you
do that?" said the online managing editor for Canada's the *Globe
and Mail*.

Most newspapers provided ways for users to share stories by
email, social bookmarking or via links on Facebook and Twitter.
But there were mixed views on how far to allow users to personal-
ize their news experience. The French newspaper, *Le Figaro*, saw
allowing personalization as a way of increasing reader loyalty. "If a
user wishes to have a personalized page to view news, he'll have
to come back to *Figaro*," said an editor. The Israeli newspaper,
Ynet, went further by developing its own social network for readers.
For others, this was a step too far. "It's not a social networking site,"
said the online executive editor of Canada's the *Globe and Mail*
website. But even he, like other editors, acknowledged the impetus
to offer "social networking functionalities along with its journalism."

Interpretation

Our study found that editors were most comfortable with opening
up this final stage of the journalistic process, where users were
encouraged to give their views on the news of the day. Newspaper
websites offered a wide range of mechanisms for users to express
themselves, from simple polls on topical issues to collective chats
to comments on stories.

The most common mechanism for interpretation was comments
on stories. Despite widespread adoption among newspapers, our
interviewees expressed mixed feelings about the worth of some of
the material posted. For example, a *Guardian* editor described us-

ers who comment as "a group of obsessives", adding, "most people don't want to comment. And actually, most people don't want to read other people's comments." His views were echoed by a *Globe and Mail* editor, who described most comments as "not terribly well-thought through or just vitriolic."

The most favourable views tended to come from journalists who saw comments as a space for public discourse. A *Guardian* editor said comments were part of its strategy to "make lots of voices, including ones we don't agree with, heard." We found that a number of our interviewees saw comments and other spaces for interpretation as an extension of the traditional role of the newspaper in sparking a national conversation. An editor at *Le Monde* talked about how "debate in the wake of news, that's still doing fundamental activities of journalists' work." A community editor at the *Telegraph* explained, "we've been trying to stimulate debate, we've been trying to get people to have conversations around the breakfast table, and in the pub and in the office, and now we can take part." An editor at the *Guardian* acknowledged that people have always had conversations around the news. For him, participatory spaces provided a way for the newspaper's commentators to be at the heart of "political, cultural, discourse."

Some of our interviewees tended to talk of these spaces for interpretation as ways of accomplishing deliberative ideals. An editor at Germany's Der Speigel described its online forum, with 100,000 members, as "one of the biggest debate platforms in the German-speaking region, at least regarding political, economic and social issues." Another German editor, at the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, spoke of the potential to create a platform that is "an expression of democracy, and in my view is bringing forward society."

Similarly, an editor at the *Washington Post* spoke of the benefits of its online discussion groups to "provide valuable information to users that we wouldn't be able to [provide] just because of resources."

Editors at the paper also spoke highly of the moderated chats it hosts, describing them as "very valuable." In Canada the *Globe and Mail* also viewed their chats positively. The newspaper's online executive editor said they "cater to informing the public in depth about important issues, from the perspective of an intelligent national debate."

Discussion

We approached this examination of how journalists conceived and implemented participatory journalism to explore whether they fell into the Lippmann or Dewey camp. We found that while audience participation has become an integral part of professionally edited online publications, it is misleading to suggest that journalists are embracing opportunities to share jurisdiction over the news. Participatory journalism has been lauded for its ability to transform citizens from perceived passive recipients of news content to active participants in the creation of it. Yet there are few indications that participatory journalism is democratizing the journalistic process itself. Journalists still see themselves as an elite group which mediates the flow of information to the public. Despite a myriad of ways for audiences to take part in the news, we found that journalists retained primary control over the stages of identifying, gathering, filtering, producing and distributing news.

The most opportunities for user participation across the 10 different countries and news cultures we studied were at the interpretation stage. Comments on stories, which allow users to offer their input after an item has been published, were by far the most popular format at the time of our study. The technical tools that facilitate participation, as well as the way those tools are implemented, are constantly evolving and changing, in some cases significantly since our interviews. However, the way professionals frame participatory journalism has remained remarkably consistent (Harrison, 2010; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Thurman and Hermida, 2010), with

journalists sharing a governing occupational ideology (Deuze, 2002; Weaver, 1998).

In the interviews, journalists tended to resist the notion of relinquishing control over the process of making decisions about what is news and how that news should be reported, issues that arise at earlier stages of story production. This attitude can be partly attributed to a desire to preserve the status of professionals in the process of making journalism. "Journalism remains journalism and it's not going to change its fundamentals," said the *Globe and Mail*'s online executive editor, while a *Washington Post* editor argued readers wanted "good old-fashioned journalism." To a large extent, journalists saw themselves as the defining actors in the process of creating news.

However, there are also indications that journalists do not view users as just consumers of professionally produced media. Often, we found conflicting views among the editors we interviewed, who expressed both apprehension and support for involving audiences in the process of journalism. Such ambivalence is understandable at a time when journalists are negotiating their standing in a shared media environment.

Our study suggests that journalists see audiences as what we call "active recipients" of news – somewhere between passive receivers and active creators of content. Users are expected to act when an event happens, by sending in eyewitness reports, photos and video. Once a professional has shepherded the information through the news production stages of filtering, processing and distributing the news, users are expected to react, adding their interpretation of the news. As "active recipients," audiences are framed as idea generators and observers of newsworthy events at the start of the journalistic process, and then in an interpretive role as commentators who reflect upon the material that has been produced.

We suggest that the way participatory journalism has been adopted and implemented falls somewhere between Lippmann's view of the media and a Deweyan approach. Overall, news professionals view audiences as receivers of information created and controlled by the journalist. But at the same time, news organizations are providing greater opportunities for audiences to engage in the public discourse. Indeed, some journalists are intrigued by the possibilities of participatory journalism to enable more voices to be heard, and perhaps even fulfil deliberative ideals in a democratic society.

Note: This paper draws from research conducted for the book, Participatory Journalism in Online Newspapers: Guarding the Internet's Open Gates, published in April 2011 by Wiley-Blackwell.

References

Allan, S. (2010). Journalism and its publics: The Lippmann-Dewey debate. In S. Allan (Ed.), *Routledge companion to news and journalism*, (pp 60-70). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Alterman, E. (2008). Out of print: The death and life of the American newspaper. *The New Yorker*, March 31, 48-60.

Bowman, S. & Willis, C. (2003). We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information. The Media Center. Retrieved January 23, 2010 from, http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/weblog.php

Bybee, C. (1999). Can democracy survive in the post-factual age?: A return to the Lippmann-Dewey debate about the politics of news. *Journalism and Communication Monographs*, 1(1), 29-62.

Champlin, D. P. & Knoedler, J. T. (2006). The media, the news and democracy: Revisiting the Dewey-Lippmann debate. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 40 (1), 135-152.

Deuze, M. (2002). *Journalists in the Netherlands: An analysis of the people, the issues and the (inter-)national environment*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Deuze, M. (2006). Participation, remediation, bricolage: Considering principal components of a digital culture. *The Information Society*, 22,63,75.

Dewey, J. (1976). *The middle works of John Dewey, 1899–1924*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1922)

Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. New York: H. Holt and Company.

Domingo, D., Quandt T., Heinonen, A., Paulussen, S., Singer, J.B., & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Participatory journalism practices in the media and beyond: An international comparative study of initiatives in online newspapers. *Journalism Practice* 2(3), 326-342.

Gans, H. J. (2003) *Democracy and the news*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gillmor, D. (2004). *We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Harrison, J. (2010). User-generated content and gatekeeping at the BBC hub. *Journalism Studies* 11(2), 243-256.

Hermida, A., & Thurman, N. (2008). A clash of cultures: The integration of user-generated content within professional journalistic

frameworks at British newspaper websites. *Journalism Practice*, 2(3), 343-356.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel T. (2007). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. New York: Crown.

