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Links of Connectedness: A Content Analysis and Industry Survey Comparing the Interactive Options of Community and Metro Newspaper Web Sites

Cleveland Allin Means
University of Southern Mississippi

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LINKS OF CONNECTEDNESS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS AND INDUSTRY SURVEY COMPARING THE INTERACTIVE OPTIONS OF COMMUNITY AND METRO NEWSPAPER WEB SITES

by

Cleveland Allin Means

Abstract of a Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2010
ABSTRACT

LINKS OF CONNECTEDNESS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS AND INDUSTRY SURVEY COMPARING THE INTERACTIVE OPTIONS OF COMMUNITY AND METRO NEWSPAPER WEB SITES

by Cleveland Allin Means

December 2010

As newspapers struggle to redefine their role in a constantly shifting mass media landscape, this research project studies how one of mass communications’ historically fundamental mediums, the community newspaper, is utilizing its Web presence to connect to readers in innovative ways that might perpetuate loyalty to the local press. A key question is: How can community newspapers utilize their Web sites’ interactive features to maintain useful links of connectedness with local readers, in effect capitalizing on the very technologies that many analysts predict will ultimately render them obsolete?

Through content analysis of newspaper Web site home pages and industry surveys, it was found that there exists a possible disconnect between what surveyed online editors believed was important for their newspapers in the area of interactivity and what their newspapers were actually doing to remain connected to their readers online. More than 70% of online editors/Web site coordinators responding to an e-mailed survey agreed that it is important for their newspapers’ Web sites to post links that connect with readers and engage them in online discourse, encouraging feedback and consistent interactivity. Also, more than 75% of respondents said their newspapers are connecting to
readers through these links of connectedness (LOCs). However, a content analysis of more than 400 newspapers showed that only 4.875 LOCs were offered per newspaper Web site home page.
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Approved:

Fei Xue
Director

Jae-Hwa Shin

Kim LeDuff

Chris Campbell

Gene Wiggins

Susan A. Siltanen
Dean of the Graduate School

December 2010
DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wife, Kelle, and daughter, Hattie Grace, for unselfishly and enthusiastically agreeing to move away from the security of friends, family, and steady jobs in Oklahoma to a town they had never heard of in Southern Mississippi, so that I could pursue a doctorate degree and ultimately place our family’s future in God’s hands instead of our own. I would like to thank all the friends we made in our short two years in Hattiesburg, MS, the friendliest town in America. I would also like to thank my colleagues at Baylor University, who by reducing my course loads and offering faithful support, allowed me to finish my dissertation in a reasonable amount of time. I would like to acknowledge Dr. John Allen Hendricks, a friend and colleague who helped steer me toward earning my doctorate degree and specifically toward The University of Southern Mississippi, which proved to be one of the best decisions of my personal and professional life. Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and family members for their prayers along the way. I am convinced that without God’s intervention in our lives, the process of earning a doctorate degree would have never even been conceived, much less achieved.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Interactivity encompasses the numerous and various methods through which newspapers utilize their Web sites to seek two-way or multi-way interaction between readers and the newspaper as an institution, readers and individual newspaper staff members, readers and other readers, through various links of connectedness.

Postmodernists generally consider the current technological generation as an era experiencing the most epic changes in how we communicate, a period in which the Internet has been mainstreamed faster than any mass communication medium in history. Not unlike when previous breakthroughs in technology occurred, existing media are continually scrambling to redefine their roles and re-establish their footing in the evolving communications marketplace. Radio did so when television arrived. Before that, newspapers did so when radio arrived. Further back in history, town criers and handwritten scrolls did so when the printing press arrived.

As is also the case when such communication breakthroughs occur, there are doomsayers who predict new media will essentially replace the existing traditional media. Some analysts have even gone as far as to predict when the last printed newspaper in America will fold. Incidentally, that apocalyptic date is scheduled to arrive in just over 30 years (Meyer, 2004). Indeed, 105 American newspapers closed in 2009 (Dumpala, 2009). Circulation nationwide declined 9% between April 2009 and April 2010. That followed a 10% decline the previous year. Newspaper industry revenues have plunged 30% in the U.S. between 2007 and 2009, according to an Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development analysis reported June 14, 2010, in The New York Times (Pfanner, 2010).
With alarming statistics like these, it is pollyannaish to consider dire market predictions to be pure hyperbole, but it might also be unrealistic to predict the absolute demise of an entire industry that has kept the masses informed for more than half a millennium. After all, as printed circulation declines for newspapers, Web site visits are increasing, although most newspapers do not charge for their Web sites and therefore their online readership is not included in the calculations that generate circulation statistics (Plembeck, 2010).

But exactly how is this American classic, the newspaper, coping with light-speed changes in human communication? Specifically, how are newspapers of varying circulation sizes – from small country weeklies to large metro dailies – adjusting to the rush of new media? Notably under-researched at this point is specifically how one of mass communications’ most foundational mediums, community newspapers – defined by the researcher in this study as medium- and small-market dailies, bi-weeklies and weeklies – utilize new media in a marketplace surging with new technologies.

“Interactivity” is one term used to describe a component of Web sites through which newspapers might remain indispensable in this evolving marketplace. Interactivity subsumes the numerous and various methods through which newspapers utilize their Web sites to seek two-way or multi-way interaction between readers and the newspaper as an institution, readers and individual newspaper staff members, readers and other readers, through various links of connectedness. While research conducted on metro daily newspapers’ interactivity with readers through their Web sites has been minimal, scholarly literature devoted specifically to smaller community newspapers’ interactivity with readers has been practically non-existent, even though community newspapers are one sector of the print media industry experiencing consistent growth.
While the total number of daily newspapers in America has decreased 5.8% in the past 10 years, the total number of weekly newspapers — defined as those published fewer than four times per week — has increased 7.8% during the same period of time (Newspaper Association of America [NAA], 2008). Even with that sector of consistent growth in an otherwise declining industry, little scholarly attention has been paid to new media in community journalism, or to community journalism in general. As Hutchins (2004) notes: “Life at the margins, in outlying areas and provincial ‘backwaters’ – the regions – is of significance in the creation and functioning of media culture, yet this area receives only limited attention when compared to activities at the global level” (p. 577).

