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by

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**The influence of audience agency in digital media:
A model adjustment in the hierarchy of influences**

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**The influence of audience agency in digital media:
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Dedication

To my patient and always-lovely wife Caron, who has calmed me or encouraged me, as I needed when I needed.

To my children Stephanie and Casey, who have always been inspiring to me.

In Memory of my parents, F. C. "Boo" and Madeline Knight.

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**The influence of audience agency in digital media:
A model adjustment in the hierarchy of influences**

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The hierarchy of influences is a theory that models the underlying forces or influences that guide journalists during their decision-making processes as gatekeepers of news and information (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014). As part of this model there are a group of influences originally described as extra-media influences: some are now labeled “social institutions” and others have been moved to the “routines” level that includes competition, advertisers, community leaders and, audiences, which in the treatise now are considered in both levels to some extent. Technological innovation in digital media has changed some of the ways journalists gather, produce, publish, present and disseminate the news. Digital media innovation has also affected the way audiences or users now consume, discuss, debate and share the news. As digital media technological innovation continues to rapidly expand and change, its use by journalists and consumers could have implications that have caused shifts on the forces or influences in this hierarchy, particularly on the levels of social institutions and routines.

This study seeks to test the idea that changes in the digital media environment have sufficiently shifted audience agency to a degree that it warrants further examination as it relates to other influences. To date, this has been documented mainly in correlational

studies (Lee, 2013; Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014; Vu, 2013) or qualitative research (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, 2009). This study agrees that the hierarchy model needs to account for the greater agency digital media affords audiences. It goes beyond the research to date that primarily uses self-reports to strengthen the case by documenting a cause-and-effect relationship with an experiment. The experiment tests if knowing what storytelling forms audiences want will lead to journalists choosing that storytelling form.

This study uses an experiment with 144 professional journalists, by giving them four scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their work – how to cover a story about a dangerous storm, for example. Half of the participants are told which storytelling forms – video, Tweets, in-depth stories, interactive graphics, etc. – are preferred by audiences, advertisers, the competition, and community leaders; half are not. Journalists select the storytelling form that they would use to tell the story. Influence is measured by how often participants choose storytelling forms that are preferred by audiences compared with how often they choose forms preferred by others. If journalists choose audience-preferred storytelling forms significantly more often than the preferred forms of other influences that will provide support for the idea that audiences now have an elevated influence in the decision-making process in the newsroom. One strength of this experiment is that it shows what journalists would *actually* do when faced with these situations, rather than asking them what they *think* is the most important influence on their decisions. That is, it gets closer to seeing what journalists *do* as opposed to what they *think* they do.

Findings show that knowing the storytelling preferences of the different influences matters; participants selected significantly different storytelling forms when they knew which forms were preferred by the influences than when they did not. Furthermore, these

journalists chose audience preferred storytelling forms significantly more often than the forms preferred by other influences it was tested against. In a practical sense, however, they did not overwhelmingly choose audience preferred forms – between 48% and 62% of the decisions were for audience preferred story forms.

Findings also show that participants *think* they choose audiences far more often than they actually do. One would have expected far more decisions favoring audiences considering how high participants placed audiences in both their ranking of the influences, where audiences were most important in both online and offline platform decisions, and in their qualitative comments. This cautions about confirming the findings of self-reports with other methods, as people are not always aware of the actual influences on their own behavior. The qualitative comments were instructive in helping explain this attitude-behavior gap as these participants exhibited paternalistic attitudes toward the audience. Participants believed that the audience needed journalistic guidance on what they really wanted because they were not capable of knowing for themselves. They justified this as being in the best interest of the audiences.

The platform that the stories are told on also mattered. While participants said audiences were their number one concern for both online and offline platforms, the similarities end there. The competition was more important in online platforms while community leaders were more influential in offline storytelling, for example.

The role of influences from other levels, specifically resources and financial influences from the organizational level, were incorporated by having participants make decisions under the real-world conditions as if they were in their own newsrooms, and under ideal conditions, as they were in a perfect world where there were no constraints.

This also mattered, as journalists chose audiences' storytelling forms significantly more often when the conditions were ideal than when they were real.

Theoretical contributions of this study include the statement that audiences do deserve stronger consideration in the newsroom decision-making. It is also accurate to say that the audience is much higher in the *minds* of journalists than in their actions.

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The influence of audience agency in digital media:

A 21st century model of the hierarchy of influences

Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the hierarchy of influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, 2014), there are many forces that affect the decision-making processes of journalists as gatekeepers of news and information. As part of this model there are a group of influences originally described as extra-media influences, which are now moved into different levels and relabeled as either “social institutions” or “routines,” that include laws, competition, advertisers, community leaders, audiences, governmental and non-governmental agencies. Technological innovation in digital media has changed some of the ways journalists gather, produce, publish, present and disseminate the news, and thus changed the impact of these influences. Digital media innovation has also affected the way audiences or users now consume, discuss, debate and share the news. As digital media technological innovation continues to rapidly expand and change, its use by journalists and consumers could have implications that have caused shifts on the forces or influences in this hierarchy.

This continual digital transition has important work practice and financial implications for journalists. While it is now easier for journalists to research and source stories they want to tell, and offers speedier ways to work with their colleagues and sources, it also requires multi-platform writing and producing for a more fractured audience that has been conditioned to get their news when they want it on all the various

platforms available. Attracting and keeping the attention of these news users becomes a tougher challenge.

This study seeks to test the idea that changes in the media environment have sufficiently shifted or elevated audience agency to a degree that it should be considered a superior influence to other influences it was tested against. It tests this proposition with an experiment using 144 professional journalists who are given four scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their work. Half of the participants are told which storytelling forms, such as video, Tweets, in-depth stories, or interactive graphics, are preferred by audiences, advertisers, the competition, and community leaders; half are not. Journalists select the storytelling form that they would use to tell the story. Influence is measured by how often participants choose storytelling forms that are preferred by audiences compared with how often they choose forms preferred by others. If journalists choose audience-preferred storytelling forms significantly more often than the preferred forms of other influences that will provide support for the idea that audiences should be considered a more influential constituency.

For the purposes of this study, using former sociological adaptations from the *Marxist* dialectical of societal status quo between elites and proletariat classes, *agency* is the amount of leverage or influence one of the opposing constituencies could bring to bear in the debate or argument (Hartman, n.d.; Noonan, 2011). *Audience agency* is the leverage, power or force in an active sense, which news audiences bring to bear on those who produce the news, influencing their decision-making processes (Duquette, 1992; Luria, 1974). Simply put, audience agency could be described as the amount of influence or the strength of influence audiences have in the conscious or subconscious of the gatekeepers of

news when making decisions on what stories make the news and how those stories are told (Duquette, 1992; Hartman, n.d.; Luria, 1974; Noonan, 2011). “Agency” is used rather than “influence” because agency not only refers to the influence on newsroom decision-making processes, but also on the entirety of how media is now designed, produced, used and generated on multiple digital and mobile platforms. Agency and influence is intrinsically linked because audiences now have more power over the media they interact with in terms of their ability to generate their own content and to give feedback to journalists.

It should also be noted here that in *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century*, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) use new terminology, relabeling the former “extra-media” and “ideology” levels of influence to “social institutions” and “social systems” respectively. In addition, some of the influences from the old extra-media level are now in the social institutions level and others are in the routines level. Other important changes between the two editions will be discussed in the chapter below. However, it is worth noting now that digital innovation has broadened the media landscape both globally and personally to a level significantly sufficient for Shoemaker and Reese to see a need for the change in labeling, among other important additions to the theory. To avoid confusion from this point forward the newer terms will be used.

To better understand the specifics of this study as it pertains to audience agency and social institution influences one must first look more fully at the original posits of the hierarchy of influences as well as other theories that relate to the impact of technological innovation and the advent of digital media. Gatekeeping and uses and gratifications theories as they concern user engagement and user experience help inform this study as

does the concept of sticky news or sticky content. These concepts and others are explicated through the lens of the impact of technological innovation in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study specifically looks at the hierarchy of influences as originally proposed (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and newly revised (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). To understand the reasoning behind the arguments of this study, it is helpful to examine other foundational research that led to this inquiry. Three main theories will be discussed: gatekeeping theory, uses and gratifications and sticky news. The impact of technology, financial implications and model adjustments will also be examined.

One of the original lines of research related to the hierarchy of influences is a study of how journalists, as gatekeepers of news and information make their daily decisions as to what is or is not newsworthy and how newsworthy a particular story might be in comparison to other news stories.

Gatekeeping Theory

The theory that inspired the hierarchy of influences was gatekeeping theory, developed by Kurt Lewin (Cassidy, 2006) and adapted for communication studies by David Manning White (1950). It has been widely studied since White's seminal case study was first published.

Gatekeeping examines the process of how "selecting, writing, editing, positioning, scheduling, repeating and otherwise massaging information to become news" (Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2008, p. 128), or in broader terms as the "overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news media is constructed" (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001, p. 233). Unlike hierarchy of influences, gatekeeping theory was not originally an audience-centered area of study, and much of the literature supports this precept, insomuch as audience was rarely considered as an influence in a journalist's

decision-making process as it relates to what makes it in the news and what doesn't. This is an interesting line of reasoning considering that major tenets of mass communication include informing and/or entertaining audiences. One of the few references of audience consideration came from White's original work in which he said: "Stories that pleased readers and informed them of what's going on in the world were selected" (1950, p. 386).

Later gatekeeping research was more inclusive of audience influence on newsroom decision-making processes. Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 54) argue "Therefore the audience has come to influence news content in as much as journalists develop routines based on assumptions or intuitions about the audience."

Shoemaker, Vos and Reese (2008, p. 22) also contend "The basic premise of gatekeeping scholarship is that messages are created from information about events that has passed through a series of gates and has been changed in the process. Some information ends up on a newspaper's front page, some in the middle of a newscast or web page, and some never makes it into the news at all. Similarly, an event may appear in some news media but not others. Or information may be given the most prominent placement in one medium but buried inside another."

A particular line of research that grew out of gatekeeping theory, hierarchy of influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and fills in the gaps by exploring in depth the reasons behind the choices that gatekeepers make. As currently presented (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), there are five levels of analysis to be considered for the hierarchal influences: individual, routine, organizational characteristics, social institution and social systems.

Hierarchy of Influences

As originally written, the hierarchy of influences is a series of levels of factors that consciously or subconsciously affect the decision-making processes of news producers in their gatekeeping role; where they decide what is newsworthy and just how newsworthy it might be. Starting with the individual level, the original hierarchy model then moves to the routines level, organizational level, social institution level, and the social systems level. Originally, the authors proposed that these levels of influence were in subsuming order (Shoemaker & Reese, 1994), but the latest addition of the book, *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century*, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) suggest that is no longer the case. Despite it no longer being a “hierarchy,” the name of this theoretical model has not changed. However, the names of some of the levels have changed; the former “ideology” level is renamed “social systems” and the former extra-media level is renamed “social institutions.” Another change is that some of the same influences are included in more than one level, making them no longer mutually exclusive. For example, sources are in the routines level and also the social institutions level (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 108). The authors justify this by saying that sources have become routinized but also institutionalized (p. 108). What was once termed the competition and included in the extra-media level is now called “inter-media influence” in the social institution level and also in the routines and organizational levels (p. 113). Public relations is also included in two different levels. The new levels thus operate more as conceptual definitions than as operational definitions.

Among the many decisions journalists as gatekeepers make and the hierarchy theory explains, are whether a story should be front-page above the fold or is it one column-inch on page six of the newspaper? Is it the lead story of the “A-block” or “C-block”

in the nightly newscast? Does this story even warrant a place in the paper or cast? Now there are other decisions to make for digital platforms at news organizations. Does this story need video or photos; maybe it needs an interactive element or other multimedia format. When is it promoted on social media, if at all? A journalist on some level of a news organization answers all of those questions; and that journalist is affected by a number of influences, both internal and external, that go into the process of answering those questions.

For the "individual" level of influence some of the socio-psychological forces at play include education, age, socioeconomic background, geographic location and origin; family background and religious beliefs play a role, as well as political and ideological beliefs, biases and affiliations. At this level, the accumulated personal history of an individual influences his or her decision-making (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Influences on the "routines" level include regular practices one might engage in during the course of a journalist's daily activities of newsgathering and storytelling. Making phone calls, researching the story on and off line, meeting with and interviewing sources, developing professional relationships, meeting deadlines, writing, perhaps shooting photos, videos and editing, engaging on social media and meeting with editors or producers. Engaging on social media as part of the routine of a journalist is one of the examples of why audiences must be considered in this level of influence. According to two specific studies (Lee et al., 2014; Vu, 2013), digital media innovations including audience tracking and data analytics tools afford journalists the ability to check on audience interests trending online. Results of both studies indicate newsroom decisions are influenced by Web metrics and clicks as well as social media engagement with topics of the

day (Lee et al., 2014; Vu, 2013). These are only some examples of routines that journalists would engage in and are not exhaustive nor are any of the other examples for other levels of influence. There are other routines in practice, such as having multiple sources for a story in an attempt to afford different perspectives, according credit to sources or allowing anonymity in certain situations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). In the latest version, the routines level now includes audiences, other news organizations, and “suppliers of content,” such as official and expert sources, which is one of the influences studied in this research. Sources are also incorporated into the social institutions level in this conceptualization, with the authors saying, “We also can regard sources as a routines-level influence” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 108). That is, listing the entirety of possible influences is not the purpose of this study; it is to better understand the interplay of all influences that come together in the formation of newsroom decisions. Influences at this level and the social institutions level, described below, are the focus of this study.