Lippmann, W. (1965) *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1922).

Paulussen, S.,, Domingo, D., Heinonen, A., Singer, J.B., Quandt, T., & Vujnovic, M. (2008). Citizen participation in online news media: An overview of current developments in four European countries and the United States. In: T. Quandt, and W. Schweiger (Eds.), *Journalismus online: Partizipation oder profession?* (pp 263-283). Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Schudson, M. (2008). The "Lippmann-Dewey Debate" and the invention of Walter Lippmann as an anti-democrat 1986-1996. *International Journal of Communication*. 2, 1-20.

Stephens, M. (2008). New media, new ideas: Escape from the holy of holies. *Journalism Studies*. 9(4), 595-599.

Shoemaker, P. J., Eichholz, M., Kim, E., & Wrigley, B. (2001). Individual and routine forces in gatekeeping, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. 78(2), 233-246.

Thurman, N. & Hermida, A. (2010). Gotcha: How newsroom norms are shaping participatory journalism online. In G. Monaghan and S. Tunney (Eds.) *Web journalism: A new form of citizenship* (pp. 46-62). Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press.

Whipple, M. (2005). The Dewey-Lippmann debate today: Communication distortions, reflective agency, and participatory democracy. *Sociological Theory*, 23(2), 156–178.

Weaver, D. (1998). *The global journalist: News people around the world*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Appendix follow

Table 1
Stages of news production (Developed from Domingo et al., 2008)

Stage Participatory formats

1) Access/observation: The initial information-gathering stage at which source material for a story is generated, such as eyewitness accounts and audio-visual contributions.

Citizen media: Photographs, video and other media submitted by users, usually vetted by journalists.

2) Selection/filtering: The "gatekeeping" stage when decisions are made about what should be reported or published. None

3) Processing/editing: The stage at which a story is created, including the writing and editing of an item for publication. Citizen blogs: Blogs created by users hosted on the news organization's website.

Citizen stories: Written submissions from readers on topical issues, including suggestions for news stories, selected and edited by journalists for publication on the website.

4) Distribution: The stage at which a story is disseminated or made available for reading and, potentially, discussion. Content hierarchy: News stories ranked according to audience ratings, often based on the most read or emailed content.

Social networking: Distribution of links to stories through social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook.

5) Interpretation: The stage at which a story that has been produced and published is opened up to comment and discussion.   Collective interviews: Chats with journalists or invited guests, with questions submitted by readers and typically moderated by a news professional. These are usually webcast in audio or video, or transcribed live, offering a sense of interactivity and immediacy.

Comments: Views on a story or other online item, which users typically submit by filling in a form on the bottom of the item.

1)Forums: Discussions led by journalists or initiated by readers. Questions can be posed by the newsroom and submissions either fully or reactively moderated, or by readers.

Journalist blogs: Authored by one or more journalists, with short articles in reverse chronological order. Journalist blogs (also called "j-blogs") often are associated with a specific topic or perspective, with the facility for readers to comment on entries.

Polls: Topical questions posed by journalists, with users asked to make a multiple choice or binary response. These polls provide instant and quantifiable feedback to users.

APPENDIX A

Country	Newspaper	Website homepage
Belgium	*Het Belang van Limburg / Gazet van Antwerpen*	hbvl.be /gva.be
	Het Nieuwsblad	nieuwsblad.be
	De Standaard	standaard.be
Canada	*The Globe and Mail*	theglobeandmail.com
	The National Post	nationalpost.com
Croatia	*24 Hours*	24sata.hr
	Vecernji List	vecernji.hr
Finland	*Helsingin Sanomat*	hs.fi
	Kaleva	kaleva.fi
France	*Le Figaro*	lefigaro.fr
	Le Monde	lemonde.fr
	Le Post (affiliated with *Le Monde*)	lepost.fr
Germany	*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*	FAZ.net
	Focus	focus.de
	Der Spiegel	spiegel.de
	Süddeutsche Zeitung	sueddeutsche.de
Israel	*Haaretz*	haaretz.co.il
	NRG	nrg.co.il
	Ynet	ynet.co.il
Spain	*20 Minutos*	20minutos.es
	El País	elpais.com
United Kingdom	*The Guardian* and *The Observer*	guardian.co.uk
	The Daily / Sunday Telegraph	telegraph.co.uk
United States	*USA Today*	USAToday.com
	The Washington Post	washingtonpost.com

Alfred Hermida is an award-winning online news pioneer, digital media scholar and journalism educator. He is an associate professor at the Graduate School of Journalism, University of British Columbia, Canada. His research into digital journalism and social media has been published in Journalism Practice and M/C Journal. Hermida was a BBC journalist for 16 years, helping to found the BBC News website.

alfred.hermida@ubc.ca

David Domingo, PhD, is a senior lecturer in online journalism at the Department of Communication Studies of Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain. His research interests include online journalists' professional ideology and work routines, as well as participatory journalism and convergence. He is co-editor, with Chris Paterson, of Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production (Peter Lang, 2008).

david.domingo@urv.cat

Ari Heinonen, PhD, is journalism teacher and researcher in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere, Finland. A former newspaper journalist, he has focused his academic research on explorations of the changing nature of professionalism in journalism, concepts of journalism in the new media era and journalistic ethics.

ari.a.heinonen@uta.fi

Steve Paulussen, PhD, is a part-time lecturer in journalism studies at both the University of Antwerp and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, as well as a senior researcher at Ghent University, Belgium. His main research interests lie in the field of journalism studies, where he has published on developments in online journalism, newsroom convergence and the sociological profile of professional journalists.

steve.paulussen@ugent.be

Thorsten Quandt, Dr. phil. habil. is a professor in Communication Studies / Interactive Media and Online Communication at the University of Hohenheim, Germany. His widely published research includes studies on online journalism, media evolution, network communication and computer games.

thorsten.quandt@uni-hohenheim.de

Zvi Reich, PhD, is a former journalist and a researcher in journalism studies at the Department of Communication, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel. The author of Sourcing the News, (Hampton Press, 2009), his research interests focus on online news, sociology of news, and sourcing and authorship in journalism.

zreich@exchange.bgu.ac.il

Jane B. Singer is an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa, USA, and a visiting professor in the School of Journalism, Media and Communication at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. Her research explores digital journalism, including changing roles, perceptions, norms and practices.

jane-singer@uiowa.edu

Marina Vujnovic, PhD, is an assistant professor at Monmouth University, USA. The author of Forging the Bubikopf Nation: Journalism, Gender and Modernity in Interwar Yugoslavia (Peter Lang, 2009), her primary fields of research are participatory journalism and new media studies, media history and gender, critical political economy, and cultural studies.

mvujnovi@monmouth.edu

Is the Medium the Message?
Predicting Popularity of Top U.S. News Sites with Medium-Specific Features

ORIGINAL ARTICLE - ISOJ 2011

Angela M. Lee
University of Texas at Austin

Recent studies find that only a handful of news sites dominate the online news landscape, but they fail to explain this pattern beyond the fact that they are all counterparts of established traditional sources. "Mediumizing" online news, and expanding on the Uses & Gratifications paradigm, this study identifies five online news interface-specific features that predict popularity among the 2009 top ten U.S. news sites using maximum likelihood regression analysis in structural equation modeling. Results suggest the need to consider the Internet as a distinct news medium to better understand the relationship between online news and its consumers.