Keyword searches through “Communication and Mass Media Complete,” arguably the most comprehensive search engine for scholarly journal articles in the fields of mass communications, support Hutchins’ (2004) observation. A June 2010 keyword search of scholarly (peer reviewed) journals through EBSCO Host revealed 296 results for the keywords “online journalism,” 395 results for the keyword “interactivity,” 383 results for keywords “new media technologies,” 1,560 results for keywords “information and communication technologies,” 3,446 results for keywords “new media,” and 8,437 results for the keyword “Internet.” But when the words “community journalism” were added to the keyword searches, results decreased sharply. For instance, combined keyword searches for “online journalism” and “community journalism” revealed 29 results; combined keywords “new media technologies” and “community journalism” revealed 12 results; combined keywords “information and communication technologies” and “community journalism” revealed 14 results; combined keywords “new media” and “community journalism” revealed only one result, and combined keywords “Internet” and “community journalism” also revealed only one result. Perhaps most relevant to this
current research project, combined keyword searches for “interactivity” and “community journalism” revealed zero results. Meanwhile, in peripheral searches, keywords “links of connectedness” (LOC) or “links of connection” brought up zero results, “community journalism” brought up 29 results, “community newspapers” showed 118 results, “online newspapers” brought up 112 results, “metro newspapers” showed three results, “daily newspapers” showed 613 results and “newspapers” showed 8,573 results.

This apparent lack of scholarly attention to the Internet’s relation to community newspapers – or to the utilization of interactive media in newspapers on a broader scale – brings cause to study this connection in greater detail. In fact, one of the more inclusive studies (Schultz, 1999) content analyzed only 100 online newspapers, another qualitative study (Rosenberry, 2005) looked at 47 newspaper Web sites, and a multi-year longitudinal study by Tremayne, Weiss, & Alves (2007) examined 24 online newspapers for dynamic content. These studies are certainly significant and are referenced in this Literature Review, but their limited scope points to a need for more expansive study of the newspaper industry’s attention to online delivery and interactive opportunities.

Additionally, the limited scholarly research conducted on community journalism and community newspapers in general provides reason for more attention to these areas. A study by Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay (2008) content analyzed more than a decade of mass communication scholarship “on the relationship between community and news media, exploring a broad array of the perceptions of the meaning of community and of the meaning of the relationship between community and journalism” (Lowrey et al., p. 278). In one of the most expansive meta-analyses of its kind – some of which is cited in this Literature Review – researchers culled 11 years of scholarly journal articles from
1995 through 2005 to arrive at a definition and measure of community journalism. Their decade-long search yielded only 108 articles to code.

This current study is among the first in the field to sample and code enough community and metro newspaper Web site home pages to safely generalize what the industry as a whole is doing – or not doing – to interact with newspaper readers online, or to facilitate readers interacting with each other.

Scholarly research is also warranted in order to address predictions beginning nearly two decades ago that increasing Internet use would correlate almost directly with the demise of the printed newspaper. For more than 500 years, historians have defined the traditional local newspaper as an ink-on-paper medium connecting readers of common cultures and characteristics, which are usually distinguished by geographic region but which might also be defined through common interests (Eisenstein, 2005). This current study investigates how modern community and metro newspapers are utilizing their Web sites’ interactive capabilities to connect with readers and to assist in connecting readers to each other.

Are journalists embracing what Internet technologies can bring to the newspaper business, or stubbornly burying their heads in the sand? Answers to questions like these could assist the industry in charting its course in the 21st century. The purpose of this study is to determine how American community newspapers – those with primarily smaller and more localized audiences – are utilizing interactive capabilities of their Web sites in comparison to larger-market newspapers. The overarching goal was to provide a more detailed understanding of how community and metro newspapers in the United States are exploiting the potential of information and communication technologies, also called “new media,” to connect with readers in a constantly evolving media marketplace.
A review of existing literature serves as a contextual underpinning for a research study that offers insight into how new media technologies, particularly interactive Web sites, might be considered a necessary complement to community and metro newspapers, or perhaps the newspaper industry’s savior.

The Literature Review is followed by a two-part study: a) A content analysis of American newspaper Web sites, and b) Surveys of online editors/Web site coordinators. The content analysis measured community and metro newspaper Web sites’ links of connectedness, operationalized through the various devices online newspapers use to interact with their readers. Data measures how connected to their readers community and metro newspapers are attempting to be, creating a reference point for analysis with industry surveys. Since no content analysis of this scope has been conducted at this point, and since there is no industry-recognized sampling frame in existence for “neighborhood and community newspapers” (Jeffres, Cutietta, Lee, & Sekerka, 1999, p. 87), the sampling frame for this study was drawn from categories determined by circulation ranges. The final stratified sample used for the content analysis phase of the study also served as the sample used in the coinciding industry survey.

The goal for this study was to build a platform from which various follow-up studies can spring in multiple directions, providing practical information useful in advancing online newspaper research – indeed the newspaper industry – forward in step with advances in new media technologies. Therefore, a number of broad research questions were raised, then narrowed and empirically examined. For instance, we begin with a philosophical macro-analytical journalism industry question: Is it good professional practice for community and metro newspapers to utilize new media options to connect with their readers?
Since studies show the primary reason people read their local newspaper is to keep up with the local goings-on (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006), this study has determined how online newspapers are attempting to create and maintain consistent interaction with their readers while facilitating online dialogue among the readers themselves. Essentially, how can a local newspaper’s Web site assist in the process of encouraging communal dialogue? How exactly do “new media” – specifically Web sites – fit into the picture of connecting community and metro newspapers to their readers, connecting institution to individual? How do new media fit into the picture of connecting newspaper readers to others within their communities, or to public officials? Do metro newspapers make better use of their interactive opportunities than community newspapers? Specifically, the researcher studied and compared the “links of connectedness” between the Web sites of smaller community newspapers and larger metro newspapers to determine if one group can possibly learn from the other.

The scope of this content analysis and industry survey provides journalism professionals and scholars with an unprecedented breadth of information about interactivity facilitated through online newspapers. The content analysis provides a clear description of LOC utilization among sampled newspapers, and the feedback gathered through surveys of online editors/Web site coordinators addresses the question of why journalists are utilizing interactive options their Web sites provide, and with what perceived effects, or why they are choosing not to. This study uses content analysis to answer this overarching research question: How are American community and metro newspapers presenting interactive “links of connectedness,” or LOCs, on their Web sites in effort to establish, maintain, and perpetuate online interaction with readers? The industry surveys have answered this related follow-up question: Why, or why not, and
with what perceived effects? This study employed both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. A quantitative content analysis sets the table in providing primary descriptive data. Since many social scientists believe descriptive content analysis should be a first essential step in any body of research, especially research that breaks new ground (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005), this study systematically and objectively approached new media options at community and metro newspapers through counting various specific links of connectedness on their Web sites’ home pages.

