Spring 5-2015

Are People Reading Local News? A Content Analysis of Popular News Stories on Nine Newspaper Websites

Peter Shiang Chen
University of Southern Mississippi

The University of Southern Mississippi

ARE PEOPLE READING LOCAL NEWS? A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF

POPULAR NEWS STORIES ON NINE NEWSPAPER WEBSITES

by

Peter Shiang Chen

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved:

Dr. Fei Xue_____
Committee Chair

Dr. Mary Lou Sheffer_____

Dr. Christopher Campbell_____

Dr. Karen S. Coats_____
Dean of the Graduate School

May 2015

ABSTRACT

ARE PEOPLE READING LOCAL NEWS? – A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF

POPULAR NEWS STORIES ON NINE NEWSPAPER WEBSITES

by Peter Shiang Chen

May 2015

The news industry has come under tremendous pressure in the last decade. None
more so than the newspaper industry, which has seen all aspects of its operation,
(readership, revenue, staff, distribution, and reputation) decline dramatically. This study
uses content analysis to examine the reading habits of news consumers from nine
newspaper-based websites from the Advance Publication chain. The samples were the
stories in the "most popular this hour" list, examined every 5 days from August to
September, 2014. These stories were separated into categories such as news, sports,
business, etc., and further coded based on their proximity to the news organization.   The
goal is to understand what stories people are reading and discover any trend in their
behaviors. This study is guided by niche theory, and the results show the theories at work
as readers of these sites overwhelmingly gravitated towards two niche categories: local
news and sports, and disregard the other offerings on the websites.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLE

Table

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

More than a decade after people started to use the Internet for all matters of information gathering and entertainment, one of the casualties of this digital revolution is the news industry. While all the media can feel the effects, the one that has sustained the sharpest decline is the newspaper (Ahrens, 2007).

The implosion of this industry is the result of the collapse of its business model exacerbated by a recession, the de-coupling of news content from earnings, and changing reading habits of its customers (Jones, 2009; Kirchhoff, 2009). In their struggles to survive, newspapers have turned to the Internet for their salvation, and newspapers have largely ditched the traditional model of revenue generation and reporting to adapt to the demands of the new medium (Jones, 2009; Keen, 2007).   One of those demands has been a strong focus on producing locally oriented content, which the industry calls a "hyperlocal" focus (Kurplus, Metzgar, & Rowley, 2010; Metzgar, Kurplus, & Rowley, 2011). Hyperlocal news is geographically based and focused on the community with an aim toward attracting an audience (Kurplus et al., 2010; Metzgar et al., 2011).

This study aimed to understand online news consumption habits about a decade into the hyperlocal experiment by examining the "most popular this hour" stories on nine Advance Publications' newspaper websites. The goal was to see what type of stories news consumers were reading from what was once the dominant source of news – their local newspapers. This study also explores two additional features of news websites: the extent of multimedia usage, such as videos, photo galleries or interactive graphic, and whether the presence of a story on a website's homepage affects its popularity.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic Impact on Newspapers

Newspapers, once a ubiquitous, robust, and respected source of information, have undergone tremendous financial upheaval in the last decade. While newspaper readership has steadily declined since the 1940s (Meyer, 2004; Newspaper Association of America, 2012), the arrival of the Internet accelerated that trend and irrevocably disrupted its three interrelated revenue sources: subscriptions, display advertising, and classified advertising (Jones, 2009; Seamans & Zhu, 2014).

When people initially began to access information on the Internet, newspapers struggled with how aggressively they should move their content online. When that trickle of online readers became a flood, newspapers realized younger readers were not reading their printed content. As a result, most newspapers abandoned any misgivings and jumped into the fray with gusto. The trouble with their approach, however, was many news organizations gave away the content for free, lured by the siren call of Internet advertising (Sullivan, 2006). The consequence of this decision meant they effectively cannibalized their own still-lucrative print operations for an unproven theoretical Internet windfall (Sullivan, 2006). The lower circulation numbers weakened two of the three sources of revenues — subscription and display advertising (Seamans & Zhu, 2014).

However, if readership and display ad declines had kept to historic levels, the newspaper industry could probably have absorbed the losses while it adapted, as it had before when facing challenges from radio in the 1920s and television in the 1950s. When

Craigslist arrived on the scene, it decimated the last source of newspaper revenue:

classified advertising (Jones, 2009; Seamans & Zhu, 2014). Classified ads alone

constituted nearly 50% of a typical newspaper's revenue (Kirchhoff, 2009; Seamans &

Zhu, 2014). It is estimated between 2000 and 2007, Craigslist cost the newspaper

industry $5.4 billion (Seamans & Zhu, 2014). For individual newspapers, this translated

to an average 20.7% drop in classified ads at the effected papers (Seamans & Zhu, 2014).

Robert Seamans, explaining his study to the Agency France-Presse (2013, p. 1), noted:

"When Craigslist enters a market, the effect on a newspaper's classified ads is almost

immediate." The decline in ad revenue has only gotten worse. It is estimated that from

2006 to 2009, the newspaper industry suffered a 43% drop in advertising revenues (Pew

Research Center, 2010).

Changing Habits of News Consumers

The Internet has completely changed the way news consumers access all news. In

an analysis of news consumption behaviors between 2000 and 2010, Pew Internet Project

(2010) found the Internet has allowed people to access news beyond the traditional

sources of TV, radio, and newspaper. The study also found people were freed from the

constraints of regularly scheduled news broadcasts so they could access news anytime,

anywhere, during the day. There was also a greater amount and variety of news during

the 10 years of the analysis. The result is "'consumers' are in charge of the news

playlist" (Rainie, 2010, p. 25), and they are no longer tied to the traditional news media

organizations with their rigid broadcast/print schedules.