In the “organizational” level, influences begin to become less internalized in a real sense, as external forces such as company policies infringe upon decision-making processes. Other influences on this level would include where an individual journalist might fall in the structural flowchart of a news organization, whether s/he be an editor, a columnist, a beat reporter or a publisher; each position would come with a certain amount of responsibility and autonomy that would allow for more or fewer restrictions on decision-making ability. A news organization could be enterprise oriented, allowing its journalists more freedom in how they generate and tell stories, or the organization could be bureaucratically operated with strict guidelines on how the storytelling process is conducted (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). A journalist could be reporting for a conservatively

or liberally biased organization with an implied ideological stance from which to tell stories. Again this is not a complete list of influences on this level of the hierarchy of influences, simply some examples to consider.

At the “social institution” level, which was formerly called the “extra-media level” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 95), are the forces outside of the media structures themselves. In addition to renaming this level, the authors have redefined it and moved some of the influences formerly contained here to other levels, such as the routines level, in order to better fit with the new conceptual definition of “institutions.” Advertisers are still included in this level, along with the commercial marketplace, government policy, and public relations – another influence that is included in the routines level as well as this one. Again, the levels are now more conceptual than operational, with the same actors being included in more than one level. As the authors say, what is measured here is how “professionals *perceive* influences exerted on them from outside the organization” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 128).

The “social systems” level, formerly termed “ideology,” is probably the hardest to recognize because it is like the air we breathe. On a societal level, it is there all the time and perceived to be everywhere. It is “The American Way” or “Mother Russia” -- a way of life that we engage in but of which we are incognizant. We take for granted that we are a capitalist society, which means that our “press” is more than a social function, but also a business industry where people need to make profits and satisfy stockholders. We don’t pay attention to the fact that we are a Federal Republic, with a constitution and a First Amendment that allows a free press to operate fairly autonomously from governmental oversight. Those in North Korea or Somalia would have completely different ideological

worldviews from the US and from each other but would not consciously make that distinction on a regular basis while carrying out their daily activities.

While all the levels of influence are reviewed above, all are not incorporated into this research. Because it is important to constrain a study to a manageable level, this research examines specific influences at the social institution and routines level, namely advertisers, the competition, local officials, and, of course, audiences. Future research can incorporate other actors; however, the purpose here is to compare audiences to other important actors that influence journalists, not to comprehensively compare all possible actors (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

This study broadly proposes that audiences today have more influence than they had in pre-digital media environments; however, before making specific hypotheses, it is necessary to examine some of the reasons why such changes are proposed to have occurred, primarily the impact of technology.

The Impact of Technology

Technological innovation is listed in the social institution level of the hierarchy of influences as the model was originally proposed. This study does not propose to examine its role as a measurable variable, but its influence cannot be ignored. Technological innovation is at the core of the invention of digital forms of media and plays a huge role in the shifting ways we operate in our daily lives. There is an all-new digital lexicon to describe the things now done digitally on a broad scale. Millions of online and mobile users now virtually accomplish a world of global activities from the comfort of their homes. Using the term “virtually” is literal, in that the digital sphere is a virtual system built on a network

of millions of computers connected on the World Wide Web, using commercially developed tools.

This new lexicon is a reflection of how media technological innovation affects our lives (Schmierbach & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2012). Digital media users now “google,” the verb derived from the proper noun Google. Users also skype (verb for Skype), friend (verb for making Facebook connections), text (mobile phone connections), tweet (verb describing micro-blogging activity on Twitter) and a myriad of other activities including map-questing, SIM building, virtual dating, e-mailing and e-shopping. One might even ask: “Do you still Yahoo?” The point is that we live in a world not only of computer mediated communication, but also of computer mediated living.

In the updated model Shoemaker and Reese (2014) discuss the impact innovation has had in blurring the lines between journalists and citizen activist organizations and bloggers, such as Wiki Leaks. This has created a new struggle for legitimization among traditional news organizations and the new entrants into online news and information creators. In fact, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) posit that online, the lines between news and information themselves have become blurred. Another effect of digital media has been the struggle news organizations in countries such as China have faced, trying to balance appeasing audiences for advertising dollars while remaining within limits that the government will tolerate. Media transition and disruption have transformed many of the traditional modes of social institutions in the new globalized environment (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

To ignore the profound societal impact that digital media has had and is continuing to have would be similar to minimizing the human impact of the wheel, the clock, the

written word, the motorized engine, electricity, the printing press, manned flight or space travel. Each of these media has transformed human interaction spatially and temporally. The term media is used here with a duality of meaning because we are discussing digital news media; roughly defined, a medium is something that carries, transports, or contains any given substance, and to a certain extent each of the above mentioned items do, in fact, carry, transport or contain something. But technological or media determinism will be a topic of another study, perhaps more suited to McLuhan-esque qualitative research.

As diffusion and adoption of digital media technologies and subsequent applications continue along the theoretical paths based on past diffusion models of technology, ideological shifts will occur and audience agency will be a much larger force and an influence that will need to be consciously considered for the continued success of news as a business and public service. “From a normative standpoint, we ask what relationships produce the best quality of news coverage, particularly regarding issues of autonomy and dependence on the state. The US, for example, has a long tradition of prizing journalistic independence, even if it has been more of an ideal than an always accurate description of reality. This norm of journalistic independence encourages the conceptual separation, drawing distinct boundaries between journalism and other social institutions.” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 96).

Sticky News

Especially germane to the influence of technology on journalistic decisions is “sticky news,” which can be defined as news that attracts and keeps the attention of digital news users to a specific news site or news story (Knight, 2010). There has been little research

done directly concerning sticky news. Most research so far has been in the area of sales, marketing, and advertising on digital platforms and has been more about sticky *content* than *news* (Leigh & Best, 2002). There has also been a small amount of research conducted on sticky content as it relates to Web site or mobile media design and search engine optimization (Tarasewich, 2003; Zickuhr & Smith, 2012). Sticky news is basically the same as sticky content but is associated directly with news media (Knight, 2010). The point of the distinction is that while sticky content has not been studied much, sticky news has been studied even less (Edmonds, Guskin, & Rosenstiel, 2011; Emmett, 2007; Hall, 2007).

While any form of news that attracts and holds audiences' attention is by definition "sticky," much of the research on it directly relates to interactive applications, and multimedia production on digital news sites (Boczkowski, 2004; Chung, 2008a; Chung & Yoo, 2006; Domingo, 2008). Typically, data have been collected through content analyses, interviews, and surveys. While all these studies shed greater insight into digital media production, they do not make the case for cause-and-effect influences on news producers in their decision-making processes of digital news storytelling (Pauplin, Caleb-Solly, & Smith, 2010; Robinson, 2009; Thurman & Myllylahti, 2009). An experiment is needed to discover whether audiences or other social institutions and routines level actors have greater influence on the decision-making processes of digital journalists, which this study will conduct.

With all of the above stated influences on journalists and news organizations, then considering the financial disruption that digital media inflicted on the news business, media companies are trying to find ways to attract and keep the attention of readers, consumers, audiences or what is now being considered users of news products. News

outlets and other media companies have been trying to find ways to make their digital products and publications more financially viable in the face of shrinking revenues for their non-digital products and publications. Media companies have been using interactive or multimedia content to attract and keep digital users on their Internet and Mobile sites and Apps (Anderson & Rainie, 2011; Garrett, 2012; Tullis & Albert, 2008). These methods of attracting and keeping digital news users are more commonly referred to as *sticky news* (Kominers, 2009). This concept has had application in the study of gaming from a sales perspective. The more engaged a gamer becomes with a particular digital game, the more the game developers can provide or sell newer versions of that particular game, much like a sequel to a popular, block-buster movie (Anderson & Rainie, 2012). Game developers can then develop spin-offs, much like sit-coms or other popular TV show. With newer online games or mobile app games developers have opted for an advertiser based revenue model; giving the games away for free or very little cost to the users, but relying on selling the number of users and time spent with the game to their advertisers. There are a variety of ways that these financial models are developed, but the bottom line is that it still comes down to attracting and keeping the attention of digital product users for financial gain.

The concept of *sticky news* follows the *sticky content* concept in very similar way; it says a news organization sells users eyes, or page views, click-through percentages and a myriad of other measurement data to its advertisers, much like older models of ad sales for printed or broadcast products, but with new forms of measurement better suited to digital media. An example of sticky news might be a story that engages users by using an interactive map that allow users to click on or hover over any part of the map and as the cursor moves over the map it will show statistical news data or various information

pertaining to that story, but on a hyper-local manner based on which part of the map the cursor is hovering over or clicking on; the longer the time spent hovering or clicking the stickier the device would be considered (Metzgar, Kurpius, & Rowley, 2011). This, of course, means that the more time the user spends clicking or hovering on the map, the longer the opportunity for the advertiser, who places an ad adjacent to the map or sponsors the map with branding signage, has for the user to see.

Simply put, unlike a newspaper, or broadcast, where advertisers were once comfortable with estimates of how many readers, viewers or listeners a news story receives, these same advertisers are unwilling to financially commit to revenue equal investment online, even with the plethora of analytic tools available to measure just how engaged users might be (Lee et al., 2014). With this in mind, Vu (2013) found that many editors reported only checking digital analytics as a means of tracking audience behavior and not as a means of responding to audience wants. Measuring how much a user actually interacts with a story is much more viable for advertisers to measure engagement on digital platforms (Picard, 2002). Sticky forms of digital storytelling provide more of this type of interactive analytical data (Tullis & Albert, 2008).

In this study, sticky news is incorporated as the “storytelling forms” that audiences and other social institution actors prefer and from among which journalists have to choose. Specifically, this study uses in-depth stories, interactive graphics, reader polls, data-visualization such as maps, videos, citizen-generated reports, and social media as the storytelling forms preferred by audiences and other social institution actors.

Uses and Gratifications

To better examine whether audience agency has more influence over other social institution and routines level influences, it is important to understand the motivations digital users have for going online and what type of news and information might be stickier and in what forms those stories are told. Uses and gratifications could be called the flip-side of the same coin with the hierarchy of influences; uses and gratifications looks at the decision-making processes of audiences, which have a direct connection to the journalists who are trying to attract and keep the attention of those audiences. To date, most research has been done from an audience or consumer perspective (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Tullis & Albert, 2008). Many of these studies explore notions of user engagement and user experience. In scholarly research user engagement and user experience are theoretical models that are derived under the umbrella of the theory known as *uses and gratifications* (Ballard, 2007; Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Roto, Hassenzahl, Vermeeren, & Kort, 2009).

Three primary reasons have been identified in studies of uses and gratifications for online media consumption: information gathering, social interactivity and entertainment (Chung & Yoo, 2006; Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Each of these motivations has been connected to interactivity and multimedia as a means of measuring user engagement (Rosenkrans, 2009).

Information Gathering: Unlike traditional mass media that require audiences to wait for a television outlet to broadcast the news of the day or the newspapers' latest edition to hit the streets, online news can be asynchronously and actively searched for by online users. News seekers can get the news they want, in as many forms as they like, when they want it (Chung, 2009, 2008b). Users also have the ability to search out and consume their

news in a non-linear or more self-directed fashion than was previously available. When designing their news packages, online journalists must remain cognizant of this freedom that users enjoy, keeping their content immediate, searchable and hyper-linkable. These characteristics add to the perceived interactivity by users in that they can more directly guide their own news consumption (Pauplin et al., 2010).

Another aspect of interactivity is ease of use. Online consumers want their information gathering to be as unfettered as possible by cumbersome modes of storytelling (Thornton & Keith, 2009). Form following function is one way to consider design and usability for online news Web sites (Bivens, 2008). The use of multimedia afforded to storytelling allows journalists to report information in a concise and complete format providing rich detail and context with less effort required from users to absorb that information. Properly executed, multimedia should enhance user engagement. When used as a gimmick, multimedia could be a detriment to online journalism. Each story should be told in its most organic form, allowing users to better find and consume the news in its most understandable and easy-to-use fashion (Singer, 2006, 2001).

Social Interactivity: Online users have been given a worldwide outlet to publish and disseminate their thoughts and opinions to unprecedented numbers of others. Blogs, social networks and user groups have all fostered an atmosphere of self-efficacy and agency for online news consumers that are causing online newsrooms to rethink their relationships with their audiences (Newhagen & Cordes, 1995). Online news consumers expect more access to online journalists and more transparency from them (Deuze, 2003). The 'we write, you read' model of traditional newsrooms no longer works in the online environment. Users want a sense of authorship in the news they consume (Potter, 2007).

Open channels such as reporter blogs allow users to better know online journalists and offer users a voice to communicate with news providers (Bichard, 2006). Open channels for user-generated news reports also have become integral for many online newsrooms. CNN.com's iReport is one example of how large news organizations are inviting audiences to have more of a participatory partnership rather than traditional one-way relationships of the past (Cooper, 2008).