The State of The News Media Report[1] by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism finds year after year that traditional news entities dominate the news landscape online, and suggests this to be indicative of the importance of branding and source credibility to average news consumers online (Abdulla et al., 2005; Meyer, 2009). In other words, news consumers converge on online counterparts of established news entities because they believe that the nature and quality of news information on sites like Yahoo News[2], CNN and *The New York Times* are more trustworthy than news information from other sites (i.e., blogs or citizen journalism) that do not have long-standing history in offering credible news information (Lin, Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2005)[3]. While such speculations may explain why these few sites, out of millions (Chan-Olmsted, 2003) if not billions (Hindman, 2007) of news-oriented sites available on the Internet, dominate the online news landscape, they pose challenge to explaining why there exist, among the top ten

sites, exponentially large gaps in these sites' popularity.

According to Nielsen's "Top 20 websites in 2009" report, Yahoo News, the most popular news site, has on average over 15%, or five million more unique news consumers than MSNBC, the second most popular news site; over 220%, or over twenty two million more unique news consumers than *The New York Times*, the fifth most popular news site; and over 438%, or thirty two million more unique news consumers than *USA Today*, the tenth most popular news site. In documenting the fact that online news consumption is even more concentrated than in the "offline" world, Hindman (2007) notes that "there is still a lot we don't know about the underlying causes of audience concentration online" (p.341). In other words, while a select few news sites' dominance online may be partly explained by average consumers' reliance on established and credible sources for news (see Hindman, 2007 for overview), what accounts for the exponential difference in popularity among the top ten news sites that all offer news content produced by comparably trustworthy news sources? By quantitatively examining the Internet as a news medium, this study proposes that one answer lies in the extent to which each site satisfies news consumers' "medium-specific process gratifications," and identifies five online news interface-specific features that predict popularity of a handful of the most popular news sites in the U.S.

Online News Consumption: A Whole New Experience?

As media organizations continue to fragment and adopt new forms on the Internet, audience demands and consumption patterns are also evolving (Chan-Olmsted & Ha, 2003). In Quinn's words (2005), "In the early twenty-first century, audiences want news when [and how] it suits them, rather than when the media have traditionally supplied it" (p. 185). Technological and content convergences online are evident – True, research has found that online news websites still largely retain the presentation styles of their traditional

counterparts (Lee, 2008), and traditional newsrooms still supply most of the news information online (see Salwen, 2005; Dibean & Garrison, 2005; Weldon, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Hindman, 2008). Nevertheless, neither is the online news environment a mirror of its offline counterpart, nor are all news organizations adapting to this new environment at the same pace. Not only does the Internet affect journalistic production processes, cultural operations, and organizational managements (Deuze, 2003), but also the convergence of multiple-platform publishing on the Internet revolutionizes how people interact with information. As Quinn asserts (2005), "Convergence offers a way to satisfy the audience's desire for news… in multiple formats to reach multiple audiences" (p.32).

Unlike in the past where differences in media largely equate differences in mediated experiences (i.e., print newspapers are solely textual and pictorial, radio news is audio, whereas television news combines moving pictures with audio), the Internet amalgamates all existing medium-specific interface features and materializes as a "hybrid of technically sophisticated multimedia-multichannel information and entertainment medium" (Lin & Jeffres, 2001, p.557) that contests our understanding of what a "medium" is, and challenges existing notion of news consumption in light of new technological capabilities. Particularly, since the Internet provides the same technological platforms for *all* media entities to produce and distribute content, the competition online among news organizations is no longer merely that of content, but also consumption experiences (Seelig, 2008a).

"Mediumizing" the Internet?

Technology is the *sine qua non* to discussions about the future of journalism, as "Journalism has always been shaped by technology" (Pavik, 2000, p. 229). With the growth of broadband technology (Huang, 2007) and online news sites (Spyridou & Veglis, 2008) in

early 2000's, the Internet has become the third most popular "mass medium" from which average American news consumers access news information on a daily basis (Roy, 2008; Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010). Nonetheless, we have not yet fully "mediumized" the Internet despite its popularity. In other words, we have not clearly conceptualized the Internet as a medium [sic] based on its unique attributes. Instead, we have largely stagnated with the term "new media" without really paying attention to what, if at all, sets the Internet apart from all other media. Echoing one of the questions raised by Eveland (2003) through the "mix of attributes" approach: How can we fully understand the intricate relationship between news consumers and the Internet if we remain vague in our conceptualization of "new media?" It is with this in mind that this study proposes the need to quantitatively operationalize the Internet as a news medium.

The Internet as a News Medium

A medium has generally been defined as "any extension of ourselves," or more broadly, "any new technology" (McLuhan, 1964 p.7). While such broad definitions apply to the Internet as well, the danger of evaluating the Internet the same way we assess newspapers, radio and television lies in that the Internet fundamentally redefines traditional mediated communicative processes with its medium-specific uniqueness, and thus renders existing theoretical assumptions and measurements of traditional media uses obsolete and inapplicable for Internet studies. Just as new technologies are changing the nature of how news is produced and distributed, they are also changing the ways in which people consume news, and thus provide new opportunities for studying such behavior in the context of the new media environment (Tewksbury, 2003). In examining how and why people consume news on the Internet, this study turns to the Uses and Gratifications paradigm.

U&G Paradigm in Media Studies

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) paradigm is an audience-centered approach that seeks to understand *why* and *how* people use media in order to understand media's impact on people (McQuail, 1983; Perse and Dunn, 1998; emphasis added), and emerged as one of the dominant theoretical frameworks for inquiry into audience orientations with the advance of new media (Palmgreen, Wenner & Rayburn, II, 1981). The U&G paradigm holds the following assumptions about the relationship between media and the audience: Audience members inadvertently form perceptions on meanings and values of a medium from mediated experiences. These perceptions translate into expectations, where such expectations then motivate audience members to return to the same medium for a certain set of gratifications. So long as the medium is able to meet audience members' expectations, or gratifications in subsequent interactions, audience members are more likely to choose to go back to the same medium, be it a conscious or habitual act, and such routine usage of a medium then becomes the focal point in conventional media studies (Blumler, 1979; Katz, Haas & Gurevitch, 1973; Palmgreen, Wenner & Rayburnm II, 1981; see Ruggiero, 2000, for recent overview of the paradigm). In Katz, Haas and Gurevitch's (1973) words, one of the goals of this theoretical framework is to understand the relationship between media and audiences by "explor[ing] the relationships between the attributes of the media and the functions they serve" (p. 179).

U&G Criticisms and Counterarguments

Early criticisms of the U&G include its assumptions of active audience and rational media uses, invalidity of self-reports, insensitivity to media content and social gratifications, and lack of predictive power (see McQuail, 1994; McDonald, 1990), albeit not all of the concerns are equally applicable in today's media

landscape, and many early criticisms have been addressed in more recent online U&G studies. Based on more recent studies, counterarguments against early U&G criticisms include: 1) With the advance of the Internet, active media choices are now common, if not necessary among average online users to navigate through a plethora of information (Sunstein, 2007). 2) Newer U&G studies have examined the implications of social gratifications online (e.g., Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004; Stafford & Stafford, 1998). Moreover, adding to the force of counterarguments against early criticisms, this study 3) relies on Nielson's empirical estimates of online traffic rather than self-report (more details in Methods section), and 4) predicts the extent to which online news-specific gratifications account for the disproportional popularity of top news sites in the U.S.

Internet and Online News-Specific Gratifications

Several Internet studies have introduced new conceptual and operational approaches in understanding Internet-specific gratifications[4]. Particularly, Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) state the need to look at *process gratifications* in addition to content[5] and social[6] gratifications, as mediated experiences online is vastly different from mediated experiences in other traditional media. Process gratifications center on classifying the Internet as a medium by its modes of transmission and reception (Perse & Dunn, 1998; Katz, Haas & Gurevitch, 1973), and examples of such experiential gratifications include surfing on the Internet, navigating through different media channels, consuming content in multimedia and timely fashion, etc.