LOCs are defined operationally in this study as any links on the home page of a newspaper’s Web site that allow readers to submit input – whether feedback or new material – to the newspaper institutionally, to individual reporters personally, or to interact with reporters, other readers or various civic leaders and public officials asynchronously or in real time. The emphasis for LOC is two-way or multi-way interaction. The sampling frame for this study was drawn from categories determined by circulation ranges, including weeklies, bi-weeklies, and dailies. The circulation ranges are narrower among small and mid-sized community newspapers than previous studies because researchers were interested in determining if there are notable increases in links of connectedness as circulation increases among newspapers in these categories. For instance, there are 11 circulation range categories between under-2,000 and 100,000 circulation, but only 8 circulation range categories between 100,000 and above-500,000 circulation. The emphasis of this LOC study remains on small- to mid-sized newspapers, explaining the narrower circulation categories among newspapers below 100,000 circulation.

The goal was to create a clear, descriptive, thorough, and replicable picture of what community and metro newspapers are doing to reach their readers through the
devices of discourse made available through the Internet. Critical examination of the content analysis data is significant in understanding how new media are connecting readers to community newspapers. Surveys are important in learning why online editors and Web site coordinators – those individuals who are most responsible for newspapers’ Web site content – are employing LOCS and with what effects, or why they are choosing not to.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

As information technologies have made multi-lateral communication the norm, the top-down vertically mediated communication of TV, radio, and newspapers continues giving way to the inter-connected, horizontally hyper-networked virtual sphere of online communication. Longstanding definitions of mass media are continually reshaped in a communication-driven world where technology advances fly through the marketplace at warp speed, where today’s satellite is yesterday’s telegraph. Whereas only a few years ago we were amazed by high-speed modems, Ethernet cables, and fiber optics, we now speak of satellite uplinks, routers and hot spots as wireless networking is the new communication standard. With cell phones acting like laptops and laptops acting like cell phones, wireless technologies have broadened communication capacities exponentially. Abbreviated in modern vernacular to PDAs or “smartphones,” personal digital assistants come with names like iPhone, BlackBerry, and Palm, and do essentially everything a laptop, cell phone, digital camera, and MP3 can. Today, as long as you can get a wireless signal, you can connect to anyplace on Earth. Consumers can receive and send e-mail, visit Web sites, talk on the phone, text message, download data, and capture digital images or video, all from a single do-it-all digital processor that is about the size of a deck of cards. Within a new media context that postmodern historians will recognize as revolutionary in scope and significance, this study examines how community and metro newspapers are utilizing their Web sites to interact with readers and enable readers to interact with each other. It studies how newspapers are taking advantage of the very technologies that many media critics claim will inevitably put them out of business.
The Digital State of a Print Industry

While essentially all metro and regional daily newspapers have Web sites, that is not assumed for smaller community newspapers, those small dailies and weeklies that average approximately 7,000 readers. In fact, an April 2007 hand count of the 2,676 community newspapers registered with the National Newspaper Association – the largest organization in America focusing on community newspapers specifically – showed that only 1,454, or 54.3%, were maintaining a Web site connected to their printed editions.

Conway (2001) points out that one benchmark for a new innovation’s popularity concerns how long it takes to become utilized by at least 30% of the mainstream population. For electricity that was 46 years, for telephone it was 38 years, for television it was 17 years (Rogers, 1995), and for the Internet it was only 7 years (UCLA Report, 2000). Certainly, infrastructure was one key determinant in how fast the Internet was adopted into mainstream America, as compared to electricity and telephones. Early technologies required huge infrastructure investments, like power grids and phone lines, poles and towers, cables and fiber optics. When the Internet tapped in, an infrastructure was already in place. Also, some researchers point to 1993 as the year when the Internet began its rapid climb from fascinating oddity to essential commodity, the year that Internet browser software made it easier to navigate the Web (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). Nevertheless, when examining the Internet’s rapid rise in mass popularity in the United States of America, Pew Research Center figures support that estimate, noting that 4% of U.S. citizens polled in January 1994 said they went “online yesterday,” jumping to 30% of Americans in April 2000, to 43% in April 2002, and to 53% in May 2006 (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2006). Internet penetration statistics supplied by Nielsen/Net Ratings and posted online by Internet World Stats (2008), which cover
the entire continent of North America (including Canada, the United States, Mexico, and several smaller countries), show that Internet penetration reached 73.6% in North America by December 2008 (www.internetworldstats.com). While North America is a vastly more sweeping region than the U.S. alone, these statistics support a consistent trend of increasing Internet usage.

Social scientists, market analysts, communication researchers, and media professionals have been predicting the obsolescence of printed newspapers since something called the “World Wide Web” opened portals to an “Information Superhighway” in the mid-1990s. As we quickly sped through the period of amazement and into our current era of accepting new media as a common utility, these lofty identifiers have been reduced simply to the “Web” or “Net” as online communication has become the norm. We have come to expect wireless signals to be available as readily as the refrigerator light that never seems to go off. Internet communication is no longer an interesting distraction we learn to live with, but an absolute necessity we cannot afford to live without. If current newspaper trends continue, predictions point to 2020 as the year in which the majority of an average newspaper’s readership and income will be derived from the Internet (Kuttner, 2007). “The Internet revenue of newspaper Web sites is increasing at 20% to 30% a year, and publishers are doing everything they can to boost Web traffic” (Kuttner, 2007, p. 26). And with good reason. Since the Newspaper Association of America began tracking online newspapers in 2004, trends show a steady increase in newspaper Web sites’ traffic each year. More than 63.2 million Americans visited newspaper Web sites in October 2007, representing an 8% increase from the same period a year before (Newspaper Association of America, 2008).
As the shift to online delivery progresses, the information itself will continue to be the primary article of trade. Kuttner (2007) posits the mainstream press will continue figuring out how to make money from the Internet, using the Web “to enrich traditional journalistic forms” (p. 24), while retaining conventional professional practices of attaining and disseminating news and information. Rewriting a media model that might incorporate part print medium and part online medium, newspapers will survive and succeed in some creative hybrid form. Meyer (2008) predicts: “The newspapers that survive will probably do so with some kind of hybrid content: analysis, interpretation and investigative reporting in a print product that appears less than daily, combined with constant updating and reader interaction on the Web” (p. 34). Kuttner adds: “The culture and civic mission of daily print journalism endure” (p. 24).