Entertainment: While listed as third in the ranking for reasons people are using the Internet, entertainment could play heavily in online newsroom decision-making. Past research would suggest that entertainment value has been a major consideration for traditional news media (Domingo, 2008). Rich content such as video, animation, audio slideshows and interactive Flash presentations all could have entertainment value in online news presentations. Other database-generated online presentations (Robinson, 2009), such as the New York Times' 2008 presidential Election Day word cloud, have captured the attention of online consumers.

As stated earlier, uses and gratifications models formed from a user engagement experience perspective, including the plethora of choice, asynchronous nature of digital communication and technical ease for user generation of content, imply an extent of agency enough to apply influence on the decision-making for digital publications, but as an audience-centered course of study, they offer limited insight into the full scope of decision-making processes gatekeepers use to determine how news products are presented.

Financial Impact

On at least two of the levels of influence, "organizational" and "social institution" (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), financial concerns of legacy media have been directly affected

by digital media (Anderson, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Chyi & Yang, 2009). Another major financial reason why audiences have a greater sense of agency is because news is now available to anyone possessing a computer, smart-phone or other digital device and an Internet connection. Although the production of news products was once prohibitively expensive, it is now widely available and easily accessible. Desktop publishing, video and photo editing tools are now ubiquitous computing tools used by millions who would never have had access to mass audiences in the pre-digital age (Gillmor, 2008; Hermida, 2010; Jarvis, 2009).

Digital media both on the Internet and mobile devices was once deemed to be the domain of young people (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). The generations known as “digital natives,” those born after 1990, and millennials, those born in the 1980s, were originally at the forefront of this “prosumer” attitude of participatory news use (Royal, 2012). Prosumers are those who consume digital media and also produce digital media on an amateur level. In the era of Web 2.0, these digital pioneers did not simply consume the news, but through the use of blogs and social networks, they shared the news, reviewed it, and mashed it up into news content with context and perspective not originally suggested by professional media (Jarvis, 2009). In this environment, friends and others with access to these mash-ups might even mash-up the mash-ups for yet another version of the day’s news and events (Hermida, 2010). As traditional news audiences continue to diminish through attrition, it is the new news *users* that need to be attracted to and kept engaged on digital news platforms. This phenomenon is one of the primary reasons this study proposes that audiences have become more important influences in journalists’ decision making. While these many studies have examined how users of online content have gained a greater

agency through choice abundance, there have not been many direct studies on how this greater audience agency has affected the production of digital news media (Knight, 2010).

Is it simply because these devices are available or that other digital media companies, such as YouTube or Google, are finding success with rich media and interactive content? Could it be that other digital news outlets are using these digital features in their storytelling or that advertisers and audience measurement companies are suggesting the use of rich media and interactivity as a means of creating sticky news? There is evidence in this type of reasoning in two separate studies on completely different topics.

Two studies indicate that rich media found online might be inferior to printed and photographic media that can be found in off-line storytelling. The first study, using a secondary analysis of Pew data, conducted by (Chyi & Yang, 2009) on media economics concludes that, as far as intent to pay is concerned, news consumers considered print products more desirable than digital products. Chyi (2012) has also found this to be the case in many other studies conducted on media economics. The second study concerns moral reasoning and ethics in news (Meader, Knight, & Coleman, 2012). Using an experimental method, this study sought to examine whether a text only story, text with photograph story or text with video, either one pass as in television or multiple passes that would be available online produced higher or lower levels of moral reasoning. Results of this study indicated that higher moral reasoning was reached for those participants that saw the text and photograph, and the lowest score was found for who saw the video multiple times. What this study found was that higher levels of moral reasoning were achieved by those participants who were treated with stories with highly descriptive written stories and a photo than did those who were treated with a single pass video

resembling a TV video and those who were able to see the video replayed three times, much like something online. The results of this study would then suggest that one form of rich media, online video, would be inferior to the more traditional legacy forms of storytelling, printed and photographic media, at least when it comes to improving audiences' moral judgment. The results of these two completely different studies and approaches would indicate that rich media forms of storytelling, found online, can be inferior to printed and photographic media found in off-line and traditional or legacy forms of storytelling. So then, one might ask: Why would digital news producers believe that rich media and interactive media would be stickier than traditional written storytelling? According to these two studies rich, flashy video and graphics do not seem to attract or keep the attention of online news users. Despite this, many news producers are filling sites with rich content.

Similarly, ethnographic studies have shown that there is greater use of rich media on digital platforms, but again they leave the question of why unanswered. Surveys and interviews have yielded some answers concerning why news producers are using rich media, but a problem of self-reporting the answers to questions concerning why digital news producers are using rich media might not fully get to the influences underlying the decision-making processes of digital news producers (Pauplin et al., 2010; Perigoe, 2009). This study aims to fill this gap.

The 21st Century Model

The hierarchy of influences describes the forces and pressures applied to news producers' decision-making processes in the newsroom in their daily gate keeping functions as journalists (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996a; Shoemaker, Vos, & Reese, 2008; Singer, 2001). It is proposed here that an experimental study is needed to examine the

hierarchy of influences as it relates to digital news production and the decision-making processes involved concerning the use of rich media as a means of producing sticky news.

As stated earlier, there are other levels of influence at play in the decision-making process that cannot be totally mitigated in any of the research methods one might use to study this phenomena, thus it is important to partially mitigate organizational or routines influences. In this study, that is accomplished by placing the journalists' decisions in the context of *actual* or *ideal* conditions. Past research concerning how people make decisions has shown that it varies under *actual* conditions and perceived *ideal* conditions (Allen & Judd, 2007; Kleman, 2007; Peterson & O'Dell, 1950). Actual versus ideal situations or scenarios have been used in previous research; primarily in the study of psychology, sociology and business or sales and marketing (Allen & Judd, 2007; Jackson, 1998; Moshiri & Cardon, 2014; Zarefsky, 2006). *Ideal* conditions reflect one's preference (Strauss, Morry, & Kito, 2012) whereas *actual* conditions refer to how something really is (Mannell, Walker, & Eiji, 2014). It also reflects the difference in what one *wants* to experience versus what one actually experiences (Scheibe, English, Tsai, & Carstensen, 2013). It is also defined as evaluating something in the best possible manner rather than according to reality, that is idealized or best practices versus realistic ones (Casad, Salazar, & Macina, 2015). For example, in this study, journalists might face constraints in their real-life newsroom such as not enough staff to produce an in-depth report, or no one with the skills or hardware to shoot and edit video, or lack of software to code websites, or Premier to edit video. Large newsrooms may be better equipped and have more time to devote to such projects than small ones; those with younger employees, or those naturally inclined toward the high-tech may be more able to produce interactive graphics, for example, than those with older or

more traditional staffers. All these limitations reflect actual conditions. Under hypothetical ideal conditions, none of these limitations would matter and journalists could choose any storytelling form without worrying about the ability to execute it. In this study, actual conditions incorporate the influences from the other levels in the hierarchy model, whereas ideal conditions would mitigate them, particularly organizational or routine influences.

Shoemaker and Reese (2014) moved audiences out of the social institutions (formerly extra-media) level, but, as a constituent group, the audience is a powerful although loosely formed institution much like a labor union or voting block that needs to be considered and paid attention to. Also the ambiguity of *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century* (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) still maintains the name of the theoretical model called the hierarchy of influences, but claims now that there is no longer a hierarchical order of subsuming levels. Other studies (Lee et al., 2014; Vu, 2013) suggest that audiences now play a greater role in the gate-keeping decisions of the newsroom, which suggest there still are levels of influence and audiences have more influence in the digital environment. This study's model follows that evidence.

Chapter 3: Hypotheses & Research Question

The specific hypotheses in this study are predicated upon the technological innovations that have changed some of the ways journalists gather, produce, publish, present and disseminate the news. It is therefore likely that these changes have implications that have caused shifts on the forces or influences in the hierarchy model. While much research has been done that claims audiences are more important to journalists' decisions than other influences, it has been conducted primarily through content analyses, which examine how content reflects longitudinal responses to web analytics (Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014), surveys that ask journalists to self-report their perceived influences, some with low response rates (Vu, 2013), ethnographies that observe newsroom activities and discussions using qualitative methods of analysis (Domingo, 2008; MacGregor, 2007). While all these studies shed light onto the shifts in influences caused by digital media production, they are unable to point directly to the cause and effect relationship that an experiment affords (Pauplin et al., 2010; Robinson, 2009; Thurman & Myllylahti, 2009). These studies are correlational in nature and do not allow inferences of cause and effect the way this study will. Because of that gap in our knowledge, this study begins with hypotheses that predict significant *differences* in the decisions of journalist participants but does not initially specify a direction of those differences. That is, existing literature allows confidence in predicting that journalists will be differentially affected by the influences brought to bear on them by audiences, advertisers, sources, and the competition, but there is not yet enough evidence to say which of these will exert the most influence. Furthermore, a non-directional hypothesis allows for the possibility that influences might be in the *opposite* direction that are predicted; that is, a two-tailed

hypothesis is appropriate when effects in either direction are theoretically possible. It would be theoretically and practically important to know if advertisers, sources, and the competition are actually more influential than audiences as well as the reverse

A second component of the first set of hypotheses is to understand and parse out the other levels of influence at play in the decision-making process. These cannot be totally mitigated in any of the research methods one might use to study this phenomena, thus it is important to partially mitigate organizational or routines influences. In this study, that is accomplished by placing the journalists' decisions in the context of *actual* or *ideal* conditions, with actual conditions reflecting the constraints and limitations of each journalists' real-life newsroom, and ideal conditions freeing them from those constraints (Allen & Judd, 2007; Kleman, 2007; Peterson & O'Dell, 1950). Ideal conditions reflect a perfect world (Strauss et al., 2012), and actual conditions refer to how something really is (Mannell et al., 2014). In this study, actual conditions incorporate the influences from the other levels in the hierarchy model, whereas ideal conditions would mitigate them, particularly organizational or routine influences.

By randomly assigning journalists to the treatment condition, where they know the storytelling preferences of various influences, or to the control conditions where they do not, allows this experiment to say that a specific manipulation is responsible for causing any effects. Finally, by measuring and controlling for the type of media the journalist works for, this study further ensures that effects are not being caused by confounds such as working for a digitally oriented newsroom or a primarily print medium, large or small organization with corresponding resources.

Thus, the first set of hypotheses is:

H1a: Journalists who know the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors will make significantly different decisions than those who do not know under *actual* conditions, controlling for the type of media they work for.

The second part of this hypothesis deals with *ideal* conditions, and predicts:

H1b: Journalists who know the audience and other influences will *not* choose a storytelling form that is significantly different from journalists who do not know, controlling for the type of media they work for.

While this second part of the first hypothesis may appear to be a null hypothesis, it is really a negatively worded research hypothesis because it states a prediction of what should occur under ideal conditions if the theory is accurate; that is, no influences should be more or less important than any other. Using a negatively written hypothesis as the research hypothesis is acceptable for experiments when it best communicates the operational purpose of a study. "As long as it is able to do this successfully, it makes no difference whether it is stated negatively or positively," (Bausell, 1994, 41)

The first pair of hypotheses predicts a *difference* between participants who know and those who do not know storytelling preferences, but it does not specify a *direction* of those differences, which is the purpose of H2a and H2b. This study proceeds with caution, for if there is no difference, then specifying a direction is a moot point. If the first hypotheses are supported, testing the second set involves examining the above results for direction. This study broadly proposes that audiences today have more influence than other actors based on correlational studies showing that audiences have become more important as the financial disruption that digital media inflicted on the news business has media companies trying to find ways to attract and keep the attention of audiences (Lee,

2013; Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014; Vu, 2013). Media companies have been using interactive or multimedia content to attract and keep digital users on their Internet and Mobile sites and Apps (Anderson & Rainie, 2011; Garrett, 2012; Tullis & Albert, 2008), that is, using sticky news storytelling forms. Also, as traditional news audiences continue to diminish, it is the news *users* that need to be attracted to and kept engaged on digital news platforms. This phenomenon is one of the primary reasons this study proposes that audiences have become more important influences in journalists' decision making.

This study proposes that technological innovation in digital media has sufficiently shifted or elevated audience to a degree that substantiates the argument that audiences now have an elevated influence on the decision-making process in the newsroom. The next set of hypotheses again incorporate actual and ideal conditions, and type of media worked for as a control variable, for the same reasons stated above. The second set of hypotheses, which are directional, predict:

H2a: Under *actual* conditions, journalists who know the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors will choose audiences significantly more than those who do not know the storytelling preferences, controlling for the type of media they work for.

H2b: Under *ideal* conditions, journalists who know the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors will *not* choose audiences significantly more than participants who do not know, controlling for the type of media they work for.

The final hypothesis studies only the treatment group – the participants who knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and actors – and examines differences between actual and ideal conditions, making a prediction in the direction of other actors over audiences under real conditions. It posits that market forces would be at work when

making real decisions, thus, participants would be less influenced by audiences and more by advertisers, competitors, and local officials, when making actual decisions than when making decisions under ideal conditions. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) cite two examples of market forces influencing storytelling decisions in the media. One study concerning journalists decision-making processes (Karlsson et al., 2012) used different terminology to describe this phenomena. The authors found that market forces did influence news decisions and that there were significant differences between what journalist thought ideally “*normative*” should be reported and what would actually be reported.