Additionally, other studies have categorized a variety of Internet-specific gratifications that Internet users get and expect from the medium: Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identify five: Interpersonal utility, pass time, information seeking, convenience and entertainment. Parker and Plank (2000) state three: Companionship

and social needs, and needs for learning, excitement and relaxation. Song et al. (2004) suggest four: Social escapism, pass time, interactive control, and information. Roy (2008) contributes two: Information seeking and self-improvement. Grace-Farfaglia, Dekkers, Sundararajan, Peters and Park (2006) offer seven: Social companionship, economic gain, self-improvement, entertainment, escape, fame and aesthetics. Also, Flanagin and Metzger (2001) supplement five: Problem solving, persuading others, relationship maintenance, status seeking, and personal insight. In relation to online newspaper consumption, Mings (1997) categorizes the following gratifications: Functionality of providing links, supplemental information, immediacy, timeliness, personalization, and interactivity. Overall, these studies offer rich description of audience's Internet-uses and gratifications, yet they have not examined the Internet in ways that facilitate understanding of its *news* uses and implications, and thus restrain our understanding of online news consumption patterns and effects. Just as print newspapers found "authenticity" to be its greatest strength in attracting readers (Jones, 2009), online news also needs to realize its strengths in relation to other news media in order to function and succeed as a unique news medium of its own.

Updated U&G Paradigm: Analyzing Five Interface-Specific Features

Extending the U&G paradigm, and drawing extensively from relevant literature, this study identifies five overarching medium-specific features, or process gratifications that affect average consumers' experiences with online news consumption (broadly speaking): 1) Interactivity 2) Immediacy 3) Multimedia 4) Information availability and 5) Usability (see Deuze, 2003; Seelig, 2008a; Seelig 2008b; Quinn, 2005; Meyer, 2009; Kemey et al., 2000; Ramasubamanian & Martin, 2009; Spyridou & Veglis, 2008, etc.).

1. Interactivity. Interactivity is often seen as the "golden standard" (Quinn, 2005, p. 89) or "key advantage" (Ha & James, 1998, p.459) of the Internet, for the Internet is one of the first media that encourages direct interaction between "producers and consumers", as well as among users (Chan-Olmsted & Ha, 2003). In fact, research finds interactivity positively associated with user satisfaction, favorability, and involvement with news sites (e.g., Spyridou & Veglis, 2008; Sundar et al., 2003; Shyam Sunder, 2000). Deuze (2003) defines interactivity as a special trait of the Internet that facilitates association, and enables people to not only *receive* but also *disseminate* information. Moreover, Ha and James (1998; also see Seelig, 2008b) compartmentalized interactivity into "audience-oriented interactivity," which examines the "range of options or choice of content available to the users to interact with," and "source-oriented interactivity," which investigates the ways in which media facilitate reciprocal communication between users and media by focusing on the availability of forums, chatrooms, games, language options, and such on media sites (p. 241).

2. Immediacy. In relation to the news media, one of the advantages of the Internet is that it allows for timely updates on breaking news by changing the ways in which news is generated, reported, and distributed (Deuze, 2003). For example, while television news already sped up the long established news cycle in the print industry, the Internet allows for even faster updates by enabling news contributors to distribute news stories in real-time (Quinn, 2005). Moreover, the fact that the Internet makes it possible for news contributors to easily edit content post-distribution allows them to publish news with more emphasis on "speed" (at the expense of "accuracy") since "irreversibility" is less of a problem online (Seelig, 2008a). Furthermore, for its speed and flexibility, the Internet also enables easy production of real-time, immediate updates especially during time-sensitive news events such as natural disasters.

3. Multimedia. Content wise, traditional newsrooms still supply most of the information on dominant news websites (see Maier, 2010; Salwen, 2005; Dibean & Garrison, 2005; Weldon, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Hindman, 2008), and this blurs the distinction between online and offline news. However, one of the properties that distinguish online news from all other news media is the ways in which news content are disseminated online. With media convergence on the Internet comes distribution of news in "multiple media platforms to target different audiences" (Huang, 2009, p. 107), and this includes the amalgamating use of texts, pictures, audio clips and video clips to meet different kinds of needs and appeal to different kinds of news consumers (Quinn, 2005).

According to Kerry Northrup, executive director of the IFRA Centre for Advanced News Operations and director of publications for the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, "to consumers, a story they read and watch and surf is all one story, just accessed in different ways at different times on different technology depending on what is convenient, what is required to satisfy the need to know, what fits with their media personalities" (quoted in Quinn, 2005, p. 75; also see Machin & Niblock, 2008). Echoing this view, Jones (2009) asserts, "news on the web is almost entirely chosen by the viewer" (p. 180). While news brand identity contributes to audiences' initial contact with online counterparts of traditional news entities (Meyer, 2009), multimedia allows online distributors of news information to deliver content in a much more engaging and creative way (Killebew, 2005; Sundar, 2000), and multimedia news presentation allows news sites to prompt audiences to extend, as well as frequent, their visits repeatedly by offering rich process gratifications (Spyridou & Veglis, 2008; Huang, 2007).

4. Information availability. Another interface feature that distinguishes online news from other news media is its facilitating information flow and exchanges. For example, Maier (2010) reports

that online news are about four times more likely to incorporate news information from other outside news outlets than print newspapers, and part of this is made possible by hyperlinks that allow audiences to easily access additional information relevant to a specific news story made available by online news providers (Ha & James, 1998). Moreover, due to its nature and the availability of broadband connection in today's society (Garrison, 2005), the Internet also makes it much easier for users to search and obtain information outside of what news providers offer to fulfill their needs and goals (e.g., to satisfy curiosity or gain knowledge) (Ferguson & Perse, 2000). In sum, information availability is about online news media's offering a plethora of information from rich and diverse sources at news consumers' disposal.

5. Usability. Usability has been found to positively shape online activities across different domains (Buente & Robbin, 2008). Traditional definitions of usability largely focus on "factors that consider user productivity and performance (Wiberg, 2003, p. 37), and most measurements center on user evaluations of usability in terms of "time required to perform specific tasks, speed of performance, and number and rates of errors made by the users" (ibid.; also see Nielsen, 1994 and Shneiderman, 2004). Nevertheless, Wiberg posits that such task is always dependent on characteristics of the web sites in question, and that measurement of usability, or user satisfaction, is thus contingent on the nature and uses of each web site. For example, news sites evidently serve different purposes as opposed to social networking sites, and hence have different criteria when it comes to "usability."

With exponential growth and dissemination of news information on the Internet, Internet users now have more channel and content choices than ever before, and this allows them to forego websites that are less user-friendly without worrying about not getting equivalent news information from elsewhere. Particularly in relation

to online news sites, usability is measured by evaluating the ease through which average users can navigate a news site in order to locate additional information.

Hypotheses

Drawing on an updated U&G paradigm, the more a news site meets average consumers' need for medium-specific gratifications, the more likely such site will attract audiences. To examine the relationship between the five online news interface-specific features and popularity among the top ten news sites in 2009[7], the first hypothesis establishes differences in how the top and bottom three "top ten" news sites incorporate the five online news interface-specific features, and the second hypothesis predicts popularity of the top ten news sites with these five online news interface-specific features:

H1: *Among the top ten news sites in 2009, the top three sites will utilize more a) interactivity, b) immediacy, c) multimedia, d) information availability, and e) usability feature than the bottom three sites.*

H2: *Among the top ten news sites in 2009, integration of the five online news interface-specific features will positively predict popularity of these top news sites.*

Moreover, to better understand the ways in which the top ten news sites utilize the five online news interface-specific features, the following research questions are explored:

RQ1: *Among the top ten news sites in 2009, which of the five online news interface-specific features is the best predictor of popularity?*

RQ2: *Among the top ten news websites of 2009, how does each top news site use the five online news interface-specific features?*

163

Method

This study is carried out through content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a method for "inquiring into social reality that consists of inferring features of a non-manifest context from features of a manifest text" (p.25). The five Internet-specific interface features proposed in this paper are theory-driven, and most of the items used in content analysis are based on existing metrics used in prior studies, which lends additional support to the reliability of results reported in this study.