While ringing the death knell for an entire industry might seem presumptuous, newspapers are certainly going through difficult transitions that come each time a new medium gains wide acceptance into the marketplace. The total number of newspapers in America has declined by 223 daily newspapers between 1987 and 2007, from 1,645 to 1,422 newspapers. In effect, this 20-year period, that saw historically significant growth in online technologies, brought with it a 13.5% decline in the total number of daily newspapers in business. A more recent indicator of the dramatic drop in daily newspapers comes in the final 2 years of that 20-year span, when newspapers declined from 1,452 in 2005 to 1,422 in 2007. The shuttering of 30 newspaper operations in just 2 years represents a 2.1% decline (NAA, 2008), but perhaps the most notable blow to the industry to date came in 2009 when 105 newspapers closed (Dumpala, 2009). Of those, 61 belonged to some of the largest newspaper corporations in America. Gannett Co. Inc., which publishes more than 900 daily and non-daily newspapers, shuttered seven U.S.
newspapers in 2009. GateHouse Media, Inc., which has 379 daily and weekly newspapers, closed eight newspapers. Also in 2009, the Sun-Times Media Group closed 12 newspapers and the Journal Register Company closed 34 newspapers after being dropped from the New York Stock Exchange in 2008 (Dumpala, 2009).

According to Meyer’s (2004) study on the decline of daily newspaper readership in America – which has shrunk from nearly 80% penetration in 1960 to just over 30% today – the daily newspaper industry will run out of readers by the end of the first quarter 2043. When total newspaper circulation in America has declined from 58.9 million in 1960 to 50.7 million in 2007 (NAA, 2008) – while the population of America has increased from 179 million to more than 300 million during the same span of time – Meyer’s (2004) dire prediction seems plausible unless the industry continues to adapt, respond, and level off. The discouraging descent appears even more dramatic when considering that newspaper circulation in America peaked at 63.3 million in 1984, meaning the 23-year span that followed saw a 19.9% drop in newspaper circulation (NAA, 2008).

When examining circulation numbers at community newspapers, however, the picture is actually optimistic, as small weeklies, bi-weeklies and dailies have been steadily increasing in numbers during the past 40 years. The NAA (2008) reports the total number of weekly newspapers in America – categorized as those published fewer than four times a week – has also increased in the past 10 years, from 6,580 in 1996 to 6,659 in 2005. Total circulation for weekly newspapers – which average approximately 7,000 readers per issue – went from 45.9 million in 1996 to 49.5 million in 2005, a 7.8% increase. Meanwhile, Sunday newspapers are also on the rise in America, increasing 61.1% in the past 47 years, from 563 Sunday papers published in 1960 to 907 printed in
2007. Circulation for Sunday papers has increased from 47.7 million readers in 1960 to 51.2 million readers in 2007 (NAA, 2008). Even with these positive numbers, there are some researchers and industry analysts who believe regional and community newspapers appear “of minor concern given their small scale and residual presence in the media industries” (Hutchins, 2004, p. 577).

Newspapers have historically endured ominous market predictions, withstood analysts’ criticism, and adapted to the onslaught of new media competition, beginning in the 1930s when radio was able to deliver news immediately so that consumers no longer had to wait until the next day to read about it in the morning paper. Consolidating resources, reducing waste, and focusing on delivering to consumers what other media cannot – in-depth analysis and local coverage of events that are significant to local readers – newspapers survived to fight another day. And it is difficult to exclaim the newspaper will be dead in less than four decades when circulation figures show that daily newspapers are delivered to roughly one out of every six people in America each day, and community newspaper circulation numbers are similar. Also, this 1-to-6 ratio does not exclude citizens too young to read newspapers. For instance, approximately 20% of U.S. citizens are below the age of 15. With a general industry-wide understanding that people under 15 years old are among the below-18 age range most likely not expected to be newspaper readers, these circulation figures would put the ratio at closer to one out of every five Americans. In fact, the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, arguably the most thorough and consistent professional research center in the newspaper industry, does not begin tracking newspaper readers in its annual audience surveys until they reach age 18 (State of the News Media, 2004). These readership figures also do not reflect the pass-along effects that generally show actual readership numbers doubling or
tripling circulation figures. For example, a 50,000-circulation newspaper typically claims 100,000-150,000 readers.

Another important study of the industry widens the lens to examine newspaper circulation growth worldwide, creating a broader and more optimistic perspective about the industry on the whole. Data gathered in 2007 by the World Association of Newspapers shows “unprecedented growth” in daily newspaper titles and paid circulation. Between 2002 and 2006, daily paid newspaper titles grew nearly 17% worldwide, from 9,533 to 11,142 daily newspapers. Circulation of daily newspapers increased 8.7% worldwide across the same 5-year span to a record 510 million copies. Also, distribution of free daily newspapers tripled during those 5 years, from 13.8 million in 2002 to 40.8 million in 2006 (Franklin, 2008). “These data offer a sobering corrective to the pessimists’ case” (Franklin, 2008, p. 308) that printed newspapers are soon to be an artifact of the past, solidifying that while the industry may be in a period of serious restructuring and realignment (particularly in America), “the global newspaper business is booming” (p. 308).

In perhaps the most significant area of interest to U.S. newspaper stakeholders – advertising revenue – newspapers continue to perform well, running second only to television and maintaining a sizeable lead over all other media. Using 2006 statistics, Plunkett Research, Ltd. notes the following overall media advertising statistics in the United States: $66.8 billion spent on television advertising in the U.S. in 2006; $49 billion spent on newspaper advertising; $24 billion spent on magazine advertising; $19.7 billion spent on radio advertising, and $15 billion spent on online advertising. The U.S. Department of Commerce consistently ranks newspapers and television news outlets among the largest and most profitable U.S. enterprises, with “operating margin
percentages usually in the range of the low to mid-twenties” (Ahlers, 2006, p. 40) for newspapers, and profit margins averaging 32% for cable TV news outlets and 45-50% for local TV news stations (Ahlers, 2006). With advertising revenues and profit margins as staggering as these, it seems difficult to project the demise of traditional media as an industry.

Community Newspapers Remain Backbone of the Industry

Newspapers are thrown away quickly, television stations are channel surfed and Web sites are abandoned with one click, but as long as there are consumers who want to stay informed on local issues, then community news and information will remain valuable as a commodity to be sold and bought. Morton (2006) wrote: “Newspapers will remain necessary because of what they do, and it does not matter whether the news they gather is delivered online or in print or in some other ways as yet unimagined” (p. 68). The positive circulation and advertising figures in the community newspaper segment of the overall print media market support a newspaper business theory held by this researcher and others: Community journalism has always been, and will continue to be, the backbone of the industry, regardless of the preferred medium delivering information. Kuttner (2007) notes:

Community newspapers clearly have momentum; subscription and single-copy income is down, but ad income, and overall income, is up. The advertising base of local weeklies was never as reliant on larger national advertisers, and their intensely local franchise is retaining both a readership and local advertising bond that the Web is challenging at a far slower rate than it assaults regional dailies. (p. 28)
One reason for this is that while businesses in large markets can choose from a wide variety of media to carry their advertising messages to consumers – Internet, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, billboards – businesses in smaller markets are more limited in how they can administer their advertising dollars. In smaller, less-populated markets the local community newspapers remain the most viable advertising option for local businesses.