H3: Journalists who know the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors will be significantly less likely to choose audiences under ideal conditions than under actual conditions.

In analyzing the third hypothesis, there is no need for covariates because the subjects received both actual and ideal conditions and therefore acted as their own controls.

Finally, the following research questions have two purposes: The first research question is to determine what journalists in this study thought were the most important influences on their storytelling decisions in order to compare their self-reported *perceived* influences against the actors they were actually influenced by in the unobtrusive conditions of the experiment. Much research has documented differences in how people *actually* behave and how they *think* they behave (Karlsson et al., 2012). This experimental design is intended to mitigate the constraints of self-reported data of perceived decision-making influences to actual influences. Other experiments on decision-making processes have also implemented designs to help explicate what journalists perceive to be the basis for their

reasoning and what is actually motivating their decisions. For example, one ethical study found that while journalists believed they treated protagonists of scenarios with either middle-upper socio-economic class Chileans or lower socioeconomic class Chileans, under certain conditions, had lower moral reasoning scores when reporting on the lower class citizens. While the journalists involved would self-report no biases in their news coverage surrounding the stereotypical schemas between middle-upper and lower classes the results of the experiment revealed significant differences in actual decisions (Correa, 2009). A survey in Sweden found significant differences in journalists' choices of what is news under actual and normative conditions – another term for “ideal” (Karlsson et al., 2012). Another study concerning framing theory finds similar dissonance between how journalists view or self-report their decision-making influences and their actual decisions (Brüggemann, 2014). In both studies gatekeeping and the hierarchy of influences were cited but were not the main focus of the study. This study focuses on those influences directly.

RQ 1: What influences do journalists *perceive* to be most important in their storytelling decisions, and do they differ from actual influences?

The purpose of the second research question is to compare the influences in online versus offline conditions to further extend our understanding of how the influences on digital media production are different from the influences in traditional media production. For example, in the 24/7 news cycle of digital platforms, scooping the competition may be more important than it is in the traditional news cycle where deadlines are longer and fewer.

RQ2: Do journalists' perceived influences on their storytelling choices differ between online and offline platforms?

Chapter 4: Methods

For this study, a controlled experiment online was used to explore whether audiences exerted a greater influence than other actors (advertisers, competition, and community leaders) on journalists' decisions about which storytelling forms to use. Influence is measured by how often participants choose storytelling forms that are preferred by audiences compared with how often they choose forms preferred by others. If journalists choose audience-preferred storytelling forms significantly more often than the preferred forms of other influences, that will provide support for the idea that audiences now have an elevated influence on the decision-making process in the newsroom. A second goal was to explore those influences under actual and ideal conditions, that is, what journalists said they *would* do in reality versus what they said they *should* do, and to compare that with what they said they *perceived* to be the greatest influences on their decisions about how to tell stories. Qualitative responses were sought to aid in understanding the reasons behind the choices.

Participants.

This study used working journalists as participants. Email addresses of the journalists were obtained using a comprehensive list culled from Cision, a database that stores information about professional news organizations and their employees in the U.S.

As an incentive, participants were offered the opportunity to be entered in a drawing to win an iPad. A power analysis using G Power indicated that 130 to 150 subjects were needed for this study, 65 to 75 per group. The first 145 participants to respond were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control condition.

Stimuli.

Four scenarios about news events that journalists might cover were written by the researcher, a former broadcast news journalist with 32-years of media experience. (See Appendix A for complete wording of stories). Each scenario was approximately 50 words long. In the technology company story, participants were told that a highly successful tech company may relocate to their town. Their products are popular and they are high profile and could bring prestige to the community along with new jobs. In the storm story, participants were told that a strong tropical storm may hit their area in the next few days and that getting information, photos, videos, and hyper-local coverage from the audience could be helpful. For the light rail story, participants were told that the city council proposed a light rail system last year that was highly debated and heavily covered. It has both strong support and opposition, and the council is evenly split on the issue. It is coming up for another vote at the next meeting, with a call for a bond proposition added to the next election. The election story is about a special election for mayor. There hasn't been much time for voters to get to know the five candidates and participants are told to do something to help voters get to know the candidates quickly. All participants in both treatment and control conditions get this information. Treatment group participants get additional information with each story about what storytelling forms the audience and four social institution influences prefer, explained below.

Design.

This was a 2 x 2 mixed factorial design. The first factor was knowledge of influences (know/don't know), that is, whether the participant knew the storytelling preferences (polls, in-depth story, video, maps, etc.) of the various actors. Those who knew the

storytelling preferences represented the treatment group, and those who did not represented the control group. The second factor was decision condition – actual or ideal. Message repetition was achieved by using four stories about the issues of an election, a high-tech firm moving into town, a storm, and a proposed high-speed rail line.

The first factor was between subjects: participants received all four stories in only one condition – either they knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and other influences or they did not for all four stories.

The second factor was within subjects: all participants were asked to make decisions under both actual and ideal conditions. This was operationalized by asking participants to “think about how the story *should* be best told, in a hypothetical ideal situation” for the ideal conditions, and “how you would *actually* tell the story based on the situation that you currently work in” for the actual conditions. Because all the journalists in this study made decisions under both the actual and ideal conditions, they acted as their own controls, ensuring that individual differences were not responsible for any effects found. In addition, all participants were randomly assigned to the treatment or control condition, ensuring that any individual differences that may affect their decisions were equally distributed to both conditions.

The story issue served as message repetition in order to ensure that the topic itself was not responsible for any effects.

Procedure.

After a manipulation check, described below, the online experiment was uploaded and distributed using the Qualtrics research platform. It took participants an average of 15 minutes to complete. Participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment or

control groups. Participants were first presented with a scenario that journalists would typically face in deciding how to best tell a story. For example, the tech story read: “There is the possibility that a highly successful technology company may relocate to your town. Their products are very popular, they are a high profile company that would bring more prestige to your community and would offer many new jobs to your population.” The control group read only this information. The treatment group also got information about which storytelling forms different social institution actors preferred. For example, the treatment group’s scenario about the tech company then said: “You have one competitor in town also offering a digital publication; you hear that they are planning to do an in-depth series of written articles, because they have a philosophy that there is more room for this type of storytelling online. Your advertisers want to see more interactive storytelling applications, such as reader polling that would keep consumers engaged longer to allow a better opportunity to see ads around the story. Some town leaders, such as the Economic Development Council and The Chamber of Commerce want to see some data-visualization with proposed fiscal growth projections and City Hall wants to show maps of how traffic would be affected. National research shows that your readers and online audience are responding well to your video and photographic storytelling methods and spend more time watching your videos than any of your other storytelling methods.” The treatment group received information about specific storytelling preferences of influences including the competition, advertisers, local officials, and the audience. This allows the researcher to see if knowing the influence made a difference in which storytelling form the journalists chose. The storytelling forms were rotated among the four social institution actors so that the researcher could be certain that it was the preferences of the actors that journalists were

influenced by, not the storytelling forms themselves. For example, in the tech company story, video was the preference of audiences, but it was the preference of community leaders in the election story. All four scenarios were written to be the same length (approximately 50 words) both treatment and control groups received the 50-word scenarios. The treatment group also got information about the storytelling preferences of the influences; this information was the same length for all four scenarios, approximately 50 additional words.

Following the scenario, participants were asked the following questions:

Independent Variables' Operationalization.

The first IV, knowing or not knowing the storytelling preferences of audiences and other influences, was operationalized by telling participants which storytelling forms the four actors (audiences, advertisers, community leaders, advertisers) preferred, or not. The second IV, actual and ideal conditions, was manipulated with instructions to subjects to make decisions about which storytelling form to use based on their current, real-world conditions in their actual newsroom, and then to again make decisions as if they were operating under ideal conditions that included no financial or resource constraints. The instructions were: "How do you think this story should be best told?" (ideal condition), and "How do you think, in your current situation, you would actually tell this story?" (actual condition). These instructions represented the manipulation for the second factor, ideal or actual condition. A manipulation check within the experiment confirmed that participants did indeed understand these instructions as intended (reported below).

Dependent Variables' Operationalization.

The dependent variables were the choice of storytelling form participants made. They made these choices for each of the independent variables of actual and ideal conditions.

Response choices for both actual and ideal conditions were the storytelling form they would use to tell each story. Each of the story scenarios offered four choices of storytelling forms, including an in-depth article, an article with a video, a poll of residents, an interactive map, a team report, freelancers, a news co-op, citizen participation, a Storify series of tweets and Facebook posts, live online chat, and live-streaming. In the interest of ecological validity, the storytelling forms were chosen to be appropriate to the story issue, for example, a live chat with the candidates was offered in the election story, and a team report was offered with the storm story. Each scenario response contained appropriate elaboration about what the storytelling forms would contain; for instance, for the tech company story response choices were, "An in-depth article, *discussing this company's history and products,*" "An article with a video *of the proposed new facility along with photos of the company's other facilities in other cities,*" "A poll of *how residents feel about the possible relocation,*" and "An interactive map *showing how such moves of major companies have improved local economies.*" Participants could choose only one storytelling form, which was associated with one of the actors.

After answering the questions for actual and ideal conditions, participants were asked an open-ended question about what were the major factors in their decision of how to tell this story. Open-ended responses were analyzed qualitatively and are reported in the results section, giving context to the quantitative responses.

After answering these questions, participants were presented with the second scenario, followed by the same three questions, then the third scenario and questions, and the fourth scenario and questions. The order the scenarios were presented in was randomly rotated by the Qualtrics software so as to avoid order effects.

The DVs were measured by scoring a +1 for each time participants chose audiences storytelling preferences and a -1 for each time they chose another actor's storytelling preferences. The decisions for all 4 stories were summed. This resulted in two interval level measures ranging from -4 to +4; one for actual decisions and one for ideal decisions. Repeated measures multivariate analysis of covariance was used to determine if participants who knew the audience and other actors' storytelling preferences chose audience storytelling forms significantly more than participants in the control group, in both actual and ideal conditions. The type of media organization participants worked for was included as a statistical control; it was expected that working for organizations with more resources and greater experience with digital media would influence their storytelling choices under actual conditions. In addition, the choices for each story issue were examined separately using chi square to determine if the story issue made a difference.

After all four scenarios and the above questions associated with them were presented, participants were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important, the following questions: "What are the major factors in your decision of how you would tell this story?" Response choices were: the subject(s) of the story; community leaders; the competition; your audience; your advertisers; and other journalists. This represents their *perceived* influences and will be compared against the influences that

actually affected their decisions in the experiment. Their self-reported perceived influences will be compared with their actual behavior choices using chi square.

Next, two questions asked participants to rank order the same response choices above for online decisions and for offline decisions. Spearman's *rho* will be used to determine if the ranking of influences online and offline are significantly correlated.

Finally, demographic questions asked: "Which best describes your orientation in the news business?" with response choices of print media, electronic media, digital media, a combination of media, and other (please explain) – this was used as a covariate. Also asked was age, education, years in the news business, and gender.

Finally, in order to add context and explanation to the quantitative portion of this study, journalist participants were given open-ended response boxes and asked to explain the major factors in their decision of how to tell the story after each story's set of questions.

Manipulation check.

Before the experiment was conducted, a manipulation check was performed on the scenarios and associated questions in order to determine if ordinary people perceived the link between audiences and other actors and their preferred storytelling forms that represented the treatment condition of the study. That is, if the scenario said the audience preferred video and advertisers preferred in-depth stories, did actual participants recognize this connection?

There were 114 participants in the manipulation check who were not involved in the actual experiment. Half were student journalists recruited from the University of Texas-Austin by obtaining permission of instructors to visit their classes and asking students to participate. The other half were non-students recruited through personal contacts by

email, phone, and Facebook. It was not necessary to have all journalists for the manipulation check as the purpose was to determine if people other than the researchers could detect that audiences and other actors preferred certain storytelling forms; this should be able to be determined by anyone, not just journalists. All manipulation-check participants were offered \$5 Starbucks gift-cards.

Each of the four 50-word story scenarios was presented online followed by four questions, each worded “Journalists most influenced by ____ would tell the story in which manner?” The blanks were filled in with: the competition, advertisers, community leaders, and audiences. The response choices mirrored the storytelling forms in the scenario – in-depth articles, reader polling, data visualization, video, cooperative partnerships with the competition, user-generated content from citizens, freelancers, Storify series of tweets and Facebook posts, and online chats. As done in the actual experiment, storytelling forms were customized to the story issue, so that online chats with a candidate went with the election story, and user-generated content went with the storm coverage, etc.

Independent samples t tests showed that the treatment group chose the correct storytelling form for each of the four influences significantly more often than the control group, indicating that the manipulation worked as it was expected to (See Table 1).