Unit of Analysis

Defining the unit of analysis on the World Wide Web is uniquely challenging because a lot of the boundaries that seem "concrete" in other media becomes blurry on the Internet (McMillan, 2000). To this end, Ha and James (1998) argue that the homepage is an ideal unit of analysis because it's the starting point in which all visitors decide whether they want to continue browsing a site or not, and that can be clearly operationalized (i.e., it's anywhere on the webpage where the "web address" does not change) (also see Seelig, 2008b). For this reason, this study also uses news site homepages as its unit of analysis.

Sample

Based on Nielsen's ranking of the top ten news sites, which was measured by average "unique audience visits" of each news site in 2009, the sample in this study consists of homepages of Yahoo News[8] (#1), MSNBC News[9](#2), AOL News[10](#3), ABC News[11](#8), *Washington Post*[12](#9), and *USA Today*[13](#10). Ideally, all ten of the "top news sites" would be coded, yet due to budgetary constraints, CNN (#4), *The New York Times* (#5), Google News (#6) and Fox (#7) were excluded from this study. Nevertheless, the underlying theoretical assumption of this study, based on literature

review, is that a *linear* relationship exists between the five online news interface-specific features and popularity among the top news sites, and thus the author argues that the omission of these four middle-range top news sites is, though not ideal, acceptable.

Data

All of the data are recorded using Automator, a free application developed by Apple Computer that enables scheduled data recording. Data can easily be accessed using Safari Web browser. All data are recorded at 11am everyday to minimize confounds of time, and for the entire month of June, 2010. The amount of data collected is justifiable because pretest observation indicates that online news interface-specific features of targeted news websites do not vary significantly overtime, and hence a month worth of data is sufficient in providing adequate power and variance for statistical analysis.

Pretest

Two graduate students from a large research university in the Northeastern U.S. are used for pretest, and they are both native English speakers and experienced Internet users. Both coders have expressed confidence in understanding the codebook before performing the pretest. The reliability between the two coders using the codebook (see Appendix B) was 0.89, which is deemed desirable according to conventional standard (Krippendorff, 2004), and results from the pretest were used to improve the codebook and coding instructions.

Codebook

Following Huang's guidance (2007), in addition to basing all the items on established metrics, the current codebook (see Appendix B) was adjusted on the basis of pretest observations; items bolded

in Appendix B were eliminated from final analysis for lack of variances[14].

Independent Variables

The independent variables consist of interactivity, immediacy, multimedia, information availability, and usability. In Appendix A is a list of all the items used to measure the five overarching online news interface-specific features. All of the items in each independent variable are first standardized before being summed to ensure compatibility across measures for H1, H2 and RQ1. Unstandardized metrics were used for RQ2.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable entails Nielsen's measure of unique audience visits on each news site, as reported by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism in its 2010 State of the News Media report. For H1, a dummy variable is created, where Yahoo (#1), MSNBC (#2) and AOL (#3) are coded as 1, and ABC (#8), *Washington Post* (#9) and *USA Today* (#10) are coded as 0. Reported estimates of unique audience visits are used as the dependent variable for the rest of the analysis.

Statistical Analyses

Firstly, using SPSS 17.0, Independent Sample T-Test is performed to estimate the between-group differences in H1. Secondly, using Mplus, and applying principles of structural equation modeling[15], maximum likelihood regression analysis is performed to assess the extent to which the five online news interface-specific features predict popularity of the top ten news sites in H2 and RQ1. And lastly, descriptive of each unstandardized independent variable is presented in Table 1 regarding RQ2.

Results

Supportive of H1, among the top ten news sites, the top three news sites generally use more online news-interface specific features than the bottom three news sites. Specifically, comparing the two groups, while no statistical difference is found between the two groups' use of the interactivity feature (H1a), the top three news sites are heavier users of the immediacy (H1b), $t(166)=9.39$, $p<0.01$; multimedia (H1c), $t(166)=2.31$, $p<0.05$; information availability (H1d), $t(166)=11.72$, $p<0.01$; and usability features (H1e), $t(166)=3.59$, $p<0.01$.

The overall chi square test of model fit suggests that the model estimated in H2 is a just-identified model, $X^2(0)$ 0, $p =0.00$. Moreover, assessment of a variety of goodness of fit tests offers further evidence that the proposed model is statistically a good fit for the data: The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.00. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 1.00. The Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI) is 1.00. Also, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is less than 0.05. Supportive of H2, integration of the five online news interface-specific features is highly predictive of popularity among the top ten news sites ($R^2 = 0.97$).

Regarding RQ1, maximum likelihood regression analysis suggests information availability to be the strongest predictor of popularity among the top ten news sites ($B= 1.22$, $p< 0.05$); followed by immediacy ($B=0.46$, $p<0.01$), multimedia ($B=0.29$, $p<0.01$), and interactivity ($B= 0.07$, $p<0.05$). Contrary to expectation, usability predicts popularity of the top ten news sites in a negative fashion ($B=-0.77$, $p<0.01$). Post-hoc analysis of this unexpected finding is presented in the Discussion section.

In response to RQ2, Table 1 illustrates the ways in which the six news sites utilize the five online news-specific features. As

Appendix B indicates, in this study the interactivity feature includes news choices, forum, chat, discussion, commenting capability, games, customized news to email option, and e-mail addresses of journalists. The immediacy feature includes latest news, breaking news, and time of update. The multimedia feature includes uses of photos, audio and video clips. The information availability feature includes specialized or extensive news coverage on select topics, special data on issues, number of stories from alternative sources, number of total stories, number of alternative news sources, and hyperlinks to relevant information from different sources. Lastly, the usability feature includes search engines that provide results from different sources, search engines that enable multimedia searches, number of "Popularity" news stories (e.g., "most read," "most recommended" stories), number of "Popularity" news story categories, and number of total Popularity stories. The six top news sites differ most significantly in their use of the information availability feature.

Table 1

Average count of online news-specific features: Mean and (SD)

	Interactivity	Immediacy	Multimedia	Information Availability	Usability
Yahoo News (#1)	15 (0)	0 (0)	41 (1.60)	894 (3.91)	6 (0)
MSNBC (#2)	14 (0.51)	21 (1.66)	47 (1.86)	190 (7.14)	4 (0)
AOL (#3)	15 (0)	7 (0)	18 (1.14)	263 (4.05)	3 (0)
ABC (#8)	10 (0)	0 (0)	63 (2.78)	141 (6.12)	0 (0)
Washington Post (#9)	14 (0.51)	0 (0)	21 (2.34)	77 (2.81)	5 (0)
USA Today (#10)	10 (0.31)	0 (0)	20 (2.35)	63 (3.20)	1 (0)

Note: *N = 168.* Data collected in June, 2010.

Discussion

The importance of news branding and credibility has been suggested to contribute to high-level concentration of traffic on the World Wide Web where a handful of news sites dominate the online news ecology. Nevertheless, existing findings are inadequate in accounting for the exponential differences in popularity among these highly visible news sites. To solve this puzzle, we need to better understand the relationship between the Internet and its users, and this study suggests the incorporation of an updated Uses & Gratifications approach in 1) mediumizing the Internet in order to understand the functional needs and gratifications it serves as a news medium, and 2) examining five underlying online news interface-specific features that dictate online news consumption experiences and predict news site popularity. Through Independent

Sample T-Test, this study finds that the top three "top ten" news sites are systematically more feature-heavy than the bottom three "top ten" news sites. Moreover, through maximum likelihood regression analysis in structural equation modeling, this study finds that the five online news interface-specific features significantly predict differences in popularity among the top ten news sites, and that information availability is by far the strongest predictor.