Community newspapers maintain a position of strength financially as long as they maintain a position of strength functionally. Recognizing their primary charge is to inform local readers about local events and issues that are important to them, many scholars and community journalists have expounded on that principle mission to incorporate elements of communal partnership. After surveying 120 journalists and media scholars at a conference aimed at defining “community journalism,” Lowrey et al. (2006) note: “Community journalism is intimate, caring, and personal; it reflects the community and tells its stories; and it embraces a leadership role. These characteristics mirror normative descriptions of community journalism proposed by its proponents in recent years” (p. 276). For instance, a 2005 research project by Heider, McCombs, & Poindexter found that approximately half of newspaper readers surveyed agreed that providing public forums through which members of the public and civic leaders could exchange views and solve community problems was an important role of the local newspaper.

Within the context of social and political philosophy, Bunton (1998) states that communitarianism in the broader sense emphasizes “connection, community, and common good over individualism, rights-based language, and cost-benefit analysis. Ethically, communitarianism can be regarded as a radical form of social responsibility
theory and a direct contrast to classic individual-oriented liberalism” (p. 232). Too radical, perhaps, for a typical business model at a traditional small-town community newspaper, but the ideal warrants examination. While the local newspaper’s role of service to its community has sometimes “veered into cheerleading” (Bunton, 1998, p. 233) about what it believes to be best for the community at large, it generally works to balance its “truth-telling and watchdog duties” (p. 233) against any perceived community boosterism and essentially provides “socially responsible coverage that fosters the common good” (p. 233). Altschull (1996) believes the “community journalist goes beyond the facts” and that community journalism, as an institution, “demands putting the public interest ahead of maximization of profit” (p. 171). Altschull and others point out that community journalism should serve as the “link that facilitates communication and decision making” (p. 172). While journalists should not necessarily be the ones proposing solutions to communities’ problems, they should be the ones using their public forums to enable solutions as the “end product of the process” (Altschull, 1996, p. 172).

As the mediums of message delivery may continue evolving from paper to paperless, the word *newspaper* should remain synonymous with what it does rather than its ink-on-newsprint format, and the community newspaper should continue focusing on what it does best, covering local news and bolstering communal values. De Waal, Schonbach, & Lauf (2005) note: “In general, newspapers indeed seem to help create a richer public agenda than other information channels” (p. 56). This might be especially true for community newspapers, where the local media play a larger role in smaller markets, the proverbial big fish in a little pond. As companies like Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc. (CNHI) specialize in community newspapers and effectively boast more than 10 million readers – approximately one-fifth of all community
newspaper readers nationwide – this theory seems to be holding strong regardless of new media’s influence (CNHI, 2007).

In fact, common perceptions of consumers totally replacing their printed newspapers with online technologies are statistically unwarranted. Data published in a 2006 study shows “the hypothesized mass migration of news consumption behavior is not supported by the facts” (Ahlers, 2006, p. 29). While some news consumers have completely replaced traditional news sources like newspapers and television with online sources, the numbers are relatively low, as only 12% of U.S. adults surveyed said they have made this direct and total substitution. Another 22% of U.S. adults surveyed said they have substituted a portion of online news for offline news, but they are generally using online news sources as a complement to traditional sources, rather than a replacement. Perhaps most significant in Ahlers’ (2006) study is the fact that “two-thirds of the U.S. adult population have not shifted to online news consumption and appear unlikely to do so” (p. 29).

Considering the abundance of media sources competing for consumers’ time and the labor involved in acquiring news and information through active media like newspapers, magazines, and Web sites, recent statistics could be considered encouraging in the area of newspaper readership. While readership has seen a steady decline in the past 40 years – since a 1965 Gallup survey (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2006) found that 71% of consumers had read a newspaper on the previous day – those numbers seem to be leveling off and even beginning a slight upswing, due in no small part to newspapers finding their Web presence. Today, adding the 38% who said they read a printed newspaper “yesterday” to the 5% who said they read a newspaper online, the total readership is 43%. Another 4% said they read both a printed version and
online version “yesterday” (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2006). The Pew Research Center (2006) reports: “While asking people if they ‘read a daily newspaper yesterday’ provides a good estimate of overall trends in readership on a typical day, it may understate the size of the online newspaper audience. Some who visit a newspaper’s Web site for news or information may not recall that experience when asked if they ‘read a daily newspaper’ precisely because it does not fit the traditional definition of newspaper reading” (p. 19). While it is unlikely that newspaper readership – in the tradition of print – will ever return to plus-70% penetration numbers enjoyed in the 1960s, shifting print journalism’s emphasis to an online presence could dictate the industry’s success in the future. The key will be whether or not consumers maintain a desire to be informed.

Examining cultural edification characteristics of newspapers, studies have noted they serve to increase readers’ knowledge base through offering a broader range of topics reported. De Waal et al. (2005) point out the different ways in which readers acquire information from Web sites and printed newspapers, determining that accessing information online has a more “active” style because it is a “research medium,” while accessing information through newspapers requires more of a survey style in that information is presented in a “display medium” (p. 57). While both methods require effort, print media have an educational advantage due to the cognitive effects of this survey style.

Tewksbury & Althaus (2000) concur, adding that reader retention rates are higher among those who acquire news from printed media and lower for those who acquire news online: “Relative to traditional newspapers, Internet-based papers provide fewer cues about news story importance and give readers more control over story selection” (p. 457).
That is to say, while newspapers traditionally employ a hierarchical ordinal design that emphasizes what editors believe are the most important stories of the day – through story placement, headline sizes, and photos – Web design typically makes story importance less obvious for the reader. Limited screen space of a computer monitor often mandates headlines of generally equal sizes, smaller images and fewer cues as to which news stories Web editors believe are the most important. Also, those who seek information via the Internet often link to sites and pages that contain information pertaining to their specific interests, thus bypassing stories that might be important and overlooking stories that might have gained their interest had they been exposed to them. An example might be students bypassing an important story about college tuition increases in favor of a link to a story about the Top 10 video games of the year. Information one might need is passed over in favor of information one might want.