The effect of that changing behavior is newspaper circulation experienced an

accelerated decline as more and more people got their news online (Bowman & Willis,

2003; Kirchhoff, 2009; Newman & Levy, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014). Even online, newspapers faced stiff challenges from news aggregators that produced no original content, but, instead, compiled a list from news organizations. Newspapers also faced competition from non-professionals who blog about news and from hybrids, such as Yahoo News, Huffington Post, Daily Kos, and Drudge Report, that both blog and aggregate (Jones, 2009; Keen 2007).

<div align="center">Theoretical Framework</div>

Niche Theory and Local News

One theory that may explain the shifting content of news is niche theory. The theory, originated from bio-ecology, is characterized by niche dimension, niche width, and niche overlap (Dimmick, 1997). Niche dimension can be thought of as all the different factors, such as resource, habitat, etc., a population needs for survival, while niche width can be seen as the variety of different resources that a population can use, and niche overlap happens when more than one population use the same resource (Dimmick, 1997). The greater the niche overlap, the higher the competition between the populations (Li, 2001). In fact, the study found:

> A specialist medium has a narrow niche and requires only a few types of resources. On the other hand, a generalist medium has a broad niche because it requires a wider range of resources. Specialists are more efficient in utilizing resources, but when there are tremendous changes in environments, specialists may not have sufficient flexibility to adjust for survival. Generalists are able to deal with changes in environments, but are less efficient in terms of consuming resources. (p. 261)

Dimmick (1997) saw the parallels between biological organisms and the news media as they consume resources, compete with others, fight for survival, and adapt to changes. He further likened the news media to biological organisms by showing "a population is a set of organizations that are more like each other than they are like members of other populations. For example, television stations resemble each other more than they resemble newspapers" (p. 35). When it comes to competition, "A new medium will compete with established media for consumer satisfaction, consumer time, and advertising dollars. If competition does exist, then the consequence for the older media consists of exclusion or replacement, or displacement, wherein the new medium takes over some of the role played by the older medium" (Dimmick, Chen & Li, 2004, p. 22). "One way of defining a medium's niche is as that region of the resource space where it outcompetes similar media" (Dimmick, Kline & Stafford, 2000, p. 240). For example, according to Dimmick (1997), "the radio industry draws most of its revenues or resources from local advertising and is a relatively narrow-niched specialist. TV, by way of contrast, is a relatively broad-niched generalist, depending not only on local ad revenues but drawing on network and national spots as well" (p. 35). In today's highly competitive environment, news outlets have to evolve to exploit different reader interest niches in order to survive.

Researchers have applied niche theory to new media that challenge more traditional outlets. For example, Dimmick and colleagues (2004) employed both niche theory and uses and gratifications theory to understand how Internet use has displaced traditional media in news consumption. Stroud (2011) used this theory to explain the process by which people select political media to consume what fits their partisan

viewpoints. Dutta-Bergman (2004) drew on niche theory to complement selective exposure and media displacement theories in findings that suggests people seek out new niche media that complement traditional media. Li (2001) applied niche theory to examine how television and newspapers meet readers' gratifications, finding different formats fill different needs. For daily newspapers and local television, local news has become a niche focus (Ahrens, 2006) as news organizations deal with the competition from new and emerging media. "But how does (local) look in a digital age, when the small town is global and its residents often transient and disconnected or when 'community' becomes virtual?" (Robinson, 2014). The trouble is when people from around the world can view the content of a small town newspaper, what is "local"?

What happened at the *Los Angeles Times* is a good illustration of this change toward local focus. The newspaper was one of a handful in the country that covered national and international news, but it had to shift its news focus because its Tribune owners felt those stories are not what its customers want (Talbot, Bergman & Aronson-Rath, 2007). Charles Bobrinskoy (2006), vice chairman of Ariel Capital Management, the fifth largest investor in the Tribune Company at the time, said: "Newspapers around the country have to figure out that what you have to do today to survive is provide local news coverage. They've got over 20 foreign bureaus, including bureaus in Istanbul and Cairo. Nobody is reading the *L.A. Times* wanting to find out what's happening in Istanbul." To reiterate that point, Dennis FitzSimons (personal communication, September 18, 2006), Tribune's Chairman/CEO from 2004 – 2007, said in a letter: "In order to continue succeeding, great newspapers must constantly evolve based on changes in the media environment and the communities they serve." Local news was particularly

relevant because research has found that people rely on newspapers for local news, but turn to television for national and international news (Riffe & Reader, 2007).

How niche theory relates to the study's hypothesis is in the days before the recent upheaval, newspapers expended a large amount of resources covering a wide range of issues, from news to fashion to sports to entertainment to cooking, etc. But in today's highly competitive and fragmented environment, newspapers have had to narrow their focus to only one or two topics so they can fully exploit those niches and not have to worry about competition. In fact, this narrow focus is a key characteristic of a niche (Pew Research Center, 2009).

H1: Based on niche theory, the Most Popular stories will be concentrated in only one or two news categories, instead of widely distributed across several categories.

H2: Based on niche theory, more of the Most Popular stories at a local news website should be of local interest.

Multimedia Elements

Multimedia elements were defined as video, audio, slideshows or interactive graphics (Columbia News, 2011; Huang, 2007). They were examined because the digital revolution has paved the way for new forms of multimedia storytelling (Columbia News, 2011). Research shows news websites are increasingly adding multimedia elements in an effort to attract readers (Bock, 2011; Chock, Wolf, Chen, Schweisberger, & Wang, 2013; Hong, 2012; Huang, 2007; Thompson, 2009; Yoo, 2011). The trend has increased over time but the pace has quickened during the current financial downturn at news organizations. As Bock (2011) notes, "News organizations are increasingly turning to

video journalism as a survival strategy in the era of convergence" (p. 705). For example, Huang (2007) found that introduction of multimedia, or "rich media" has been growing at newspapers in the top markets and is quickly trickling down to smaller markers. A Pew Research study (2014) found that 36% of all US adults watch news videos online. Therefore, multimedia elements were important elements to consider in this study. Based on this foundation, the following hypothesis and research questions were posed:

RQ1: How many stories in the Most Popular list included multimedia elements?