Table 1. Manipulation check t tests comparing treatment group to control groups on correct vs. incorrect answers to which storytelling form was preferred by four influences

Story	Influence	t (df)
Tech Company	Competition	-3.124 (113)***
	Advertisers	-6.107 (113)***
	Leaders	-8.679 (113)***
	Audience	-8.362 (113)***
Storm	Competition	-4.796 (113)***
	Advertisers	-9.711 (113)***
	Leaders	-6.299 (113)***
	Audience	-2.941 (113)***
Rail	Competition	-2.415 (113)***
	Advertisers	-9.596 (113)***
	Leaders	-10.655 (113)***
	Audience	-4.886 (113)***
Election	Competition	-5.392 (113)***
	Advertisers	-12.691 (113)***
	Leaders	-12.229 (113)***
	Audience	-10.572 (113)***

Within the actual experiment with journalist subjects, a manipulation check was performed to ensure that participants understood the instructions associated with making decisions under actual and ideal conditions. Because subjects chose significantly different storytelling forms when making decisions under actual and ideal conditions, it is clear that they did understand the instructions for “actual” conditions to mean their current

newsroom with its constraints on resources, software, personnel, technology, ideology, and the other influences in the hierarchy model, whereas “ideal” meant a perfect world ($F = 124.127, df = 1, p < .001$). Furthermore, the covariate of media type was not significant for ideal condition decisions, but it was significant for actual condition decisions. (Media type: Ideal $F = 14.406, df = 1, p < .175$, Actual $F = 124.127, df = 1, p < .001$). Media type is expected to make a difference in real-world situations because journalists in online or broadcast newsrooms may have more digital resources available to them than those in primarily print-oriented media. Thus, the fact that the media type covariate was significant for actual decisions but not for ideal ones shows that subjects were factoring in their real-world newsroom constraints.

Chapter 5: Results

Descriptives. A total of 144 journalists participated in the study; 51 percent were male and 49 percent were female. Thirty percent were between 50- and 59-years-old; 24 percent were 60 or older; 18 percent were between 40- and 49-years-old; 15 percent from 30- to 30- years-old; and 13 percent were from 18- to 29-years-old. Forty-seven percent had a bachelor’s degree, 22 percent had a graduate degree, 20 percent had some graduate school and 10 percent had some college. None of the participants had only a high-school degree.

A majority of participants, 35 percent, had 30 or more years of experience in media, 28 percent had between 10 and 19 years of experience, 21 percent had one to nine years experience and 16 percent were in the media business from 20 to 29 years.

Forty-one percent said they were print-only journalists, eight percent were digital or broadcast journalists only, and 51 percent said they worked in a combination of media platforms (See Table 2).

Table 2. Frequencies for participants’ demographics

Gender	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>			
	69	67			
Age	<i>18-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60+</i>
	17	20	24	40	32
Education	<i>Some College</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>Some Graduate</i>	<i>Graduate</i>	
	14	65	28	30	
Experience	<i>1-9 Years</i>	<i>10-19 Yrs.</i>	<i>20-29 Yrs.</i>	<i>30+ Yrs.</i>	
	28	37	22	47	
Media Type	<i>Print</i>	<i>Digital Broadcast</i>	<i>Combination</i>		
	56	11	69		

Note: Frequencies do not total to 144 for all categories because some participants did not answer all questions

Because there often are differences between journalists working for different media platforms, this study tested both of these groups on their responses to the questions about choices of storytelling forms under both actual and ideal conditions. Participants identifying as working for print, digital/broadcast and a combination of platforms were compared and showed significant differences between the three groups ($F = 8.15$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$; Combination $M = -1.453$, $SD = 1.6$; Print $M = -2.56$, $SD = 1.232$, Digital/Broadcast $M = -2.10$, $SD = 1.52$); $N = 64$). Planned post-hoc comparisons using Tukey's method showed that print journalists were significantly less likely to choose audiences under actual conditions than the combination platform journalists ($p < .001$); there were no significant differences between broadcast/digital journalists and either print or combination journalists. Because of this, the few participants who identified as digital/broadcast were collapsed with the combination media type in order to have two categories for future use as a covariate.

Also examined was whether length of time working in journalism was significantly correlated with choosing audiences, under both actual and ideal conditions. There was no significant correlation between the number of years a journalist had worked and how they would handle the decisions under either condition (Actual $r = -.088$, $p = .337$, $N = 122$; Ideal $r = .079$, $p = .403$, $N = 115$). Because there were no significant differences based on length of time working in journalism, it was not necessary to use it as a covariate.

In the treatment condition, where participants knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and other social institution influences, they chose audiences on one or more

stories 48% of the time under actual conditions; that rose to 62.4% of the time under ideal conditions. However, participants were not choosing audiences *all* of the time; under both actual and ideal conditions, participants who knew the storytelling preferences chose audiences for all four stories only 2.6% of the time (See Table 3).

This study also tested to see if there were differences between men and women in their choices of storytelling forms under both actual and ideal conditions. Paired samples t tests showed that while there was a significant difference in the storytelling forms chosen by female and male participants in their actual circumstances ($t = -2.52$, $df = 120.52$, $p < .05$), with men being more likely to choose the audience over other social institution influences (Male $M = -1.615$, $SD = 1.636$; Female $M = -2.29$, $SD = 1.33$, $n = 124$), there was no significant difference between genders under ideal circumstances ($t = -1.29$, $df = 115$, $p = .199$; Female $M = -1.18$, $SD = 1.88$; Male $M = -.726$, $SD = 1.935$, $n = 117$). Because gender was not predicted to matter by previous studies or in theory, and it mattered only under the actual condition, to include gender as a covariate would be post-hoc theorizing.

Table 3. Percentages of Audiences’ Storytelling Preferences under Actual and Ideal Conditions Chosen by Participants in Treatment Group

Number of Times Audiences’ Preferences Chosen	Actual Conditions	Ideal Conditions
1	33.8%	31.2%
2	10.4%	20.8%
3	1.3%	7.8%
4	2.6%	2.6%
Total %	48.1%	62.4%

Hypothesis testing. Because there were two dependent variables representing subjects' choice of storytelling forms under the IVs of actual and ideal conditions, a repeated measures MANCOVA was used to correct for chance findings of significance when multiple tests are performed. Using Wilks' Lambda, the omnibus analysis showed a significant effect for the dependent variables considered together ($F = 31,46$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Partial Eta² = .215). The covariate of type of media subjects worked for was significant in the overall test ($F = 10.819$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Partial Eta² = .350). When the dependent measures' univariate analyses were examined, significant effects were obtained for both the within-subjects (actual and ideal) and between-subjects (knew or did not know storytelling preferences of audiences and others) factors.

The first hypothesis, H1a, predicted that journalists who knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors would make significantly different decisions than those who did not know under *actual* conditions, controlling for the type of media they work for. This hypothesis was supported; there was a significant difference in choice of storytelling forms between those who knew the preferences and those who did not under actual conditions ($F = 12.484$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Partial eta² = .098; Know $M = -1.54$, $SD = 1.17$; Don't Know $M = -2.54$, $SD = 1.17$). The covariate of media type was significant ($F = 10.82$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Partial eta² = .086).

The second part of this hypothesis, H1b, dealt with *ideal* conditions, and predicted that journalist participants who knew the audience and other influences would *not* choose a storytelling form that is significantly different from journalists who did not know, controlling for the type of media they work for. While this at first appears to be a null hypothesis, it reflects the appropriate direction of the prediction because decisions under

ideal conditions should be based on the most appropriate way to tell a story, not the preferences of various social institution influences. This hypothesis was *not* supported as participants who knew the influences still chose significantly different storytelling forms from those who did not know, even under ideal conditions ($F = 15.89$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .121$, Observed Power = .584; Know $M = -.508$, $SD = 1.86$; Don't Know $M = -1.37$, $SD = 1.86$). The covariate of type of media subjects worked for was not significant, which is as it should have been if they were following the instructions to make decisions based on a perfect situation and not the environment they actually worked in ($F = 1.68$, $df = 1$, $p = .197$, Partial $\eta^2 = .015$, Observed power = .251).

The first pair of hypotheses predicted a *difference* between participants who knew and those who did not know storytelling preferences, but it did not specify a *direction* of those differences. Testing H2a and H2b involved examining the above results for direction. Recall that participants were given a +1 score for each time they chose audience preferred storytelling forms and a -1 for each time they chose another influence's preferred form. The scores ranged from -4 to +4, with higher means reflecting more choice of audiences. Therefore, under *actual* conditions, those who know the storytelling preferences chose audiences ($M = -1.54$, $SD = 1.70$) significantly more than those who did not know the storytelling preferences ($M = -2.53$, $SD = 1.175$). H2a is supported. It is important to note that even though the differences between means for the two groups were significantly different, the means for those who chose audiences more often were still not very high in favor of audiences. While this difference reached statistical significance, it has less practical significance. It is probably more accurate to say that, participants chose the other influences *less often* when they knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and others.

The prediction of H2b was that under ideal conditions, participants would *not* choose audiences significantly more than participants who did not know; this was not supported because as we saw in H1b journalist participants who knew the storytelling preferences made significantly different decisions, choosing other influences significantly less often than participants who did not know (Know $M = -.509$, $SD = 1.862$; Don't Know $M = -1.375$, $SD = 1.864$).

The above analyses were conducted on the four stories combined. For greater understanding of these results, and to determine if story topic mattered, chi-square analyses were then used to examine each of the four stories independently. Because the dependent measure for the individual stories is a dichotomous measure (1 = chose audience storytelling forms, 0 = did not choose audience storytelling forms), the proper statistical test is a chi square. Hypothesis 1a, that participants who knew storytelling preferences under actual conditions would make significantly different decisions than those who did not know, was supported for all four stories. Hypothesis 1b, that under ideal conditions participants who knew would *not* make significantly different decisions than those who did not, was supported for two of the four stories (See Table 4). The high tech company and the high-speed rail stories produced significant differences between groups, with those who knew the storytelling preferences placing more emphasis on audience preferences than those who did not know even under ideal conditions, where actors' preferences should not have mattered.

Table 4. Chi-square tests between participants who know storytelling preferences vs. participants who do not know in actual and ideal conditions, with frequencies of choosing audiences preferred forms

Story Issue	Actual Condition X^2 (df)	Ideal Condition X^2 (df)
Election	34.69 (3) ^{***}	7.42 (3), $p = .115$
Don't Know f	21	39
Know f	34	50
Rail	40.72 (3) ^{***}	41.04 (3) ^{***}
Don't Know f	24	19
Know f	56	37
Storm	19.46 (3) ^{***}	8.27 (3) $p = .082$
Don't Know f	24	40
Know f	31	35
Tech	46.59 (3) ^{***}	24.16 (3) ^{***}
Don't Know f	23	31
Know f	49	62

*** $p < .001$

Note: For all Chi-square tests, no cells had an expected frequency less than 5

The third hypothesis tested only the treatment group – the participants who knew the storytelling preferences of audiences and other actors – and examined differences between actual and ideal conditions, making a prediction in the direction of other actors over audiences under real conditions. It posited that market forces would be at work when making real decisions, thus, participants would be less influenced by audiences and more

by advertisers, competitors, and local officials, when making actual decisions than when making decisions under ideal conditions. This hypothesis was not supported; instead, there was significance in the *opposite* of the direction predicted ($t = -3.695$, $df = 60$, $p < .001$). Participants who knew the storytelling preferences chose other actors' preferred storytelling forms significantly less often under ideal conditions compared with when they were asked to choose under actual conditions (Actual $M = -1.525$, $sd = 1.68$; Ideal $M = -.51$, $sd = 1.81$). Once again, however, the average number of times that participants chose audiences' preferred storytelling forms was not very high; for example, a mean of .00 means they chose audiences on two stories and other social institution actors on two stories, on average. Statistical significance was reached, but practically, these journalist participants were not overwhelmingly choosing audiences' preferred storytelling forms.

Finally, the research question had two goals, with the first being to determine what the journalists in this study thought were the most important influences on their storytelling decisions, in order to compare their self-reported perceived influences against the actors they were actually influenced by in the unobtrusive conditions of the experiment. For both online and offline influences, participants ranked audiences first in importance. For online storytelling, 39.4% of participants ranked the audience first in importance; for offline storytelling, 66.2% of participants ranked the audience first.

The second purpose of the question was to compare their ranking of perceived influences across online and offline platforms. Participants were asked to rank order the importance of various actors – audience, competition, other journalists, story subjects, community leaders, and advertisers – on their decision-making both online and offline. Their online and offline rankings were then compared with Spearman's *rho*. It found that

participants did indeed perceive different influences online and offline as there was a non-significant correlation between their online and offline rankings ($\rho = .122$, $p = .544$). (See Table 5). However, audiences ranked number one in both online and offline decisions.