Consequently, online readers tend to become what Tewksbury & Althaus (2000) call “issue publics,” which are small pockets of “dispersed individuals who specialize in particular kinds of public affairs information” (p. 459) but who have less expansive and generalized knowledge about the broader array of issues in the news. A cycle of reaffirming existing understandings replaces any potential acquisition of new knowledge. “As a result, readers of an online paper may acquire less information about national, international, and political events than would print paper readers” (p. 457). In their study using The New York Times printed and online editions, Tewksbury & Althaus (2000) learned that online readers of the newspaper “appear to have read fewer national, international, and political stories and were less likely to recognize and recall events that occurred during the exposure period” (p. 457). In the pages of printed newspapers, on the other hand, editors collate and organize stories in a manner that prioritizes them for the
reader based on overall importance and general value to readers at large, therefore exposing readers to stories they need as well as stories they want.

As consumers’ tastes have evolved significantly during the past 20 years, along with the content and format of newspapers, one constant remains: The biggest advantage community and metro newspapers have over all other media – their coverage of local news – continues to be their most attractive draw for readers. Today, as it was during the mid-1980s, roughly 9-in-10 of those who at least “sometimes read a newspaper” say they spend a “significant amount of time” reading about their city, town or region (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 2006). Simply put, people read the newspaper to attain local information.

Studying how community newspapers are utilizing new media becomes relevant as two truths emerge: a) online communication is here to stay, and b) community journalism is not a secondary participant existing in the shadows of the large daily metro, regional and national newspapers, but an equally powerful participant, perhaps even the driving force behind the stability and success of the industry. A community newspaper’s primary commodity remains its local information, regardless of how that information is delivered. Meyer (2008) notes: “A newspaper’s most important product, the product least vulnerable to substitution, is community influence. It gains this influence by being the trusted source for locally produced news, analysis and investigative reporting about public affairs” (p. 35).

Throughout history, we have learned that each time a new medium is introduced to the market and readily accepted into mainstream communication – like the printing press, telegraph, radio, television, and the Internet – the existing dominant media are forced to shuffle around and make room for the new kid screaming for consumers’
attention. Information and communication technologies have emerged into the marketplace faster than any medium in history, and traditional media are reacting and readjusting, sometimes seamlessly, sometimes clumsily, often reluctantly. One overarching question on which this study might shed valuable light is: How will interactivity, these so-called links of connectedness (LOCs), factor into newspapers’ adjustments to the increasing relevance of new media?

As even a few years can be a virtual lifespan in the fast-changing world of Internet technology, this study examines more extensively how the modern newspaper is reacting to consumers’ exponentially increasing use of the Internet. While some in the newspaper industry are embracing new media and taking advantage of their potential, others are posting Web sites that do little more than shovel content from the printed newspaper, while still others are steering away from the Internet entirely, choosing to focus only on the printed edition. This study quantifies community and metro newspapers’ connectedness to their readers through new media, then analyzes the associated editorial decisions.

Traditional Understandings of Uses and Gratifications Theory

Traditional uses and gratifications (U&G) theories suggest that consumers of mass media products – newspaper and magazine readers, TV viewers, radio listeners, Internet browsers – will direct their attention to the medium that best suits their needs, and select what they need from that medium. Beyond our basic needs, consumers’ motivations for selecting a certain medium and assigning a specific use to that medium come from “interests and externally imposed constraints” (Baran & Davis, 2006, p. 275). Theories of consumers’ uses for and gratifications gained from mass media have been studied in various social sciences since the 1930s. Progressively, researchers in sociology
and psychology gained interest in studying the fulfillment audience members attained from their chosen forms of media and the types of content that satisfy audience members’ social, psychological, and emotional needs (Cantril, 1942). But most of the early U&G research was disjointed and lacked theoretical coherence, applying quasi-qualitative methods to gather data whose interpretation was largely subjective (McQuail, 1994). Broad categories of U&G were developed without researchers being able to generalize their findings to any mass audiences. Ruggiero (2000) notes:

The earliest researchers for the most part did not attempt to explore the links between the gratifications detected and the psychological or sociological origins of the needs satisfied. They often failed to search for the interrelations among the various media functions, either quantitatively or conceptually. (p. 5)

Long-held ideas that media were able to have a direct effect on audience members exclusive of other social influences began giving way in the 1960s to more practical notions of media being part of a larger uses and gratifications phenomenon. Klapper presented the notion that “several elements intercede between a message and one’s response so that, in most instances, media messages that are intended to persuade actually reinforce existing attitudes” (Rubin, 2002, p. 525). Rubin (2002) notes that media researchers could therefore argue that media, by themselves, are not “sufficient causes of audience effects,” (p. 525) and that media messages make up only one factor (albeit significant) of influence in consumers’ lives. “Uses and gratifications sees a medium or message as a source of influence within the context of other possible influences. It sees media audiences as variably active communicators, rather than passive recipients of messages” (p. 525). Within this contextual framework, Rubin explains the paradigm:
The principal elements of uses and gratifications include our psychological and social environment, our needs and motives to communicate, the media, our attitudes and expectations about the media, functional alternatives to using the media, our communication behavior, and the outcomes or consequences of our behavior. (p. 527)

By the 1980s researchers were beginning to approach U&G research in a more systematic manner, conducting studies with methodologies that were replicable, expounding on previous research in a more quantitative way, comparatively analyzing findings from separate studies, and treating mass media use as an “integrated communication and social phenomenon” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 7). The effects of various media selected by consumers have been open to rigorous scholarly debate since Windahl argued more than 25 years ago that a “uses and effects” model provided the more appropriate merger between U&G theories and any plausible effects the media might have on consumers (Baran & Davis, 2006). It stated that what people are motivated to do after being exposed to media messages they select – whether it’s buying an advertised product or copying a fashion style they see on TV – should be as important as the reasons they have for selecting exposure to their media of choice in the first place. Audience members may receive several different gratifications from attending different forms of mass media, “both sought and obtained,” such as “knowledge, dependency, attitudes, perceptions of social reality, agenda-setting, discussion, and various political effects variables” (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rosengren, 1985, p. 31). But clear empirical understandings are forever debatable on the questions of what levels of gratifications are attained and what effects are discernable as a result of media consumption. Baran & Davis (2006) note: “While modest cognitive effects are sometimes found, links with
affective or behavioral effects are much less common. Perhaps it takes a long time for such effects to occur and therefore they are difficult to measure” (p. 275). Or perhaps “media uses-and-gratifications may not be a very powerful influence compared to other forces in the social world” (p. 275). Palmgreen et al. (1985) build on the argument that any changes effected as a result of media consumption are most likely to occur congruently with other social forces. For instance, purchasing a clothing item advertised on television might become more likely after the consumer notices that same item becoming fashionable among peers. Many social theorists still agree with the position Palmgreen et al. maintained in 1985: “Current uses and gratifications theory … posits that change will arise from the dynamic interaction of an active, resourceful audience with responsive and equally resourceful media systems, within the context of fluctuating social, political, and economic environments. Where these conditions hold, uses and gratifications theory has the potential to provide new and fruitful insights into media-related social change” (p. 35).