Story Placement

Finally, this study examined if there is a link between a story's popularity and its presence on the homepage of a news website. For this study, "most popular" was defined based on the news organization's own internal system. Therefore, most popular was not an arbitrary definition but based on actual readership that was updated throughout the day. This type of rank-ordered list of "most popular" stories is common on news websites and provides a convenient and accurate means of accessing popularity of a story because it indicates what the audience reads, not what editors think they should read (Shoemaker, Johnson, Seo, & Wang, 2010). Therefore, the most popular list is an example of the audience saying what's important, rather than the editors (Shoemaker et al., 2010). In contrast, news organizations used a variety of factors, including editors' judgments, to decide what stories to place on the homepage. As a result, stories posted on the homepage are more of an indication of the more traditional function of editors (Lee, Lewis, & Powers, 2014; Shoemaker et al., 2010). Based on this, it made sense to compare whether stories that readers picked coincided with those editors' picked for the homepage. This is

a valid question because it examined whether readers' choices of popularity coincides with stories the news organization deems as newsworthy by putting them on the homepage.

RQ2: How many stories in the Most Popular list have a presence on the news websites' home pages?

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This study used a descriptive content analysis of 720 news stories to determine what types of stories people are reading over a 41-day period.

Categories

These categories (Newman & Levy, 2014) were news, business, entertainment, celebrity, education, health, arts and culture, sports, politics and government, science and technology, financial, economy, and fun/weird/miscellaneous. These categories were further divided into local, regional, national, or international news. The definitions of each category are provided in the coding scheme provided in (Appendix A). The study also examined whether the stories had a presence on the homepage, and whether multimedia elements were included in the stories.

Sample

The content analysis examined the 10 "most popular this hour" stories from nine daily news websites in the Advance Publications chain. The company owns newspapers in more than 25 US cities, such as *The Times-Picayune* in New Orleans, *The Oregonian* in Portland, and *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland,as well as Conde Nast Publications and the Golf Digest Companies, among others (Advance.net, n.d.). This chain was selected because all its news websites were extensions of their daily newspapers. More importantly, these sites broke down the "most popular" list by the hour or the day, which allowed for consistent analysis. The news sites in this study were Cleveland.com, GulfLive.com, LehighvalleyLive.com, MassLive.com, NOLA.com, OregonLive.com, PennLive.com, SiLive.com, and Syracuse.com. Three other news sites from the chain −

AL.com, MLive.com, and NJ.com – were not included in the analysis because these sites included newspapers from a geographic area that was too wide to accurately reflect local news. For example, AL.com gets its content from Huntsville, in the extreme northern part of Alabama, to Mobile, the extreme south of the state, so what constitutes local news is very different between the two.

Procedure

The sites were sampled once every five days to eliminate any single news event from skewing the results. The sampling took place during a random hour between 8 a.m. and 12 a.m. CDT because Internet traffic studies have shown those are peak Internet traffic hours (Chitika.com, 2013).

The author and a second coder each have 20 years of daily metropolitan newspaper experience, the majority of which took place at *The Post-Standard* in Syracuse, NY. This newspaper's website, syracuse.com, was one of the Advance Publications' sites sampled in the study. However, at the time of the study, neither the author nor second coder worked for, or had any association with, the publication. The two independently coded a pretest sample of 90 news stories (12.5% of the total *N*.) The coders achieved 100% agreement when coding for the presence of multimedia elements, location of stories on the homepage, and whether the stories were local, regional, national, or international in origin. The coders achieved intercoder reliability of .94, calculated according to Holsti's formula (Holsti, 1969) when coding for story categories. Disagreements were discussed and definitions were clarified. The author and coder then split the numbers of coding samples (57% to 43%, respectively). In addition, although

the two coders achieved a high degree of intercoder reliability, they alternated the coding

days to avoid bias.

The 10 most popular stories of that hour from each site were analyzed as either

having a presence on the homepage or not, and as either having a multimedia presence or

not. They were also categorized into the following topics explained above.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Niche News Categories

H1 predicted the Most Popular stories would be concentrated in only one or two niche news categories. Results (Figure 1) supported this hypothesis as the news and sports categories made up 76.7% of all the stories that were on the Most Popular list.
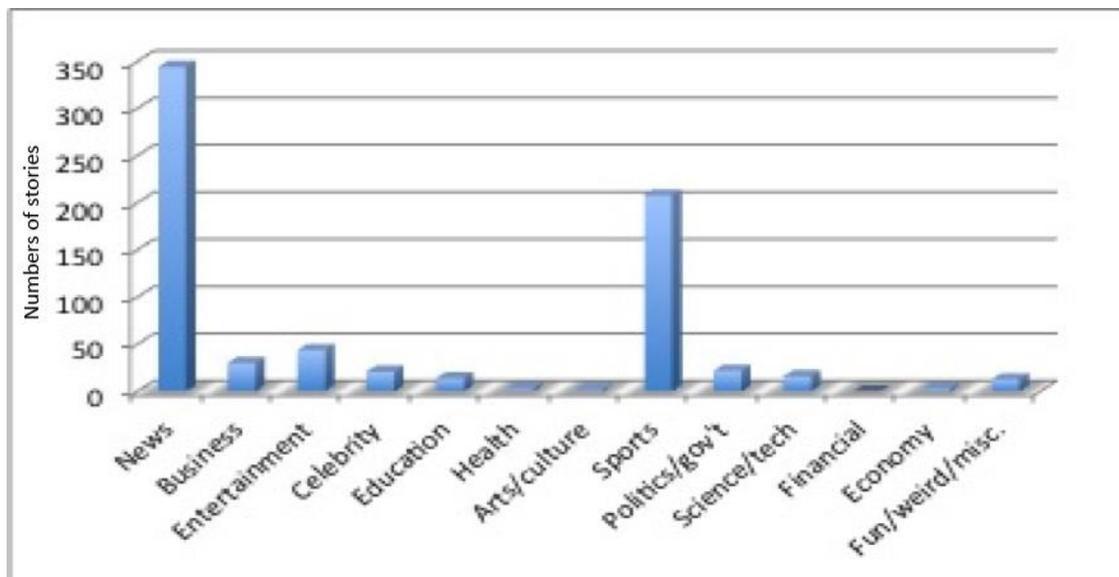
Figure 1. The breakdown of the "most popular this hour" stories by categories, $N = 720$.