Table 5. Rankings of journalists' perceived influences for online and offline storytelling

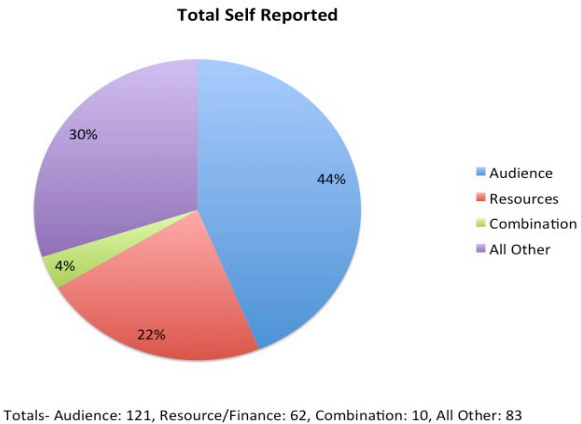
Influences	Online Rank	Offline Rank
Audience	1	1
Competition	2	4
Other Journalists	3	6
Story subjects	4	3
Community leaders	5	2
Advertisers	6	5

Chapter 6: Qualitative Findings

The quantitative portion of this study, where journalist participants were given open-ended response boxes and asked to explain the major factors in their decision of how to tell the story after each story's set of questions, proved to be telling. By far, the overwhelming comment made by these journalists was how important the audience was. Participants cited the audience 44 percent of the time (n = 121), compared to all other explanations at 30 percent (n = 83). Finances or resources were cited 22 percent of the time (n = 62) and a combination of audience and finances or other were cited four percent (n = 10). (See Chart 1)

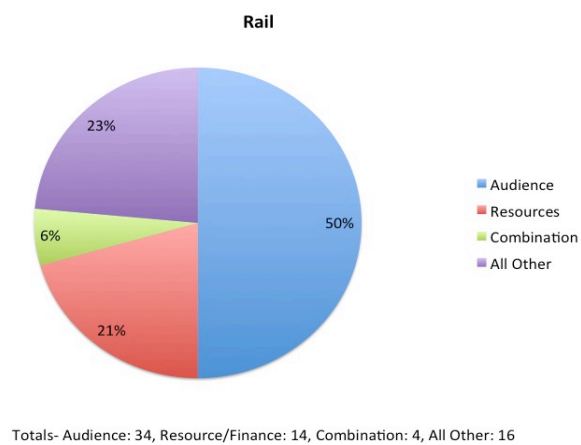
What is interesting about the open-ended questions is that no mention was made about advertisers, community leaders or competition other than to say that none of those influences mattered in the decision-making processes -- to the point of derision in some examples. One participant wrote: "This entire survey is irritating in that it indicates that advertisers' views are even known to me as an assigning editor, let alone a factor in decision-making. If you are consulting with organizations that are guided by advertisers, you are not talking to news organizations, but shoppers or some other kind of ad-driven crap. Has anyone involved with this study ever worked at a legitimate news organization?"

Chart 1. Self-Reported reasons for major influence in the decision-making process for all scenarios combined



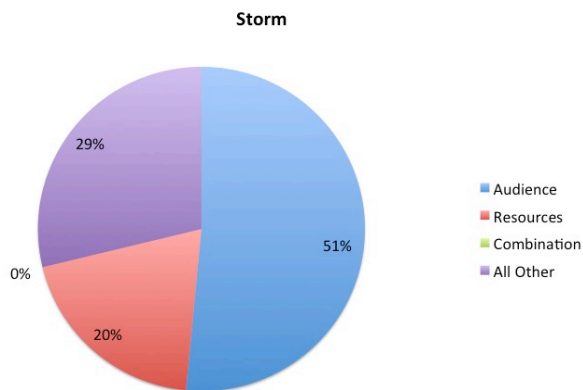
Self-reported answers for the light rail scenario show the highest number of participants citing audiences; 49 percent (n = 34) cited the audience. Participants cited all other explanations 23 percent (n = 16) of the time, finances/resources 21 percent (n = 14) and a combination seven percent (n = 4). Again, advertisers, competition or community leaders are not cited as an influence in any of the scenarios. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2. Self-Reported reasons for major influence in the decision-making process for Light Rail



The storm scenario had the second highest total of audience cited as an influence, with 46 percent (n = 34). All other explanations were cited 36 percent (n = 26) and finances/resources were cited 18 percent (n = 13) of the time. (See Chart 3)

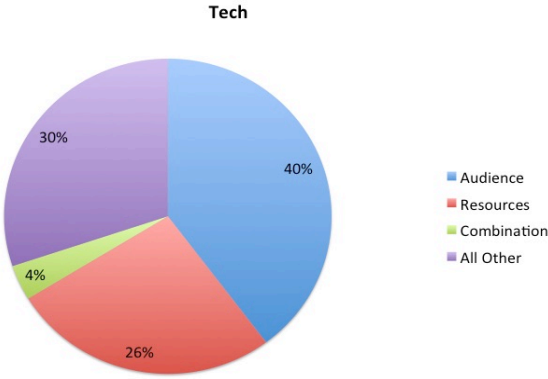
Chart 3. Self-Reported reasons for major influence in the decision-making process for Storm



Totals- Audience: 34, Resource/Finance: 13, Combination: 0, All Other: 26

For the scenario that proposed a new high tech company moving to the area participants cited audience as the influence 43 percent (n = 33), finances/resources 28 percent (n = 22), all other explanations 25 percent (n = 19) and a combination four percent (n = 3). (See Chart 4)

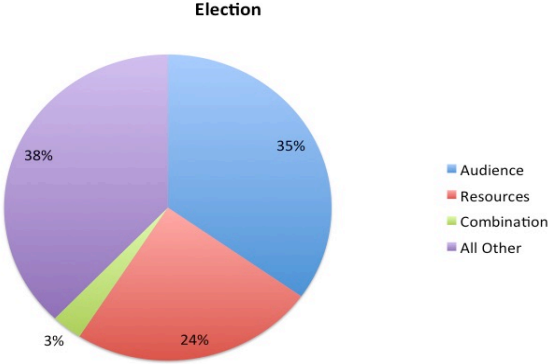
Chart 4. Self-Reported reasons for major influence in the decision-making process for High Tech



Totals- Audience: 33, Resource/Finance: 22, Combination: 3, All Other: 19

The only scenario that participants did not cite audience highest of all influences in their decisions was the election scenario. Participants cited all other explanations 38 percent (n = 25), audience 35 percent (n = 23), finances/resources 25 percent (n = 16) and a combination two percent (n = 2). (See Chart 5)

Chart 5. Self-Reported reasons for major influence in the decision-making process for Election



Totals- Audience: 23, Resource/Finance: 16, Combination: 2, All Other: 25

However, some interesting twists to this overwhelming self-report of audiences reigning supreme emerged. Many of those in the treatment condition who knew what audiences preferred but chose another form of storytelling said that they made their decisions based on what they believed was best for their audience. In other words, the journalists knew what the audiences wanted but thought they knew better as to what the audience needed and gave them that instead of what audiences had said they preferred. In essence this still points to the audience influence strongly affecting the decision making process, but with a paternalistic bent.

For example, some participants who fit this profile wrote for the election scenario: “Online chats and candidate presentations” (which the scenario said audiences wanted) “would not get to enough of the information that readers need to know about the candidates.” And, “By providing several platforms for the candidates to share their views, question the other candidates and provide readers with their backgrounds, and allow for interaction with readers, provides the best opportunity for the most readers to become informed voters.” In the light rail scenario one participant chose the data visualization map for both ideal and actual circumstances (which is the advertiser’s preference), and wrote: “If there's a lot of public money involved in a decision, I think the most responsible thing to do is help people understand the choices involved. Recapping coverage or social media response doesn't help anyone involved.” The participant clearly wants to “help people (audience) understand, but then writes “social media response doesn’t help” even though social media is what the audience preferred.

This was not the only interesting finding. It seems that underlying all of the other influences that go into the decision-making process, the story or type of story also played a

role in how participants explained their choices. For the storm scenario some wrote: “Based on goals for story, the strategy would be to best enable community participation to help tell the story.” And, “With citizens from around the area providing coverage of what they are seeing, we would be able to convey to our customers what is actually occurring in close to real time from preparations to what is experienced to the aftermath. Gives larger picture of the story than staff alone could provide.” Another wrote, “Not enough staff resources on hand for a; bringing in people outside the area who aren't familiar with it could be an issue for b; citizens and readers already have the ability to send photos, videos, etc.”

Financial reality and lack of resources also played a role for some of the smaller news outlet’s participants. For the light rail scenario some wrote: “My company has no interactive storytelling, but I like the idea and I think it would interest the most readers. The community leaders can figure out the traffic flows for themselves.” Another said, “Very little resources for the digital options, and as mentioned before, our readers, who are older, are more the physical newspaper sort.” There were a variety of comments on all four scenarios in which the participants chose a storytelling option other than the audience’s choice but still listed the audience as the most important influence that predicated the choice for how to tell a story. For the new tech business scenario participants wrote: “In the end, a journalist’s role is to inform the reader. If we show we have more readers, everything else will follow. Also, the multifaceted coverage increases website traffic.” Another said, “Readers want and need the news and they pay attention to video, but you can give more detail in print. The interactive map is also both interesting and informative.” But one participant who chose a scenario other than what the audience would want still

said what most influenced the final choice of story-telling method in one succinct answer:

“Audience.”

Participants in the control group had no way of knowing what influences, including the audience, would prefer, so there is no way to actually look for contradictions in their choice of story-telling method compared to their stated reason for that choice. However, looking at the responses, many stated that the audience was the major influence in their choice. For the election scenario some wrote: “We don't do videos. I've won journalism awards for election coverage. My attitude is give voters everything you can so they can make the most informed decisions.” Another said, “How to most effectively reach audience in an engaging and participatory manner.”

Answers to this question for the light rail story also reflect an audience-centric concern: “Reader interest and engagement; ability to create content for appropriate platforms in a timely manner.” And, “Facts reported since the onset should be reported and retold as needed. Audiences should be provided with all available informative in one easy to read and digest [sic] story.”

Similarly, participant sentiment was found in the new business scenario answers to this question, while also taking outlet capabilities and resources into account: “How readers interact and engage with the content; newsroom ability to create the content within deadlines; display across digital platforms.” And, “What is most important to readers. People want to know why they should care. They want to know how this will affect them.” Also, “...(My company) makes it tough for me to upload video and interactive media.”

The storm scenario provided more choices for audience involvement that would increase user engagement, which supports the idea that the story does play significantly into newsroom decisions, but some still did not choose the audience and cited the audience as the motivating factor: “Combined resources will provide a better quality of fact and information. This is particularly important if readers/viewers are relying on media reports about what they might need to do.” Another said, “Disseminating info to help protect the audience is paramount.”

All of these above examples are statements from participants who did not choose what the scenarios said the audience wanted but still said in open-ended questions that it was the audience that mainly drove them to the decision on how to best tell the story. Those in the treatment group did choose the storytelling methods which aligned what the audience influence would suggest significantly more than other actors wanted and also self-reported congruently to that choice.

Chapter 7: Discussion

This study examines the theoretical model of the hierarchy of influences as originally proposed and later adjusted by Shoemaker and Reese (1996, 2014). As part of this model there are a group of influences originally described as extra-media influences, some are now labeled “social institutions” and others have been moved to the “routines” level that include laws, competition, advertisers, community leaders, audiences, governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. This study uses an experiment with 144 professional journalists, by giving them four scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their work. If journalists choose audience-preferred storytelling forms significantly more often than the preferred forms of other influences, that will provide support for the idea that audiences should be considered a more influential constituency in journalists’ daily decision-making processes as gate-keepers of news and information.

The overarching argument that technological innovation in digital media, or “sticky news,” has elevated audience agency as an influence on newsroom decision-making processes was partially confirmed in this study. Disruptive media transformations of the past, such as the mass production of printed words during the Gutenberg era or the electronic transition into radio, television and film have all kept the audience in high regard. Journalists reify the audience and carry through by choosing audience preferred storytelling forms, but not as much as they think they do. The results of this study do not suggest that the audience should be afforded a level unto itself in the hierarchy of influences model. However, there is evidence that audiences have more influence in the

minds of the journalist who participated in the study over the other actors the audience was tested against. In this regard it is accurate to say that the audience is an influence that is high in the *minds* of journalists.

The first important finding is that when journalists making actual decisions know the influences, they choose a storytelling form that is significantly different from journalists who do not know the influences. This served to test that there were, in fact, differences between the control and treatment group, but more importantly, to show that being aware of the preferences of the different actors can change the judgment of journalists. When they have information about influences' storytelling preferences, they act on it and it results in a different decision than when they do not have this information. The second hypothesis built on the first by making a prediction of direction – knowing the preferences of influences can change the way journalists tell stories, such that they choose influences other than the audience less often under actual conditions.

The third hypothesis was not supported, and, in fact was significant in the *opposite* direction than was predicted. It did not compare journalists who knew the storytelling preferences against those who did not, as the previous hypotheses did, but looked only at those who knew and compared their decisions under actual conditions against ideal conditions. This predicted that in a real-world situation, the influences of advertisers, competitors, and sources such as local officials would outweigh concern about audiences. The rationale was that advertisers, who provided the financial means for journalists to do their work, and sources, who provided the content, would be more important to journalists than the reified audience. This did not prove to be the case. All these journalists knew the storytelling preferences of all the actors, and yet they still chose the forms preferred by the

advertisers, competition, and sources less often when faced with real-world conditions than when the conditions were ideal.

These three findings are at the heart of this study, which suggests that with the technological innovation of digital media, sticky news, and all of the financial implications, plus other disruptive changes to media including fragmentation, expanded choice, user participation and other important issues explained earlier, audience influence is somewhat greater now than it has been in past media eras. This is important for journalists, as the gatekeepers of news and information, to help them be more reflective in the decisions they make as they contextualize, prioritize and bring the important issues of the day to an informed citizenry.