The fact that usability negatively predicts popularity of top news sites in H2 is unexpected. Post-hoc analysis of the data reveals that the number of popularity news stories (i.e., "most read," "most recommended," or "what's hot") is the only predominant item that contributes to the negative slope in the information availability variable. Specifically, ABC has on average the most number of popularity news stories[16] (22) as opposed to Yahoo News (15), MSNBC (11), AOL (10), *Washington Post* (16) and *USA Today* (5). Future studies are encouraged to consider weighting individual items in each variable as to ensure comparable assessments of the five online news interface-specific features. Moreover, future studies are encouraged to examine how evolution in usage of the five online news interface-specific features predicts popularity of top news ranks over time. Furthermore, future studies are encouraged to interview actual consumers of these top news sites to have a more holistic understanding of a potentially wider range of online news-specific process gratifications that are not accounted for in this study.

Limitations

Despite the author's attempt to strengthen this study methodologically, it is not without limitations. As aforementioned, this study is unable to examine mid-range (rank #4 through #7) top news sites due to budgetary constraints. While such data limitation does not appear to weaken the conclusiveness of theoretical assumptions and statistical power presented in this study, it

prevents examination of the relationship between different types of news sites (e.g., News portal versus newspaper or TV news sites) and popularity. Thus, future studies are encouraged to replicate the present study with mid-range top news sites to expand our knowledge of how the five online news interface-specific features predict popularity of all top news sites, and to investigate news site types as an additional factor in influencing popularity.

Positivistically speaking, all causal claims in non-experimental studies are contestable, for only true experiments can adequately establish cause-effect inferences by fully accounting for temporal order and non-spuriousness between two variables (Cook & Campbell, 1979). This content analysis study shares the same methodological limitation, though it attempts to strengthen the validity of its causal claim through theoretical reasoning[17], test of reverse causation (see Dillard, Shen & Vail , 2007)[18], and evaluation of its SEM model's goodness of fit tests (See Results section). Nevertheless, future studies are encouraged to implement true experimental designs to fully test the causal relationship between the proposed independent and dependent variables.

Conclusion

In the age of digitization, the Internet is changing the way people live and interact with each other. As Hindman (2007) documents, "Seventy million Americans now log on to the Internet in a typical day, reading news, checking e-mail, and engaging in a host of other online activities" (p. 327). With rapid changes in Internet-use diffusion and online news media landscape come ever-evolving online news consumption patterns (Lin, Salwen, Garrison & Driscoll, 2005; Garrison, 2005). New technologies are changing the nature of news consumption and providing new opportunities for studying such behaviors, and empirical research is necessary to systematically examine not only *causes* that lead to differing online news consumption patterns, but also *effects* of such newly

emerging news consumption patterns.

While past studies have explained to a certain extent why only a handful of news sites dominate the online news landscape, we still don't know enough about why popularity disparities are so great among these few most popular news sites, or how the Internet as a news medium contributes to news consumption choices. At the intersection of an updated Uses & Gratifications approach that focuses on online news medium-specific process gratifications, content analysis and structural equation modeling, this study asserts that one of the fundamental first steps in understanding this puzzle lies in deciphering how the Internet appeals to consumers as a news medium [sic] in order to maximize its medium-specific strengths to better match 21st century news audience desires, and calls to attention the need to expand focuses in existing online news consumption studies on content to examination of medium.

This study does not take the position of technological determinism where technology is seen as *the* answer, or the medium the message. As established studies indicate -- Credibility, news quality and news brands, just to name a few, are without a doubt influential determinants of online news consumption in today's media landscape. Nevertheless, especially given the unique nature of the Internet, this study argues that online news-specific process gratifications are also important predictors of online news consumption, and are thus worthy of scholarly and industrial attention.

The medium is not the whole message in online news consumption, but it tells an important and compelling story that deserves, and ought to be heard.

References

Abdulla, R. A., Garrison, B., Salwen, M. B., Driscoll, P. D., & Casey, D. (2005). *Online news credibility*. In M. B. Salwen, B. Garrison, & P. D. Driscoll (Eds.), *Online News and the Public* (pp. 147-163). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Blumler, J. (1979). The role of theory in uses and gratifications studies. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 9-36.

Buente, W., & Robbin, A. (2008). Trends in Internet information behavior, 2000-2004. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(11), 1743- 1760.

Chyi, H. I. & Lasorsa, D. L. (1999). Access, use and preferences for online newspapers. Newspaper Research Journal, 20(4), 2–13. Chan-Olmsted, S. M., & Ha, L. S. (2003). Internet business models for broadcasters: How television stations perceive and integrate the Internet. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 47(4), 597-617.

Cook, T.D., & Campbell, D.T. (1979). *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis for Field Settings.* Illinois: Rand McNally. Deuze, M. (2001). Online journalism: Modelling the first generation of news media on the World Wide Web. *First Monday*, 6(10). Retrieved from http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_10/deuze/index.html

Deuze, M. (2003). The web and its journalisms: Considering the consequences of different types of news media online. *New Media & Society*, 5(2), 203-230.

Dibean, W. & Garrison, B. (2005). Online newspaper market size and the use of world wide web technologies. In M.B. Salwen, B. Garrison, & P.D. Driscoll (Eds.), *Online News and the Public*

(pp.257-276). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dillard, J. P., Shen, L., & Vail, R. G. (2007). Does perceived message effectiveness cause persuasion or vice versa? 17 Consistent answers. *Human Communication Research,* 33(4), 467-488.

Dimmick, J., Chen, Y., & Li, Z. (2004). Competition between the Internet and traditional news media: The gratification-opportunities niche dimension. *The Journal of Media Economics,* 17(1), 19-33.

Eveland, W. P. (2003). A "mix of attributes" approach to the study of media effects and new communication technologies. *Journal of Communication*, 53(3), 395-410.

Ferguson, D., & Perse, E. (2000). The world wide web as a functional alternative to television. *Journalism of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 155-174.

Flanagin, A. J., & Metzger, M. J. (2001). Internet use in the contemporary media environment. *Human Communication Research*, 27, 153-181.

Garrison, B. (2005). Online newspapers. In M. B. Salwen, B. Garrison, & P. D. Driscoll (Eds.), *Online News and the Public* (pp. 3-46). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grace-Farfaglia, P., Dekkers, A., Sundararajan, B., Peters, L., & Park, S. (2006). Multinational web uses and gratifications: Measuring the social impact of online community participation across national boundaries. *Electronic Commerce Research*, 6, 75-101.
Ha, L. & James, E. L. (1998). Interactivity reexamined: A baseline analysis of early business Web sites. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media,* 42(4), 456–474.

Hindman, M. (2007). A mile wide and an inch deep: Measuring media diversity online and offline. In P. M. Napolis (Ed.), *Media Diversity and Localism: Meaning and Metrics* (pp.327-345)*.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erblaum Associates.

Hindman, M. (2008). *The myth of digital democracy.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Huang, E. (2009). The causes of youths' low news consumption and strategies for making youths happy news consumers. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies,* 15(1): 105-122.

Huang, E. (2007). Use of rich media differs at newspaper, TV web sites. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 28(3), 85-97.

Jones, A. S. (2009). *Losing the news:The future of the news that feeds democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Katz, E., Haas, H. and Gurevitch, M.(1973). On the use of the mass media for important things. *American Sociological Review,* 38: 164-181.