This concentration showed these two categories were the local news websites' niches. When the results were examined for each of the nine news websites, news and sports were still the top categories, except in the case of the Staten Island (New York) news site. For that site, news was first, followed by entertainment and then sports. See Figure 2 for details.
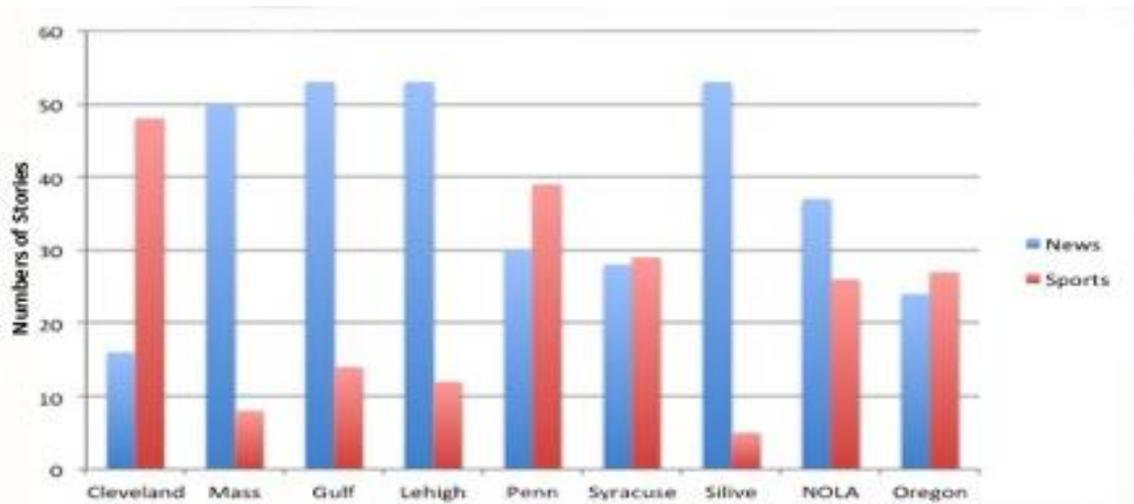
Figure 2. The breakdown of the "most popular this hour" stories by news organization, *N* = 720.

Local News

H2 predicted readers of the newspaper websites would gravitate toward those stories that are local in origin because people are interested in what is going on in their neighborhoods. Results (Figure 3) supported this hypothesis, as local and regional stories accounted for the two most read categories: 349 local stories (48.5%), 184 regional stories (25.6%), 175 national stories (24.3%), and 12 international stories (1.7%).
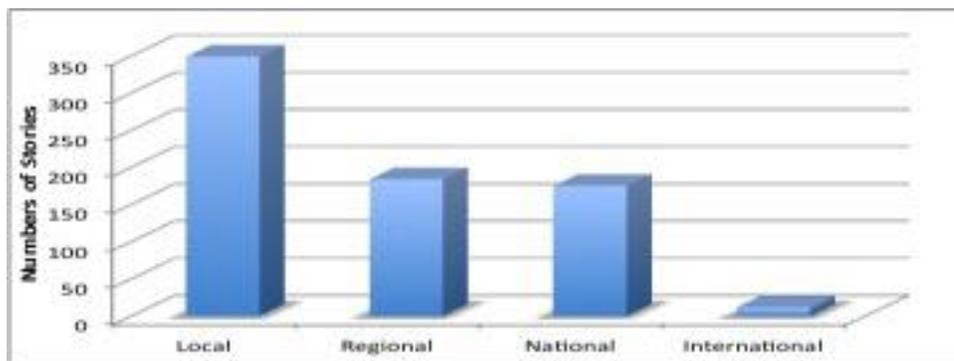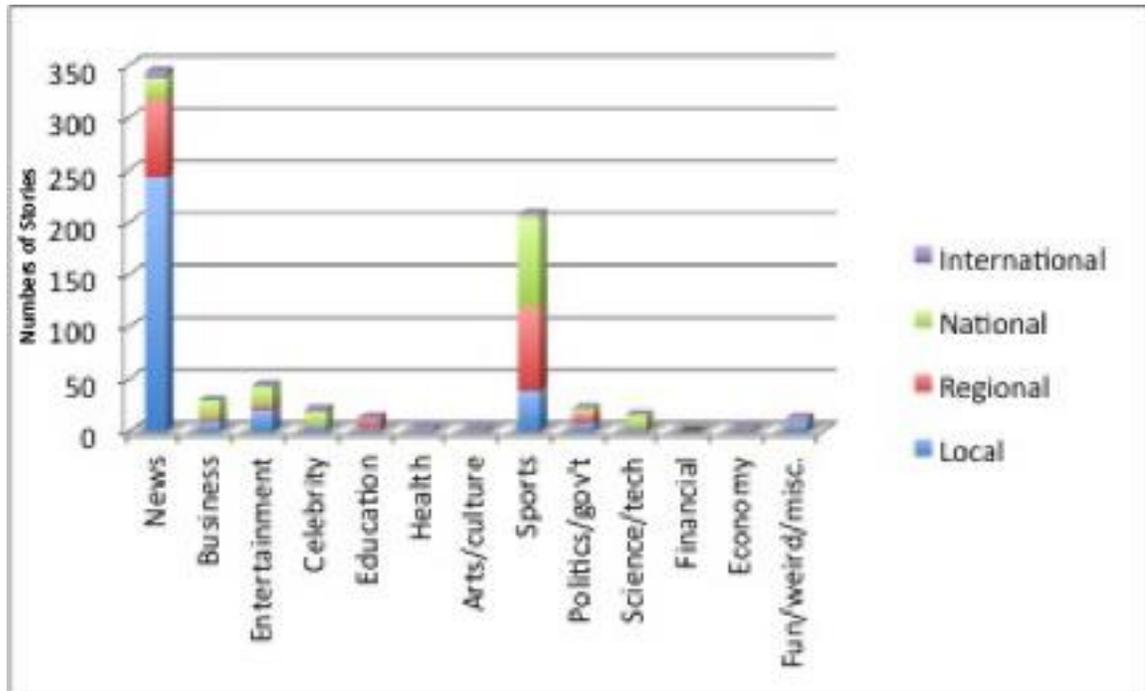