The two other hypotheses that were not supported do not necessarily dispute the findings that audiences have garnered a higher level of influence in the era of digital media. These two hypotheses concerned ideal conditions rather than actual ones. The first predicted that when journalists knew the influence under ideal conditions, they would *not* choose a storytelling form that is significantly different from journalists who do not know. That is, decisions under ideal conditions should be the same for those who know and those who don't – journalists should choose the storytelling form that best tells the story regardless of who prefers it. Instead of acting in this fashion, the journalists who knew the preferences still chose significantly different storytelling forms than those who didn't know even though conditions were ideal. This shows the power of actors to influence gatekeepers' decisions even when conditions do not favor one actor's preferences over another. Furthermore, the second unsupported hypothesis showed that it was the audiences' preferred storytelling forms that these gatekeepers chose. This held true for two

of the four stories when they were examined individually – for both the high-speed rail and technology company stories, journalists who knew the storytelling preferences chose other actors’ preferences significantly less. Only on the storm and election stories did journalists choose storytelling forms without regard for preferences of the various influences, as they should have. This cannot be totally explained by the data collected here, but other mitigating factors, such as the story itself or financial and resource concerns could have affected the participants’ choices. As for the stories and scenarios themselves, there may have been a priming effect that caused participants to think of financial issues for these two stories but not the others. The light rail story talked about issuing a bond, and the tech story mentioned job creation. It could have influenced participants to think about how light rail or a new employer could have trickle down financial implications to own bottom line, prompting them to think about advertisers, who finance the news, and local officials who serve as sources – the currency in obtaining stories. It is also possible that these two stories would have long-term effects on the community, whereas the storm and mayoral stories have shorter-term effects. Storms and mayors come and go, but light rail systems and successful industries stick around a lot longer. Nevertheless, when pleasing the audience should have no more sway than pleasing sources, beating out the competition, or following organizational norms and expectations, journalists still cater to their audiences. This effect may be conscious or not on the part of the journalists; this study was not designed to explore the nature of journalists’ cognitive processing. However, this finding does fit with what the journalists self-reported about the influences on their storytelling choices, saying that audiences mattered most. In both the open-ended responses, and to the two questions about what they saw as the most important influence on their decisions in online and

offline environments, they consistently said it was the audience. They carried through with that in the unobtrusive environment of the controlled experiment, choosing audience-preferred storytelling forms under both real and idealized conditions. But one would have expected far more decisions favoring audiences considering how high they placed audiences on in their qualitative comments and rankings of different influences. For example, of the participants who knew the preferences in the experiment, only 14.3% chose audiences' preferences on two or more stories under actual conditions, with 31% choosing audiences two or more times under ideal conditions. But in the rankings, between 39% and 66% said audiences were most important in online and offline storytelling, respectively.

The research question asked participants to rank the importance of six social institution and routines level actors according to their importance in their online decisions and again in their offline decisions. The audience was ranked most important for both platforms, but after that, the rankings bore no similarities. Online, the competition and other journalists were second and third most important. Offline, community leaders and story subjects were. The least important influence for online decisions was advertisers, but for offline decisions it was other journalists.

This leads to speculation that the online environment offers a different atmosphere than offline for the other influences. Competition is more prolific online and that could be why it is a more important consideration than it is offline (rated 2 online versus 4 offline). In a similar comparison, other journalists present a more competitive field online than offline, particularly when one considers the ability for much more entrepreneurial, self-promoting activities that social media offers journalists online rather than offline (rated 3

online versus 6 offline). Community leaders also have greater differences online and offline. This might be a result of community leaders being considered important sources to traditional journalists that need to be handled differently in print or electronic media versus the wild-west environment online (rated 5 online versus 2 offline). Story subjects show relatively little dissonance online and offline (rated 4 online versus 3 offline) and could be simply the fact that the story itself is of the same import no matter which platform it is told on. Finally, advertisers are ranked low online and offline (rated 6 online versus 5 offline). This could be because of a mitigating force from the routine level of the hierarchy of influences. It has been a spoken or unspoken rule for years that advertisers have no place in the newsroom. The slight edge that advertisers might have offline is that, while offline revenue has dropped dramatically online advertising dollars still pale in comparison.

In addition to the journalists ranking audiences as most important in both online and offline decisions, one more area of support for the overarching argument that audiences hold great influence over journalistic decision-making processes comes from the data collected in the answers to the open-ended questions. Even when participants chose other forms of storytelling than what the audience wanted in the unobtrusive experiment, responses to the open-ended questions reflected either a desire to give the audience what they wanted, or what the journalists felt audiences needed. Perhaps the participants believed that the audience needs journalistic guidance on what they really wanted, because they were not informed enough to know for themselves. This seemingly paternalistic impulse by the participants was found in both those who chose audience preferences and those who did not (Allen & Judd, 2007). Paternalism is defined in the Oxford Dictionary

(2015) as, “The policy or practice on the part of people in positions of authority of restricting the freedom and responsibilities of those subordinate to them in the subordinates' supposed best interest,” would seem to suggest an arrogance on the part of journalists, but if one were to examine this propensity to choose what the audience needs rather than what the audience wants from an ethic of care theory perspective, which falls under the greater umbrella of feminist theory, (Fourier, 1971; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981) one could then conclude this comes from an altruistic attitude towards the audience. These perspectives on decision-making processes are not studied or more fully explained in this treatise simply because they would fall under the individual level in the hierarchy, which is not the focus of this study.

Finally, the qualitative responses also revealed an important concept controlled for but not incorporated in this experiment – the influence of finances and resources. Many of the participants simply said they made their choices of how to tell a story based on the financial state or size of their organization, explaining that their staff did not have anyone technically capable of doing interactive stories, or they didn't have the money to buy the equipment needed to do videos, or the people to spare to edit them. One wrote: “My access to tech tools. I can write the story, take the photos and video on my own but I don't have the tools to easily do an interactive map, which I think readers would find fascinating.” Another said: “Limitations in time, staffing and in-house digital resources would have to be weighed against likely reader interest in this story.” While these factors of finance and staffing fall under the organizational level of the hierarchy of influences and not the social institution and routines levels being studied here, they do seem to suggest that there is

dialectic between and within the now conceptual levels of influence as argued in the latest version of Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) examination of the hierarchy of influences.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The hierarchy of influences is a theoretical model that has shown predictive ability in scholarly studies of media production, but it is just as useful as a model for professionals. It is a reflective tool for those looking at the deeper motivations that influence decisions of importance to a free society. The audience does play an important role in how these decisions are made. There have been many studies concerning media effects on audiences, and while digital media innovation has impacted scholarly research, and though more sociological studies concerning newsroom decision-making have been conducted, more needs to be done regarding how the audience affects journalism, particularly concerning causal relationships.

The continued study and adjusting of a theory such as the hierarchy of influences is necessary as media innovations continue to change and even disrupt the way we operate in our daily lives.

As it was originally proposed, the separate levels of influence in the hierarchy were subsuming in nature; the original authors now suggest that might not be the case. This study suggests that, while the model's conceptual levels are no longer considered hierarchical, audiences are a very strong influence in gatekeeping decisions. In particular, evidence in this study would conclude that a hierarchy of influences model for the 21st century should hold audiences in higher regard than the other actors it was tested against: advertisers, competition or local leaders, within the social institution and routines levels. There is also evidence that audiences have more influence in the minds of the journalist who participated in the study over the other actors the audience was tested against. In this regard it is accurate to say that the audience is high in the minds of journalists.

This study also shows that different story topics produced different results; researchers looking at the psychological underpinnings of decision-making processes should also consider idiosyncratic stories as a moderating factor. More research needs to be done into this phenomenon.

Additionally, the hierarchy of influences is a logical, or “cold,” rational theoretical model; it fails to articulate the role that “hot” processes such as emotion, empathy, and rationalizing can play in influences. This study found two important influences on journalists’ decision-making – patriarchal or care-ethics attitudes, and perceptions of the participants that were incongruent with reality in terms of the influences on their choices. In many instances participants believed they were giving their audiences what they wanted, but in reality they were giving the audience what they *thought* what was best for the audience, whether through arrogance or protectiveness. The digital media version of the hierarchy of influences model should incorporate this at the individual level for a more fully rounded theoretical framework.

The original theorists of the hierarchy of influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) now posit that the levels may not be subsuming, but evidence from this study would suggest that the hierarchy may be *within* levels rather than between them. Within the four actors from the routines and social institutions level studied here, it seems that some are dominant over others. As proposed here, there is dialectic within and between levels; an interplay of influences that shifts predicated on circumstances of the story, financial environments and a myriad of other unforeseen and continually changing situations.

This dialectic was evidenced in this study when participants from smaller organizations reported that they would like to give the audience (routines level) what they

wanted, but lacked the staff, resources or funding to do so (organizational level). The original model, as originally proposed (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), would say that the routines level influence of the audience would subsume the organizational level influence of finances, staffing or resources. The digital hierarchy of influences builds in this dialectic but still recognizes the subsuming nature of influences.

At the time the original theoretical model of the hierarchy of influences was proposed, media companies were, in general terms, much more financially stable. As digital media disrupted business as usual for traditional media in its daily operations, digital media turned all income models on their heads. Now revenue models are still in a state of disruption and, as such, this once organizational influence might now actually be a social institution influence, somewhat out of the control of the once stable and sound traditional media revenue stream. This influence seemed to have the most effect on two of the scenarios where finances were directly related to the story.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that as an experiment it is not generalizable, nor was it intended to be. It was intended to uncover causal relationships, which can then be replicated for more confidence in the generalizability of the effects. Causal knowledge is sorely needed on this topic, as all studies to date have been correlational; this is the first to examine cause and effect. Knowledge is cumulative and more experiments in different contexts with different subjects is the way generalizability is achieved with this method. Future experiments should look at broadcasting journalists compared to print journalists and then entrepreneurial online journalists, in order to get a broader look at how the

hierarchy of influences works on a meta-level. This study did uncover a discrepancy between well-staffed and resourced news organizations compared to those who are less well off.

One of the limitations of this study is that organization size was not measured, thus, future research should examine inequalities between the haves and have-nots of news production. Additionally, for unknown reasons, broadcast journalists were underrepresented. Future research should take extra steps to include this important group of journalists.

As with all studies, this one raised as many or more questions as it answered. This experiment looked exclusively at the social institution and routines levels of influence and not at the interplay between all the various levels and how digital media might influence those interactions. As suggested earlier, there seems to be both a subsuming and rebutting dialectic of influence between the levels in the model that could be examined more closely. For example, an experiment setting up treatments to look directly at how powerful financial influences are when moderated by advertising influences, which were self-reported here by participants as inconsequential. The reality is that there are only fledgling revenue models that circumvent advertising dollars. Without audience eyes to sell to those advertisers or sustainable ways to support subscription revenue, finances, and thus advertisers, while perceived as inconsequential, in reality are hugely important considerations in the media industry.

Another subject of study arises from some of the open-ended responses indicating that there is a gap between the haves and have-nots. Some newsrooms are better equipped with cutting edge technology and those who know how to use it than others. This gap could

have a large impact on the financial survival of smaller news organizations. Further research using experiments, in-depth interviews and ethnographic studies of newsroom decision-making processes could help uncover some of the questions raised and not answered here.

This study still leaves many unanswered questions that should be asked and studies conducted to get to the questions that are at the heart of a journalist's decision-making process as a gatekeeper. For example, what makes a story newsworthy, or how newsworthy is a story? How can this story be told in a compelling, complete, concise and engaging way, that will contextualize information that is useful to those who read, consume or use it? There are many stories that may not have great import in and of themselves, but who makes those decisions and how are they made? It is the gatekeepers, the journalists of a society, that keep the public aware of issues of the day and the psychological underpinnings of those daily decisions are worthy of study. Is it important for journalists to know what audiences, advertisers, community leaders or their competition want to see in the news? Or is it better if they don't know? Why is the audience so important to reach and keep engaged? Is it an altruistic calling to have an informed citizenry or is it about selling eyes and ears for long periods of engagement to the advertisers? Knowing what audiences want could help journalists financially by selling their eyes and ears to advertisers, but then what about the paternalistic attitudes in some of the self-reported, open-ended questions? Is it arrogance on the participants' part when they wrote that they wanted to inform the audience in a more complete manner than what was suggested the audience wanted or was that a paternalistic/altruistic response? When the audiences of today seem more interested in the Kardashian family than the national debt, isn't it incumbent on journalists to step in

and help with real world issues that are important even if the audience isn't that interested? This study has not attempted to answer these questions. Much more research is needed to dig deeper into the psychology and sociology that both guide journalistic decision-making and news production.

Technology is continually changing the way news is gathered, contextualized, reported and consumed. If journalists are, in-fact, altruistically trying to attract and engage news users to build a better society of informed citizens, other studies that help journalists make more reflective and better decisions to that end are a noble enterprise worthy of our efforts.

Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:

To participate in this study I will present four hypothetical stories followed by three questions. It is hoped that by your answers to the questions I can get a better understanding of the decision making processes that are made in digital media storytelling.

While you are considering your answers please keep in mind that question one and question two may look very similar but are actually quite different. This difference, which may seem subtle, is quite important to the analysis for my study. Please do your best to make a choice that best suits your decision and not leave any of the questions unanswered. Thank you for keeping this in mind.