The idea that there is such a thing as an “active” audience has been debated by scholars who point out that media consumers who engage deliberately and selectively in their information choices are anything but universal, perhaps even being few and far between. Windahl (1981) argued that audiences range across a broad spectrum of engagement in the communication process, from very involved and highly discriminating to completely passive and nearly detached. Ruggiero (2000) clarifies: “More succinctly, different individuals tend to display different types and amounts of activity in different communication settings and at different times in the communication process” (p. 8). There is no single brush stroke we can apply to media consumers, and therefore, no single dimension we can apply to their uses and gratifications attained from media.
This reality brings cause for concern as to the generalizability of any U&G research. It is, for instance, difficult if not impossible to predict outcomes beyond the specific group being studied “or to consider societal implications of media use” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 12). Research projects are generally individualized so that motives measured in media use are broad and diverse across different U&G studies, therefore impeding “conceptual development because separate research findings are not synthesized” (Ruggiero, p. 12). Also, there are no universally recognized definitions for concepts such as: media consumer needs or motives; social history; psychological predispositions; behavior and consequences. In fact, as Ruggiero (2000) notes, there are no clear definitions for fundamental terms like uses and gratifications. What constitutes a use? What defines a gratification?

Where certain conditions hold, certain outcomes might be expected. Where certain levels of activity are measured, certain outcomes might be predictable. But where do any of these conditions hold? And how active is active? That depends on several conditions, among them which media are being examined. For instance, there are active media that require a notable level of engagement and effort by the user. Newspapers, magazines, and Web sites, for instance, require scanning and turning of pages, or selecting and clicking Web links, and, ultimately, reading of text. There are also passive media that require little more attention than reflexively tuning in, like watching television programs from a couch (with a remote control for easy channel surfing) or viewing video streams or DVDs, or listening to radio or podcasts.

As Baran & Davis point out (2006), the study of mass media uses and gratifications ultimately delivers few concrete answers, but contributes to an ever-expanding research framework. A final all-encompassing result is not the goal but, rather,
a continually clarifying explication as contributing variables constantly change. Baran & Davis (2006) state:

Some audience members are more active, and some are more passive. This is obvious; we all know too many couch potatoes, people who live their lives through the movies, or people who bend to every fad and fashion presented in the mass media. But we also know many people who fit none of these descriptions. An inactive user can become active. Our level of activity might vary by time of day and by type of content. We might be active users of the World Wide Web by day and passive consumers of late-night movies. What the uses-and-gratifications approach really does, then, is provide a framework for understanding when and how different media consumers become more or less active and what the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement might be. (p. 272)

U&G research is not necessarily a means to an end but, rather, a continuous study of the means. Results of U&G studies add more fibers to an increscent fabric that is essentially a never-ending work in progress. Each contribution to mass communication’s body of knowledge is significant, even the smallest additions, but we are never supposed to see a finished product.

U&G Theory in an Interactive New Media Environment

According to Ruggiero (2000), the phases of U&G research logically evolve to include postmodern concepts like interactivity (two-way or multi-way online communication), demassification (breaking major media options into decentralized segmented elements targeting specific audiences, such as special-interest magazines or Web sites), hypertextuality (multiple hyperlinks within online text that lead to other resources), and asynchrononity (ability to consume media irrespective of time/space
constraints). “As new technologies present people with more and more media choices, motivation and satisfaction become even more crucial components of audience analysis” (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 14). Within the purview of U&G, Crosbie (2004) explains:

If there has been but one trend in media during the past 40 years, it has been people gravitating toward whatever mix of media vehicles that best satisfies each of their own unique mixes of generic and individual interests – mainly at the expense of generic media vehicles such as newspapers and traditional television networks. … The audiences and readerships that appeared to be monolithic in 1960 are forsaking solely generic sources of content and instead satisfying themselves by mixing newer media vehicles that better match their own uniquely individual mixes of generic and individual interests. (para. 44)

Unlike the seemingly vast, anonymous, and generic audiences to whom traditional media have historically attempted to appeal, interactivity is user specific, as online readers select particular LOCs that accommodate their individual needs. Rather than merely surveying general-interest information thrown at them by major media outlets, new media consumers strategically select information that directly meets their requirements. And when they have discriminatorily found the various particular items that appeal to them, they respond to them, interacting with newsmakers and adding to the dialogue, often becoming newsmakers themselves. Traditional news-flow structures have been dismantled. In fact, the postmodern structure of uses and gratifications within the variable framework of technology-driven mass media is that there is no structure. Hutchins (2004) notes: “People use technology for specific, traceable and changeable purposes, and technological forms are both enabling and constraining factors in human action” (p. 578). The same could be said for any attempts to propose uses and effects
theories in a constantly shifting media environment. Interactive technologies – and the ways they are used – advance so quickly that little can be done to anchor a theoretical foundation. Bucy & Tao (2007) point out:

The empirical research on interactivity has yielded scattered findings and has been unable to ascertain consistent patterns of effects on users. After three decades of analysis and investigation, we scarcely know what interactivity really is, let alone what it does, and we have scant insight into the conditions in which interactive processes are consequential for individual technology users. (p. 647)

When discussing active media within the context of the modern online newspaper, notions of interactivity become relevant in any discussion of media uses and gratifications, or uses and effects. As we examine how interactivity might find its place in the evolution of online journalism and discuss the degree to which a newspaper’s Web site might invest in the concept of multi-lateral feedback, we must revisit the concept. For the purposes of this study, interactivity encompasses the numerous and various methods through which newspapers seek two-way or multi-way interaction between readers and the newspaper as an institution, readers and individual newspaper staff members, readers and other readers, through various LOCs. Interactivity “allows for greater activity and involvement by the reader and simultaneously allows the newspaper to monitor that activity, harness it, and respond to it” (Tremayne, Weiss, & Alves, 2007, p. 825). As early as 1995 one researcher defined interactivity as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time” (Steuer, 1995, p. 46). Deuze (2003) updates and adds: “The literature on online journalism indeed refers to interactivity as the characteristic of the Internet which facilitates association, enabling people not only to receive information … but also to
disseminate it” (Deuze, 2003, p. 213). Schultz (1999) views interactivity as a “variable of responsiveness in interpersonal and societal communication” (p. 1). Bucy (2003) said interactivity describes “reciprocal communication exchanges that involve some form of media, or information and communication technology” (p. 17).