Figure 3. The breakdown of all of the Most Popular stories by proximity to readers, *N* = 720.

To better understand the results of the content analysis, Figure 4 showed the breakdown of each news category while Table 1 showed the raw numbers.

Figure 4. The breakdown of the Most Popular stories by categories and proximity to readers, *N* = 720.

Table 1

The breakdown of the Most Popular stories by categories and proximity to readers, *N* = 720.

	Local	Regional	National	International
News	243	74	22	5
Business	9	5	16	0
Entertainment	21	4	18	1
Celebrity	5	1	13	2
Education	4	8	0	2
Health	3	0	0	0
Arts/culture	2	0	0	0
Sports	39	79	88	2
Politics/gov't	8	8	6	0
Science/tech	3	2	11	0
Financial	0	0	0	0
Economy	2	1	0	0
Fun/weird/misc.	10	2	1	0

The results showed local news was the main reason people visited a local news website (243 stories or 33.8%,) followed by national sports (88 stories, 12.2%,) regional sports (79 stories, 11%,) regional news (74 stories, 10.3%,) and the rest. A series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also conducted, testing if there were differences in story categories by geographic regions. These tests were done by splitting the 9 news websites into 4 geographic regions: the Northeast, made up of LehighvalleyLive.com, MassLive.com, PennLive.com, SiLive.com, and Syracuse.com; the south, made up of GulfLive.com and NOLA.com; the Midwest, made up of Cleveland.com; and the Pacific

northwest, made up of OregonLive.com. No significant differences were found in any of the categories.

Multimedia Elements

RQ1 asked how many stories in the Most Popular list included the use of multimedia elements, such as videos, photo galleries, audio, interactive graphics, etc. to tell a more compelling story. The results show 323 of the 720 stories (44.9%) included multimedia elements.

Story Placement

RQ2 asked how many stories in the Most Popular list had a presence on the news websites homepages. The results showed 545 of the 720 stories (75.7%) had some form of presence on the homepage.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the reading habits of news consumers, as reflected by the "most popular this hour" stories from nine news websites in the Advance Publications chain. Overall, the findings support the premise of this thesis that when people go online for news, their interests are confined to narrowly defined categories, not a broad range that reflect wide interests. Individual findings will be discussed first, and implications of each finding addressed. Then limitations of this research and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Niche Theory

The first hypothesis drew on niche theory (Dimmick, 1997) to predict that the stories that ended up on the Most Popular list would be concentrated into two news categories. Findings showed support for the hypothesis, as most were either in news or sports. It is also notable that news and sports were the top categories for eight of the nine website studied, showing a consistency in this finding.

The second hypothesis proposed that local news would frequently make the Most Popular stories list, and the data supported that premise. Local (48.5%) and regional (25.6%) stories were far more popular than international stories (.17%), for example. These results partially supports Tewsbury's (2003) finding that people preferred sports news, but they differ from his finding that people did not prefer local news. One reason these findings differ from the Tewksbury (2003) study may be that these results may not indicate a surge in local news interest, but rather a general shift in news consumption habits (Newman & Levy, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2014). The idea is the demand in

local news may be the same but the reason why people read so few local news stories in the Tewksbury (2003) study could be because they were reading them offline in their local newspapers. The dramatic surge in local news in the current study could be a reflection of the fact that newspapers' print circulation is down and people are mainly reading local news online now, a direct contrast to the Tewksbury study.

However, when the nine news websites that were studied were examined individually, local and regional stories were not always the most popular. This may be due to regional differences in audience or in the type of topics that people found important. For example, in Cleveland, national news – not local news -- accounted for more than half of the Most Popular stories, but that may reflect the interests of that community. Further research should examine these regional differences to provide answers.

From a practical standpoint, these findings should be encouraging to newspaper journalists because they show people are overwhelmingly drawn to local news. Newspapers and television stations are still the primary providers of this type of information (Ahrens, 2006; Robinson 2014) as they have been for decades. In particular, these findings are important for newspapers because research (Riffee & Readers, 2007) has found that people rely on newspaper for local news, but turn to TV for national and international news. These findings support the drive on news websites to focus on local news as a means of attracting and retaining readers (Kurplus et al., 2010; Metzgar et al., 2011). These findings show news organizations would be advised to continue this emphasis on local news, which people cannot readily get elsewhere.