Killebrew, K. C. (2005). *Managing media convergence: Pathways to journalistic cooperation.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.)*.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Lee, A. M. (2008, November). The convergence of new and news media: An exploratory study. Paper presented at the 94th Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, San Diego, CA.

Lin, C. A., & Jeffres, L. W. (2001). Comparing distinctions and similarities across Web sites of newspapers, radio stations, and television stations. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78(3), 555-573.

Lin, C., Salwen, M. B., Garrison, B., & Driscoll, P. D. (2005). Online news as a functional substitute for offline news. In Salwen, M.B., Garrison, B., & Driscoll, P. D. (Eds.), *Online News and the Public* (pp. 237-255). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Machin, D., & Niblock, S. (2008). Branding newspapers: Visual texts as social practice. *Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 244-259.

Maier, S. R. (2010). Newspapers offer more news than do major online sites. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 31(1), 6-19.

McDonald, D. (1990). Media orientation and television news viewing. *Journalism Quarterly*, 67(1), 11-20.

McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media: The extensions of man.* McGraw Hill, NY: MIT Press.

McMillan, S. J. (2000). The microscope and the moving target: The challenge of applying content analysis to the world wide web. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 77(1), 80-98.

McQuail, D. (1994). *Mass communication: An introduction* (3rd ed.,). London: Sage Publications.

McQuail, D. (1983). *Mass communication theory* (1st ed.). London: Sage Publications.

Meyer, P. (2009). *The vanishing newspapers: Saving journalism in the information age* (2nd ed.). Missouri: University of Missouri Press.

Mings, S. M. (1997). Uses and gratifications of online newspapers: A preliminary study. *Electronic Journal of Communication*, 7(3). Retrieved from http://www.cios.org/EJCPUBLIC/007/3/007312. HTML.

Mitchelstein, E., & Bozkowski, P. J. (2009). Between tradition and change: A review of recent research on online news production. *Journalism*, 10(5), 562-586.

Nielsen, J. (1994). *Usability engineering.* San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann.

Palmgreen, P., Wenner, L. and Rayburn II, J. (1981). Gratification discrepancies and news program choice. *Communication Research,* 8(4), 451-478.

Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of Internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-196.

Parker, B. J., & Plank, R. E. (2000). A uses and gratifications perspective on the Internet as a new information source. *American Business Review*, 18, 43-49.

Pavlik, J. (2000). The impact of technology on journalism. *Journalism Studies,* 1(2), 229-37.

Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010, March 1). Understanding the participatory news consumer: How Internet and cell phone users have turned news into a social experience. Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/understanding_participatory_news_consumer.

Perse, E. & Dunn, D. (1998). The utility of home computers and media use: Implications of multimedia and connectivity. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 42 (4), 435-456.

Quandt, T. (2008). (No) news on the World Wide Web? *Journalism Studies*, 9(5): 717-738.

Quinn, S. (2005). *Convergent Journalism: The Fundamentals of Multimedia Reporting.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Ramasubamanian, S. & Martin, S. M. (2009). Teens and the new media environment: Challenges and opportunities. In A. B. Jordan, D. Kunkel, J. Manganello & M. Fishbein (Eds.), *Media Messages and Public Health: A Decisions Approach to Content Analysis* (pp. 99-115). New York: Routledge.

Roy, S. K. (2008). Determining uses and gratifications for Indian Internet users. *Case Studies in Business, Industry and Government Statistics*, 2(2), 78-91.

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 3-37.

Salwen, M. B. (2005). Online news trends. In M. B. Salwen, B. Garrison, & P. D. Driscoll (Eds.), *Online News and the Public* (pp. 47-79). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Seelig, M. I., (2008a). An updated look at trends in content and web page design in news web sites. *Electronic News*, 2(2), 86-101.

Seelig, M. I. (2008b). Interactivity on traditional media web sites. *Journal of Radio & Audio Media,* 15(2), 231-248.

Shneiderman, B. (2004). *Designing the user interface: Strategies for effective human-computer interaction* (4th ed.). Massachusetts: Addison Wesley.

Sundar, S. (2000). Multimedia effects on processing and perception of online news: A study of picture, audio, and video downloads.

Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 77(3), 480-499.

Sundar, S., Kalyanaraman, S., & Brown, J. (2003). Explicating web site interactivity-Impression formation effects in political campaign sites. *Communication Research*, 30(1), 30-59.

Sunstein, C. R. (2007). *Republic 2.0.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Song, I., LaRose, R., Eastin, M. S., & Lin, C. A. (2004). Internet Gratifications and Internet Addiction: On the Uses and Abuses of New Media. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 7(4), 384-394.

Spyridou, P., & Veglis, A. (2008). Exploring structural interactivity in online newspapers: A look at the Greek Web landscape. *First Monday*, 13(5). Retrieved from http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/ bin/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/printerFriendly/2164/1960

Stafford, T. F., & Stafford, M. R. (1998). Uses and gratifications of the World Wide Web: A preliminary study. In D. Muchling (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 1998 American Academy of Advertising Conference.* Pullman: Washington State University, 174-182.

Stafford, T. F., Stafford, M. R., & Schkade, L. L. (2004). Determining uses and gratifications for the Internet. *Decision Sciences*, 35(2), 259-288.

Tewksbury, D. (2003). What do Americans really want to know? Tracking the behavior of news readers on the Internet. *Journal of Communication:* 694-710.

Weldon, M. (2008). *Everyman news: The changing american front page*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press.

Whitney, D. C., Wartella, E., & Kunkel, D. (2009). Non-academic

audiences for content analysis research. In A. B. Jordan, D. Kunkel, J. Manganello & M. Fishbein (Eds.), *Media messages and public health: A decisions approach to content analysis* (pp. 233-245). New York: Routledge.

Wiberg, C. (2003). A measure of fun: Extending the scope of web usability (Doctoral dissertation, Umeå University, 2003. Retrieved from http://www8.informatik.umu.se/~colsson/Avh-pdfer/1-overhead-text.pdf.

Appendixes and notes follow

Appendix A: Summary of the five online news interface-specific features

1) **Interactivity**
   i. Audience-oriented interactivity
      1. Availability of news content choices/categories
   ii. Source-oriented interactivity
      1. Survey or poll
      2. Chat or discussion
      3. Games
      4. Customized news to email (e-letter)
      5. Direct e-mail link to article's author
      6. Provide email contacts of the editor/journalists
      7. Service featuring the most read stories and blogs
2) **Immediacy**
      1. Latest news section
      2. Breaking news services
      3. Time of updating
3) **Multimedia**
      1. Inclusion of photos/still-images (including ads)
      2. Inclusion of sound/audio clips (including ads)
      3. Inclusion of video/moving-images (including ads)
4) **Information availability**
      1. Special database on issues
      2. Special reports on important issues
      3. Hyperlinks that connect to relevant information from the same site
      4. Hyperlinks that connect to relevant information from different sources
      5. Number of total news stories
      6. Number of news stories from alternative sources
      7. Number of alternative sources
      8. Archives for textual news articles
      9. Archives of video/audio clips
5) **Usability**
      1. Content available for mobile devices
      2. Free "search engine" function
      3. Search engine provides search results from within the news site

4. Search engine provides search results from different news/ web sites
5. Search engine enables news story searches
6. Search engine enables photo/still-image searches
7. Search engine enables audio clip searches
8. Search engine enables video clip searches
9. Site Map
10. Category of "Popularity" news types (i.e., "most read," "most recommended," or "what's hot)
11. Number of popularity news stories
12. Having "Help" or "FAQ" section that answers users' queries

Appendix B: Codebook[1]

Definition of "homepage": Tabs or scrolls are okay, as long as the web address does not change after clicking on the tab or scroll it's still considered a homepage.