In the following four scenarios you will be asked in question one, about how you think the story should be told, in the hypothetical situation described, and question two asks how you would actually tell it based on the situation that you currently work in.

High Tech Story:

Both control and treatment group read:

A highly successful technology company may relocate to your town. Their products are very popular, they are a high profile company that would bring more prestige to your community and would offer many new jobs to your population.

Treatment group only also reads:

Your competitor in town also offering a digital publication; they are planning to do an in-depth series of written articles.

Your advertisers want to see more interactive storytelling applications, such as reader polling.

Community leaders, such as The Chamber of Commerce want to see some data-visualization with proposed fiscal growth projections and maps of how traffic would be affected.

Research shows that your audience spends a lot more time watching your video and photographic slideshows than any of your other storytelling methods.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

1. How do you think this story *should* be best told?

- a) An in-depth article, discussing this company's history and products
- b) An article with a video of the proposed new facility along with photos of the company's other facilities in other cities
- c) A poll of how residents feel about the possible relocation
- d) An interactive map showing how such moves of major companies have improved local economies
- e) Other: Explain

2. How do you think, in your current situation, you would *actually* tell this story?

- a) An in-depth article, discussing this company's history and products
- b) An article with a video of the proposed new facility along with photos of the company's other facilities in other cities
- c) A poll of how residents feel about the possible relocation
- d) An interactive map showing how such moves of major companies have improved local economies
- e) Other: Explain

3. What are the major factors in your decision of how you would tell this story?

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Storm Story

Both treatment and control groups read:

A strong tropical storm may hit your area in the next couple of days and getting information, photos, videos and hyper-local conditions from your audience could possibly be helpful for your storm coverage.

Treatment group only also reads:

In a previous, similar situation your advertisers liked the cooperative partnership between your and your competitor in crisis coverage and wrote each company complimenting you both for the cooperation.

Community leaders think that encouraging the locals to try to report on this storm or other risky situations, by taking pictures or videos might put residents in unnecessary danger; they'd prefer you use your own team.

Research shows that your readers and online audiences respond well to user-generated content and some have even contributed to such sites as CNN's iReport and Fox News' uReport.

Your competitors have talked to you about a possibly using their own staff, supplemented by professional freelancers this time.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

1. How do think this story *should* be best told?

- a) A team report, having all of your staff positioned throughout the possible trouble areas of the storm
- b) Hiring freelance videographers, photographers and digital journalists from outside your area to come in and help cover the storm
- c) A news co-op with your competitor, pooling resources to cover the area more comprehensively sharing information and materials to get a broader coverage for both outlets
- d) Set up a citizen generated system that allows your audience to participate by sending in photos, videos and eyewitness accounts of what is happening in their immediate area.
- e) Other: Explain

2. How do think, in your current situation, you would *actually* tell this story?

- a) A team report, having all of your staff positioned throughout the possible trouble areas of the storm
- b) Hiring freelance videographers, photographers and digital journalists from outside your area to come in and help cover the storm
- c) A news co-op with your competitor, pooling resources to cover the area more comprehensively sharing information and materials to get a broader coverage for both outlets

- d) Set up a citizen generated system that allows your audience to participate by sending in photos, videos and eyewitness accounts of what is happening in their immediate area.
- e) Other: Explain

3. What are the major factors in your decision of how you would tell this story?

Light Rail Story

Both treatment and control groups read:

Last year the city council proposed a light rail system. This has been a highly debated and heavily covered story at each council meeting since the original proposal, with strong support and opposition. The council is evenly split on this issue and is going to bring it up for a vote at their next meeting and call for a bond proposition to be added to the upcoming election. You have been recently assigned to take over the coverage of this issue.

Treatment group only also reads:

Community leaders want to see some data visualization of how the rail system will affect traffic flow during construction.

Your audience has been very involved with the news coverage of this story and has been active in social media with you about this.

Your competitor has published a series of in-depth articles on its digital publication, covering the proposed rail system.

Your advertisers think an interactive cost/benefit application would be a good way to attract audiences to their ads in your digital publication.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

1. How do think this story *should* be best told?

- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year
- b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction
- c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes
- d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year
- e) Other: Explain

2. How do you think, in your current situation, you would actually tell this story?
- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year
 - b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction
 - c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes
 - d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year
 - e) Other: Explain

3. What are the major factors in your decision of how you would tell this story?

Election story

Both treatment and control groups read:

There is a special election coming up for mayor of your town. There has not been much time allowed for voters to get to know the five contenders vying for the office. You are assigned to do something that would best help voters get to know the candidates quickly.

Treatment group only also reads:

Research indicates your audience wants you to present a series of debates.

Your competitor is doing a written series of in-depth profiles of the candidates over the next five days.

Your advertisers want you to hold town hall chats online.

The candidates and community leaders want you to do an online series of video presentations by each candidate on a series of topics rather than debates.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

1. How do you think you this story *should* be best told?
- a) Set up a live online chat with the candidate
 - b) Present the videos of the candidates discussing the topics of the day
 - c) Host live-streaming debates
 - d) Offer similar articles as your competitor

e) Other: Explain

2. How do think, in your current situation, you would *actually* tell this story?

a) Set up a live online chat with the candidates

b) Present the in-depth videos of the candidates discussing the topics of the day

c) Host live-streaming debates

d) Offer similar articles as your competitor

e) Other: Explain

2. What are the major factors in your decision of how you would tell this story?

Q18 On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important, and 6 being the least important, please rank how much do you think journalists consider the below constituencies when making storytelling decisions online. You can choose each number only once (two constituencies cannot be ranked with the same number).

_____ The Subject(s) of the story (1)

_____ Community Leaders (2)

_____ The Competition (3)

_____ Your Audience (4)

_____ Your Advertisers (5)

_____ Other Journalists (6)

Q19 On a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important, and 6 being the least important, please rank how much do you think journalists consider the below constituencies when making storytelling decisions offline. You can choose each number only once (two constituencies cannot be ranked with the same number).

_____ The Subject(s) of the story (1)

_____ Community Leaders (2)

_____ The Competition (3)

_____ Your Audience (4)

_____ Your Advertisers (5)

_____ Other Journalists (6)

Q20 Which best describes your orientation in the news business?

- Print Media Oriented (1)
- Electronic Media Oriented (2)
- Digital Media Oriented (3)
- A Combination of Media Orientation (4)
- Other (Please Explain) (5) _____

Q27 How long have you been in the news business?

- 1 to 9 years (1)
- 10 to 19 years (2)
- 20 to 29 years (3)
- 30 + years (4)

Q21 Your Education is:

- High school graduate (1)
- Some college (2)
- Bachelor's degree (3)
- Some graduate school (4)
- Graduate degree (5)
- Other: (6) _____

Q22 Your Age:

- 18 to 29 (1)
- 30 to 39 (2)
- 40 to 49 (3)
- 50 to 59 (4)
- 60 + (5)

Q23 Your Gender:

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Appendix 2

Manipulation Check Instrument

S1 Please read the following story before answering the questions below. Story 1 of 4
Here's your story: A highly successful technology company may relocate to your town. Their products are very popular, they are a high profile company that would bring more prestige to your community and would offer many new jobs to your population.

Your competitor in town also offering a digital publication; they are planning to do an in-depth series of written articles. Your advertisers want to see more interactive storytelling applications, such as reader polling. Community leaders, such as The Chamber of Commerce want to see some data-visualization with proposed fiscal growth projections and maps of how traffic would be affected. Research shows that your audience spends a lot more time watching your video and photographic slideshows than any of your other storytelling methods.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

Q 1. Journalists most influenced by the competition would tell the story in which manner?

- a) In-depth series of written articles (1)
- b) Reader polling (2)
- c) Data visualization with interactive maps (3)
- d) Video and photographic slideshows (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 2. Journalists most influenced by advertisers would tell the story in which manner?

- a) In-depth series of written articles (1)
- b) Reader polling (2)
- c) Data visualization with interactive maps (3)
- d) Video and photographic slideshows (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 3. Journalists most influenced by community leaders would tell the story in which manner?

- a) In-depth series of written articles (1)
- b) Reader polling (2)
- c) Data visualization with interactive maps (3)
- d) Video and photographic slideshows (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 4. Journalists most influenced by the audience would tell the story in which manner?

- a) In-depth series of written articles (1)
- b) Reader polling (2)
- c) Data visualization with interactive maps (3)
- d) Video and photographic slideshows (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

S2 Please read the following story before answering the questions below. Story 2 of 4
Here's your story: A strong tropical storm may hit your area in the next couple of days and getting information, photos, videos and hyper-local conditions from your audience could possibly be helpful for your storm coverage. In a previous, similar situation your advertisers liked the cooperative partnership between your and your competitor in crisis coverage and wrote each company complimenting you both for the cooperation. Community leaders think that encouraging the locals to try to report on this storm or other risky situations, by taking pictures or videos might put residents in unnecessary danger. Research shows that your readers and online audiences respond well to user-generated content and some have even contributed to such sites as CNN's iReport and Fox News' uReport. Your competitors have talked to you about a possibly using their own staff, supplemented by professional freelancers this time.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

Q 5. Journalists most influenced by advertisers would tell the story in which manner?

- a) Cooperative partnership with your competition (1)
- b) User-generated content from the community (2)
- c) Cover the storm with your own staff (3)
- d) Hire freelancers to cover the storm (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 6. Journalists most influenced by community leaders would tell the story in which manner?

- a) Cooperative partnership with your competition (1)
- b) User-generated content from the community (2)
- c) Cover the storm with your own staff (3)
- d) Hire freelancers to cover the storm (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 7. Journalists most influenced by the audience would tell the story in which manner?

- a) Cooperative partnership with your competition (1)
- b) User-generated content from the community (2)
- c) Cover the storm with your own staff (3)
- d) Hire freelancers to cover the storm (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 8. Journalists most influenced by the competition would tell the story in which manner?

- a) Cooperative partnership with your competition (1)
- b) User-generated content from the community (2)
- c) Cover the storm with your own staff (3)
- d) Hire freelancers to cover the storm (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

S3 Please read the following story before answering the questions below. Story 3 of 4
Here's your story: Last year the city council proposed a light rail system. This has been a highly debated and heavily covered story at each council meeting since the original proposal, with strong support and opposition. The council is evenly split on this issue and is going to bring it up for a vote at their next meeting and call for a bond proposition to be added to the upcoming election. You have been recently assigned to take over the coverage of this issue. Community leaders want to see some data visualization of how the rail system will affect traffic flow during construction. Your audience has been very involved with the news coverage of this story and has been active in social media with you about this. Your competitor has published a series of in-depth articles on its digital publication, covering the proposed rail system. Your advertisers think an interactive cost/benefit application would be a good way to attract audiences to their ads in your digital publication.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

Q 9. Journalists most influenced by community leaders would tell the story in which manner?

- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year (1)
- b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction (2)
- c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes (3)
- d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

- Q 10. Journalists most influenced by the audience would tell the story in which manner?
- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year (1)
 - b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction (2)
 - c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes (3)
 - d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year (4)
 - e) Other: Explain (5) _____

- Q 11. Journalists most influenced by the competition would tell the story in which manner?
- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year (1)
 - b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction (2)
 - c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes (3)
 - d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year (4)
 - e) Other: Explain (5) _____

- Q 12. Journalists most influenced by advertisers would tell the story in which manner?
- a) An in-depth article re-capping the coverage of this issue over the past year (1)
 - b) A data visualization map of traffic flow patterns during and after construction (2)
 - c) An interactive application that readers can choose from a selection of cost/benefit scenarios to see various outcomes (3)
 - d) A Storify series, crowd-sourcing all of the tweets and Facebook updates your readers have been posting over the past year (4)
 - e) Other: Explain (5) _____

S4 Please read the following story before answering the questions below. Story 4 of 4
Here's your story: There is a special election coming up for mayor of your town. There has not been much time allowed for voters to get to know the five contenders vying for the office. You are assigned to do something that would best help voters get to know the candidates quickly. Research indicates your audience wants you to present a series of debates. Your competitor is doing a written series of in-depth profiles of the candidates over the next five days. Your advertisers want you to hold town hall chats online. The candidates and community leaders want you to do an online series of in-depth video presentations by each candidate on a series of topics rather than debates.

Considering this story please answer the following questions:

Q 13. Journalists most influenced by the audience would tell the story in which manner?

- a) A series of in-depth profiles of the candidates (1)
- b) A series of debates (2)
- c) Online town hall chats (3)
- d) Online series of in-depth video presentations (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 14. Journalists most influenced by the competition would tell the story in which manner?

- a) A series of in-depth profiles of the candidates (1)
- b) A series of debates (2)
- c) Online town hall chats (3)
- d) Online series of in-depth video presentations (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 15. Journalists most influenced by advertisers would tell the story in which manner?

- a) A series of in-depth profiles of the candidates (1)
- b) A series of debates (2)
- c) Online town hall chats (3)
- d) Online series of in-depth video presentations (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

Q 16. Journalists most influenced by community leaders would tell the story in which manner?

- a) A series of in-depth profiles of the candidates (1)
- b) A series of debates (2)
- c) Online town hall chats (3)
- d) Online series of in-depth video presentations (4)
- e) Other: Explain (5) _____

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