These findings also suggest that niche theory adequately explains the types of news people are consuming. Niche theory has been applied to a variety of new media (e.g. Dimmick et al., 2004; Dutta-Bergman, 2004; Li, 2001; Stroud, 2011), and these finding supports the idea of using this theory to understand that people seek narrow topics of news on online websites.

Multimedia Elements

The first research question of this study looked at the addition of multimedia elements and the homepage presence of the Most Popular stories. The reason is because a Pew Research study (2014) found news videos are gaining popularity among news consumers. Results showed that only 44.9% of the Most Popular stories in the study had any type of multimedia elements. This finding shows that the increased trend of multimedia storytelling at news websites (Bock, 2011; Chock et al., 2013; Huang, 2007; Thompson, 2009; Yoo, 2011) was apparent in the sites in this study. However, it also offered evidence that the use of "rich media" in the top newspaper markets is not trickling down (Huang, 2007), as quickly as the industry might hope. More than half the Most Popular stories lacked multimedia elements, according to this thesis. This may be an area in which news managers could work on to increase traffic and revenue. According to Pew Research Center (2014), approximately 36% of all US adults watching news videos online, and digital advertising is up 44% from 2012 to 2013. Clearly, American newspapers need to do a better job of seizing on this interest in multimedia to attract an audience.

Story Placement

The second research question asked if the Most Popular stories also had some presence on the websites' home page. The relevance of this question is that the Most Popular list indicated what the audience wants, while placement on the homepage suggests what editors deem as newsworthy (Lee et al., 2014; Shoemaker et al., 2010). The goal was to see if there was overlap between the two. The vast majority of the Most Popular stories (75.7%) had some form of presence on the websites' homepages, suggesting that editors and the audience may see the same stories as valuable. However, it also may mean that people gravitated to stories on the home page, and then those stories became Most Popular. If that were the case, the traditional editor function of deciding which news is important (Lee et al., 2014; Shoemaker et al., 2010) continues even in the digital age. Future research using an audience survey should address this question because this current study could only show what stories ended up on the Most Popular list, not what the audience members were thinking about the stories.

Limitations and Future Research

Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, the interest in national sports may seem perplexing at first, considering there are numerous sports-centric websites, and at least two high-end, authoritative, national, sports news outlets already in existence – ESPN and Sports Illustrated – so people should be going there for the sports niche. However, the findings could be the result of how national sports stories were coded in this study. Based on the national interest that the NFL, MLB and NBA generate, those stories were coded as national. But the author of this study didn't take into account that if a team is within the circulation area of a news website in this study, the interest should

probably be local in nature as the teams are in the readers' "backyard." For example, Cleveland, Ohio, is the home to three professional sports team – the Browns of the NFL, the Indians of the MLB, and Cavaliers of the NBA. They all fall under the immediate coverage area of Cleveland's The Plain Dealer/Cleveland.com, so the stories about all three teams that were coded national should, perhaps, have been coded as local. In fact, nearly half of Cleveland's 80 stories (39) in the Most Popular list were national sports stories, a large majority of which was about those professional sports teams. Future researchers should take this into consideration.

The same oversight could also apply to the regional sports category, as any story about a university's sports team, as long as it fell within the coverage area of one of the news websites in this study, was coded as regional instead of local. If both categories were re-coded local, the news consumers' interest in local news would be even more dramatic.

Second, none of the newspaper/news websites in this study have the balance of international, national, and local reach of the *New York Times*, so their focus is naturally local in nature. Their audience probably knows that so they would not come to these nine news sites for national, economic, and political news. Therefore, the lack of interest in those stories in the current study may reflect the niches of these news organizations and not the readers' lack of interest in those stories.

Third, in this study the presence or absence of multimedia elements were coded, but future research should examine what types (videos, audio, interactive graphics) of multimedia are used the most and most popular with the audience of news websites.

Lastly, there are many factors that go into how a story ends up on a news website's homepage. Sometimes a news manger will post a story there because he or she thinks it is important. Other times, the news managers will post the story on the homepage when Internet traffic indicates a story is getting a lot of hits. There are even instances where it is based on a mathematical algorithm. Therefore, a causal relationship between whether a story is popular and its presence on the homepage cannot be established at this time, but future research should examine this question.

Future studies should compare what stories are on the homepage of a news site with those that are on the Most Popular list and examine how the editors made the decision to post the stories on the homepage. This would provide insight into whether news managers have accepted their niche in the new media landscape and highlight only stories they know will generate interest. In other words, in news websites such as the ones in this study where the niche is local and sports, do news managers try to buck their niche and still highlight national or political stories on their homepages, or do they accept what is expected of them and highlight only local and sports stories?

In addition, a content analysis of the most popular stories from online news aggregators, such as Yahoo and Google, may allow researchers to draw conclusions between the different populations of news consumers. Lastly, the Most Popular list can be compared with the "recommend" list to see if media gatekeeping function is still in effect.

APPENDIX A

CODING SHEET

Name of publication:

Date and time:

Name of story 1:

Step one: See if the most popular stories are on the homepage. Score one point if the same headline is found anywhere else on the homepage, score one more point if that headline has a picture with it.
_____ Presence on homepage score

Step two: Click on each story and see if it has a multimedia presence (photo slideshow, audio or video components, additional raw documents, etc.)
_____ Multimedia presence

Step three: Code the headline based on the categories below, then determine if the story is either local, regional, national or international.
_____ News
_____ Business
_____ Entertainment
_____ Celebrity
_____ Education
_____ Health
_____ Arts and culture
_____ Sports
_____ Politics & government
_____ Science and technology
_____ Financial
_____ Economy
_____ Fun/weird/misc

_____ Local
_____ Regional
_____ National
_____ International

APPENDIX B

CODEBOOK AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

Explanation of news categories:

When judging which category a story should fall under, first determine the main thesis of the story.