A. Unique ID
B. Website code
- Yahoo News = Yahoo = 1
- MSNBC = MSNBC = 2
- AOL News = AOL = 3
- ABC News = ABC = 8
- *Washington Post* = WP = 9
- *USA Today* = USA = 10

C. Date of data (Ex: April 20th, 2010 = 042010; June 4th, 2010 = 060410)

1a) INTERACTIVITY - <u>Audience-oriented interactivity</u>

D. News Choices-- Number of explicitly labeled news sections on the front page (Enter numeric value) i.e., "Recipes," "Politics," "Blotters," "Health," "Economy," "Entertainment," etc. Anything that is bolded or written in bigger font to indicate a "section title" on the homepage)?

1b) INTERACTIVITY - <u>Source-oriented interactivity</u>

E. Forum/chat/discussion/commenting capability on homepage
   0. No, The homepage has no forum/chat/discussion/commenting capability
   1. Yes, the homepage has forum/chat/discussion/commenting capability

F. Survey or Poll on homepage or first-layer page (EX: "The Grid" on AOL news, make sure to only count same-day posts; or "READER POLL" from *USA Today*)
   0. No survey or poll on homepage
   1. Yes, there is either survey or poll on homepage

G. Games on homepage or first-layer page (EX. Crossword puzzles,

---

1   Bolded items in the codebook are deleted in the final analysis due to lack of variance in the variables.

Sudoku)

>   0. No games on homepage or first-layer page
>   1. One kind of game on homepage or first-layer page (i.e., only Crossword, or only Sudoku)
>   2. Two kinds of games on homepage or first-layer page (i.e., both Crossword and Sudoku)
>   3. More than two kinds of games on homepage or first-layer page

H. Customized news to email (e-letter) option on homepage or first-layer page (i.e., "News Alerts" option on Yahoo News; "Sign up for e-mail & SMS alerts" on MSNBC; "E-mail newsletters" on *USA Today*. Podcast and RSS feeds do not count)

>   0. No customized news option on homepage or first-layer page
>   1. Yes, there is/are e-letter options whether

I. Direct sharing link/options of news articles/videos on homepage (INSTRUCTION: Randomly sample from three most prominent news articles TO YOU on the homepage**)**

>   0. No, there is no direct "email" link/option on homepage
>   1. Yes, via email (i.e., "Send" or "Email")
>   2. Yes, via social networking (i.e., Facebook, Twitter) or alternative news sites (i.e., Reddit, Technocrati, Digg, Delicious, Newsvine, Fark, StumbleUpon)
>   3. Yes, via BOTH email and social networking/alternative news sites.

J. Provide e-mail address of the author/reporter (INSTRUCTION: Randomly sample from three most prominent news articles TO YOU on the homepage)

>   0. No, no email of the author/reporter found
>   1. Yes, email of the author/reporter was found

2) IMMEDIACY

K. "Latest News" Section: Number of news story links/videos in the "latest news" section [if such section exist, if not enter 999]?

L. "Breaking News" Section: Number of news sotires from "breaking general news" (scroll headlines if need be, though be sure to stay on homepage, i.e., be sure the web address doesn't change)

M. Time of update: Do articles on the homepage or first layer have time stamps?
> 0. No
> 1. Yes

3) MULTIMEDIA

N. Number of photos on homepage? (Images for ads or banners count as well)

O. Number of audio clips on homepage? (Audio for ads or banners count as well)

P. Number of video clips on homepage? (Video clips for ads or banners count as well)

4) INFORMATION AVAILABILITY

Q. Special service/section that provide more detailed, specialized or extensive news coverage on select topics?
> 0. No
> 1. Yes

R. Special data on issues?
> 0. No
> 1. Yes

S. Number of news stories from alternative sources on homepage?
> -   Enter number of news stories

T. Number of total stories?

U. Number of alternative news sources on homepage?

V. Are there hyperlinks that connect users to relevant information from the same news site? (i.e., Links for "related news stories)
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

W. Are there hyperlinks that connect users to relevant information from different news/web sites?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

X. Are there archives for textual news articles?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

Y. Are there archives for audio or video clips?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

5) USABILITY

Z. Content available on portable devices? (i.e., iPhone application; Yahoo's mobile device alert)
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

AA. Free search engine?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

AB. Search engine provide results from within the news site?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

AC. Search engine provides results from *different* news/web sites?
  - 0. No
  - 1. Yes

AD. Search engine enables news story searches?
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AE. Search engine enables photo/still-image searches?
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AF. **Search engine enables audio clip searches?**
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AG. Search engine enables video clip searches?
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AH. Site map?
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AI. Number of "Popularity" news stories? (i.e., "most read," "most recommended," or "what's hot"; Count repeats if they are listed in both "most recommended" and "most read" on the same news site)
- • Enter number of popularity news stories

AJ. Categorization of "Popularity" news stories? (i.e., "most read," "most recommended," or "what's hot")
  - Enter the number of popularity news story categories

AK. "Help" or "FAQ" section on homepage that help answer users' queries or troubles?
- 0. No
- 1. Yes

AL. Number of popularity stories
AM. Number of *categories* of popularity stories

Notes

[1] www.stateofthemedia.org

[2] Albeit Yahoo News is not the online counterpart of an established news entity, it primarily aggregates news from credible sources such as *The Associated Press, Christian Science Monitor, Reuters*, etc.

[3] As Abdulla, Garrison, Salwen, Driscoll and Casey (2005) further suggest: "Internet users are aware of the ease of uploading a page on the Web, and with a little design experience, making it look like the output of a well-established, professional organizations. This seems to underline the importance of branding in online news. Readily identifiable news organizations that have moved to a Web presence or Web sites that use existing and known news brands (e.g., CNN, the associated Press, or other news services) have this advantage over news sites that are only on the web and do not offer branded news" (p. 161).

[4] "Gratifications" are reflective of how users perceive characteristics of a medium (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004).

[5] Content gratifications have often been studied under broad categorizations such as "for entertainment, diversion, or surveillance purposes (Roy, 2008).

[6] e.g., focuses on interpersonal communication and social networking

[7] Popularity is based on Nielsen's measure of unique audience visits reported in the 2010 Stsate of the News Media Report. See http://www.stateofthemedia.org/2010/online_nielsen.php#online_toptenusage

[8] http://news.yahoo.com

[9] http://www.msnbc.msn.com

[10] http://www.aolnews.com

[11] http://abcnews.go.com

[12] http://washingtonpost.com

[13] http://www.usatoday.com

[14] For example, the "Site map" and "FAQ" variables were eliminated because all of the news websites examined have such functions.

[15] Which enables analysis of recursive systems with latent variables involving multiple indicators and correlations among all independent variables.

[16] i.e., "most viewed," "most commented," and "most emailed" stories

[17] U&G theorizes that the extent to which media satisfy audience gratifications shapes conventional media uses.

[18] Statistics available upon request.

Angela M. Lee (M.A., University of Pennsylvania) graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude from UCLA in 2006, and with College and Departmental Honors in Communication Studies. She received her M.A. from the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania in 2009, and she is currently a doctoral student in the School of Journalism at University of Texas at Austin. Angela has presented her work at annual meetings of the International Communication Association, National Communication Association, International Symposium on Online Journalism, Flow Conference, and Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, and she has published in Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies (2011) and Making the University Matter (Routledge, 2011). Angela's collaborated work on U.S. news media's report of its own woes has been covered by The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Daily News, Philadelphia Inquirer, Richmond Register, and Baltimore Sun. Angela is vice-president elect of the National Communication Association's Communication and the Future Division, and her term runs through the 2011 NCA convention. Angela is interested in understanding why and how people consume news across genres and platforms in the 21st century new media environment. She can be reached at amlee229@gmail.com and on Twitter (#angelamlee).

amlee229@gmail.com