News

- Stories about crime, accidents, fires, courts, traffic, etc.

Business

- Stories about company happenings. For example, a story about Dell slashing 300 jobs or collapse of Bear Stearns would be business news. A story about a local deli expanding to different parts of the city would also be business.

Entertainment

- Stories that are about the entertainment industry, such as weekend box office results, list of tv shows that's been cut. Recreational activities such as travel pieces also fall under this category because we generally enjoy recreation, it passes the time, so it's a form of entertainment.

Celebrity

- Stories where the person's celebrity status is the main reason for the story. For example, Johnny Manziel partying in Las Vegas is celebrity, not sports. Winona Ryder caught shoplifting is celebrity, not news, because news don't generally publicize shoplifting. The story is written because it's Ryder. LeBron James' doing work on his house is also celebrity.

Education

- Stories about any educational institutions, their students, faculty, etc.

Health

- Stories such as cholesterol, the seasonal flu, allergies, Ebola, etc.

Arts and culture

- Stories such as theater productions, musical performances, artist profiles, etc.

Sports

- Johnny Manziel's arm strength is sports, Cowboys wanting a bigger stadium is sports. Same with World Cup, Wimbledon, etc.

Politics and government

- Stories that have a political theme such as the election, the tea party revolt, etc. Politicians such as Hilary Clinton may be a "celebrity", but she ultimately is a politician so it's politics.

Science and technology

- Stories such as the new iPhone, a new jet, etc. A story about the da Vinci robot, while used by surgeons, is more a technology devise so it would be science/technology.

Financial

- Stories about the financial health of the nation or the average household, such as a story about retirement plans, 401k, investments, etc.

Economy

- Stories that affect the economy, such as about the collapse of the financial industries, the credit default swaps, overall housing numbers, etc.

Fun/weird/miscellaneous

- These are the cute cat videos, Charlie bit my finger, Diet Coke and Mintos, viral videos, etc.

- Miscellaneous stories are any stories that can't easily be categorized into one of the above categories.

Explanation of the proximity to readers

When judging whether a story is local, regional, national or international:

- Local stories are those that happened or affect a specific town or city within the geographical base of the news organization. For example, a high school football game in Syracuse, NY, would be a local story in *The Post-Standard*/Syracuse.com. A story about lake-effect snow in the county is also local news because it's within *The Post-Standard's* coverage area. Also, if a local citizen is injured, or becomes famous, outside of the area, it is still local news because of the person's local ties.

- Regional stories are those that happened near the selected city but far away enough that is beyond the regular coverage area of the news organization. The cutoff is generally within the border of the state. However, if the news organization is large enough, or is based near the state border, events that happened in the adjacent state could be consider regional. For example, a wildfire that spans both Washington and Oregon would be regional news for *The Oregonian*/OregonLive.com. A story by the Associated Press could be an indication of a regional story. Also, any major college sporting events within the state is regional.

- National stories are those events that are beyond a state's borders and across a vast distance. For example, a story of a manhunt in Springfield, MA, would be national news if it were in *The Times-Picayne*/NOLA.com. In addition, any NFL, NBA or MLB stories because their fan base is across the nation. Also, any news items that have a national trend, or national impact. For example, the delays at the VA hospitals, even though it may cite specific cities, are reflective of a larger national trend, so it's a national story.

- International stories are those that originate outside of the boarder of the US.

REFERENCES

Advance.net. (n.d.). About Advance.net. Retrieved online:

    http://www.advance.net/index.ssf?/advance_internet/about_advance_net.html

Agence France-Presse. (2013, August 14). Craigslist has cost US newspapers \$5 billion.

    www.rawstory.com. Retrieved online:

    http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2013/08/14/craigslist-has-cost-u-s-newspapers-5-

    billion/

Ahrens, F. (December 4, 2006). A newspaper chain sees its future, and it's online and

    hyper local. *Washington Post*. Retrieved online

    http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-

    dyn/content/article/2006/12/03/AR2006120301037.html

Ahrens, F. (April 20, 2007). Newspapers report drop in ad revenue. *Washington Post*.

    Retrieved online http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-

    dyn/content/article/2007/04/19/AR2007041902652.html

Alexa.com. (2014). *Top sites in United States*. Retrieved online, 2014, July 26:

    http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries;0/US

Bobrinskoy, C. (2006). News War: What's happening with the news? (Part III). In S.

    Talbot (Producer), *News War*. Boston, MA:WGBH. Retrieved online:

    http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newswar/interviews/bobrinskoy.html

Bock, M.A. (2011). You really, truly, have to "Be There": Video journalism as a social

    and material construction. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 88*(4),

    705-718.

Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2003). We media: How audiences are shaping the future of
news and information. *The Media Center at The American Press Institute*.
Published online http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf

Chitika.com. (2013, March 26). Hour-by-Hour Examination: Smartphone, Tablet, and
Desktop Usage Rates. Retrieved from https://chitika.com/browsing-activity-by-
hour

Chock, M.T., Wolf, M.J., Chen, G.M., Schweisberger, V.N., & Wang, Y. (2013). Social
media features attract students to news websites. *Newspaper Research Journal,
34*(4), 96-108.

Columbia News. (2011). Pulitzer Prize Board announces changes for 2011 journalism
competition. www.pulitzer.org. Retrieved online:
http://www.pulitzer.org/2011_rules_changes

Craigslist (2014). Factsheet. *Craigslist*. Retrieved online:
http://www.craigslist.org/about/factsheet

Dimmick, J. (1997). The theory of the niche and spending on mass media: The case of
the video revolution. *Journal of Media Economics, 10*(3), 33-55.

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

Dimmick, J., Kline, S., & Stafford, L. (2000). The gratification niches of personal e-mail
and the telephone: Competition, displacement, and complementarity.
Communication Research, 27(2), 227-248.

Dimmick, J., & Rothenbuhler, E.W. (1986). Comments on Kaul and McKerns'
'Dialectic Ecology'. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 3*(3), 380-383.

Dutta-Bergman, M.J. (2004). Complementarity in consumption of news types across
traditional and new media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 48*(1),
41-60.

Holbrook, A.L, Green, M.C., & Krosnick, J.A. (2003). Telephone versus face-to-face
interviewing of national probability samples with long questionnaires:
Comparisons of the respondent satisficing and social desirability response bias.
Public Opinion Quarterly, 67(1), 79-125.

Holsti, O.R. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Boston,
MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hong, S. (2012). Online news on Twitter: Newspapers' social media adoption and their
online readership. *Information Economics and Policy, 24*(1)*, 69-74.*

Huang, E. (2007). Use of rich media differs at newspaper, TV websites. *Newspaper
Research Journal, 28*(3), 85-97.

Jones, A.S. (2009). *Losing the news: The future of the news that feeds democracy*. New
York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Keen, A. (2007). *The Cult of the Amateur: How blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the rest
of today's user-generated media are destroying our economy, our culture, and our
values*. New York, NY: Random House.

Kirchhoff, S.M. (2009). US newspaper industry in transition. *Congressional Research
Service.* Retrieved online:
http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=mvXBn4ifq5YC&oi=fnd&pg=PA

1&dq=decline+of+newspaper+industry&ots=IpgGHIs21Z&sig=gY0qXP2F2q2B

Bv7H_hVdawcKchM#v=onepage&q=decline%20of%20newspaper%20industry

&f=false

Kurplus, D.D., Metzgar, E.T., & Rowley, K.M. (2010). Sustaining hyperlocal media: In

search of funding models. *Journalism Studies, 11*(3), 359-376.

Lee, A.M., Lewis, S., & Powers, M. (2014). Audience clicks and news placement: A

study of lagged influence in online journalism. *Communication Research, 41*(4),

505-530.

Li, S.S. (2001). New media and market competition: A niche analysis of television news,

electronic news, and newspaper news in Taiwan. *Journal of Broadcasting &*

Electronic Media, 45(2), 259-276.

Metzgar, E.T., Kurpius, D.D, & Rowley, K.M. (2011). Defining hyperlocal media:

Proposing a framework for discussion. *New Media & Society, 13*(5), 772-787.

Meyer, P. (2004). *The vanishing newspaper: Saving journalism in the Information Age.*

Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press.

Newman, N., & Levy, D.A.L. (Eds.). (2014). Reuters Institute digital news report 2014

Tracking the future of news. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.*

University of Oxford.

Newspaper Association of America. (2012). Newspaper circulation volume, 1940-2011.

Pew Research Center. (2009). The new Washington press corps. *Pew Research*

Journalism Project. Retrieved online:

http://www.journalism.org/2009/07/16/rise-niche/#

Pew Research Center. (2010). State of the news media, 2010. *Pew Research Journalism Project.* Retrieved online: http://www.journalism.org/category/publications/state-of-the-media/2010/

Pew Research Center. (2014). State of the news media, 2014. *Pew Research Journalism Project.* Retrieved online: http://www.journalism.org/packages/state-of-the-news-media-2014/

Price, V. (1993). The impact of varying reference periods in survey questions about media use. *Journalism Quarterly, 70*(3), 615-627.

Rainie, L. (2010, June 24). How media consumption has changed since 2000: News is pervasive, portable, personalized, participatory – and a social experience. *Pew Internet Project*. Retrieved online: http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Presentations/2010/Jun/2010%20-%20062410%20-%20syracuse%20newhouse%20MOB%20conf%20NYC%20pdf.pdf

Riffe, D., & Reader, B. (2007). Most rely on newspapers for business news. *Newspaper Research Journal, 28*(2), 82-98.

Robinson, S. (2014). Introduction to Community journalism midst media revolution. *Journalism Practice, 8*(2), 113-120.

Rosenberg, H., & Feldman, C.S., (2008). *No time to think: The menace of media speed and the 24-hour news cycle.* New York, NY: Continuum.

Seamans, R., & Zhu, F., (2014). Responses to Entry in Multi-Sided Markets: The Impact of Craigslist on Local Newspapers. *Management Science, 60*(2), 476-493.

Shoemaker, P.J., Johnson, P., Seo, H., & Wang, X. (2010). Readers as gatekeepers of online news, *6*(1), 55-77.

Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press*. Chicago,
    IL: University of Illinois Press.

Stroud, N.J. (2011). *Niche news: The politics of news choice*. New York: Oxford.

Sullivan, P. (2006, June 19). As the Internet grows up, the news industry is forever
    changed. *Washington Post*. Retrieved online:
    http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-
    dyn/content/article/2006/06/13/AR2006061300929.html

Talbot, S., & Bergman, L. (Writer), & Aronson-Rath, R. (Director). (2007, Feb. 27).
    News War: What's happening with the news? (Part III). In S. Talbot (Producer),
    News War. Boston, MA: WGBH.

Tewksbury, D. (2003). What do Americans really want to know? Tracking the behavior
    of news readers on the Internet. *Journal of Communication, 53*(4), 94-710.

Thompson, J.L. (2009). Using social media to reach young readers. *Nieman Reports,
    63*(1), 27-39.

Yoo, C. (2011). Modeling audience interactivity as the gratification-seeking process in
    online newspapers. *Communication Theory, 21*(1), 67-89.