In that vein, user-generated content, or UGC, is Web site fodder that is produced by users or readers themselves. As Schweiger (2005) notes: “In contrast to private homepages or amateur Web sites, UGC is always situated on professional, commercial Web sites, controlled and administered by professional providers and constitutes only one part of the whole content on such a site” (p. 1). Interactive media are typically “responsive to user-inputs” and offer a variety of ways for users to select and modify their feedback. For instance, users can “communicate their needs to the system by choosing from a number of options or by typing in their own text or uploading other content. This allows them to modify the existing system data with their own content” (Schweiger, 2005, p. 4). Schultz (1999) adds: “Interactivity requires a thread of messages, i.e. a chain of interrelated messages. The degree to which communication transcends reaction is key. In one-way communication, one source sets the agenda, receiving no or (at most) indirect feedback. In two-way and reactive communication, both sides send messages” (p. 3). Rafaeli (1988) expounds: “Two-way communication is present as soon as messages flow bilaterally. Reactive settings require, in addition, that later messages refer to (or cohere with) earlier ones” (p. 119).

While interactivity, as applied in this study, is relatively new to online journalism, reciprocal exchange has always been necessary in marketing and public relations. Indeed, feedback has been a requisite in traditional journalism as long as newspapers have run letters to the editor and radio has aired call-in shows. Lordan (2006) points out that forms
of interactivity have “been part of professional communications for a long time. …

Customer testimonials have been used in advertising for more than a century, and public
relations practitioners have employed focus groups to test messages and gather feedback
on programs for decades” (p. 27). Deuze (1999) adds: “Interactivity is a term or concept
which is not, in itself, exclusively part of the Internet discourse, as earlier media and
types of mediated communication have claimed to be more or less interactive – within
journalism one can think of talk radio, for example” (p. 377).

In the case of interactivity related to the newspaper industry, the only real
longstanding universal feedback method has been letters to the editor. Newspapers’
increasing online presence enables them to take classic letters to the editor to a more
instantaneous posture. In fact, one study shows that in the interactive environment of
online newspapers, letters to the editor are still the most common interactive device used
(Rosenberry, 2005). Today a story can run in the newspaper and be posted online, and
within minutes readers can offer feedback, along with other readers, and then readers can
offer feedback on other readers’ feedback, and so on. While no one is asked to discuss
matters face to face, a sort of hyper-text dialogue has become common via newspaper
Web sites’ links of connectedness.

The classic understanding of delayed feedback being one defining characteristic
of mass media is now obsolete as feedback options have become instantaneous at media
outlets with even the most basic Web presence. Immediate feedback on stories often
leads to new additional approaches to stories, which often leads to more feedback. The
story-to-feedback cycle is accelerated, effectively changing the news production process
to accommodate consumers who take advantage of new media options. “As such, an
embrace of this networked environment by journalism challenges news organizations to
extend the level of their direct engagement with audiences as participants in the processes of gathering, selecting, editing, producing, and communicating news” (Deuze, Bruns, & Neuberger, 2007, p. 323).

Deuze (2003) points out that newspapers working to emphasize their online presence by shifting their “focus from content to connectivity” (p. 218) should consider embracing a concept he calls “monitorial journalism,” (p. 218) a partnership in which professionals still monitor “the pulse of society” but do not function as the sole providers of news content. He states:

One could imagine that a Web site is a specific, useful platform for allowing citizens to voice their opinions and questions regarding the issues about which they care. If this connective emphasis is still located within a closed journalistic culture, one could imagine journalism to become like a so-called Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) site, where online editors and reporters answer the demands of their publics by posting stories, backgrounds and annotated links in a FAQ-capacity. (Deuze, 2003, pp. 218-219)

While the reality of newspaper staffing issues may render this level of attention to perpetual online dialogue with readers to be impractical at best, impossible at worst, editors and publishers would certainly be well-advised to recognize this is at least one apparent direction for online journalism. “In other words, a strict division no longer necessarily remains between producers and consumer of news content” (Deuze, 2003, p. 219). As Rosenberry (2005) notes: “The power and promise of online journalism is interactivity, tapping into an audience that is already actively engaged in construction of meaning in the messages and doing some of the gatekeeping for itself” (p. 64). As editors, publishers, and academics research and evaluate the perceived effects – and
effectiveness – of promoting online dialogue through interactive links of newspaper Web sites, they should always scrutinize readers’ uses for, and gratifications from, accessing those Web sites in the first place.

The newspaper’s traditional community standing as a reliable source of information places it in a logical position to host and facilitate reader interactivity. As Rosenberry (2005) points out: “The involvement of the newspaper, a community institution, gives the information exchanged and expressed there a certain traffic level and institutional backing that makes the interaction more meaningful because it is where people are accustomed to turning for accurate, credible information and analysis” (p. 65). Regardless of how information delivery systems continue evolving in the future, the newspaper as an institution will continue to be the most reliable source of news and opinions within any American community. Interactivity, through links of connectedness, must be a logical discursive component within that consistent position of dependability.

Some scholars claim this flexibility in interaction opens a new world of dialogue that serves to promote democratic principles of solving problems through unfettered discourse, a challenge Habermas (2006) claims to be virtually impossible in our vast, fragmented society that depends willingly or unwillingly on a select few elites to establish public opinion for the rest of us. Singer & Gonzalez-Velez (2003) note: “The most participatory mass media form yet invented would seem a natural venue for democracy in action. Internet proponents hail it not just as a massive vehicle for disseminating political content, but more important, as a place for renewed political discourse” (p. 433). Bimber (1999) adds: “An emergent school of Internet communitarians argues that the Internet is creating new social bonds that transcend physical proximity” (p. 409).
Choi (2004) goes so far as to claim that interactivity is perhaps the most significant advantage of a newspaper’s online edition, a feature so important that it might be added to the list of core journalistic values such as objectivity, impartiality, and truth. She states:

Interactivity is the most distinctive contribution that online newspapers make to readers and the newspaper business. … Interactive devices are used to stimulate public discussions and draw thousands of people together in a virtual community. … Building communities for public discussion is one of the main goals of public journalism and can be accomplished by interaction among readers and between readers and editors. (Choi, 2004, p. 16)

Research examining uses and gratifications of new media constantly evolves, but Ko, Cho, & Roberts (2005) point to two dimensions of interactivity that seem to be emerging most frequently in the literature: human-message interaction and human-human interaction. “These two dimensions hold promise for the examination of interactivity on the Internet because they serve as umbrellas for different definitions and dimensions of previous interactivity studies” (Ko et al., p. 59). In their research, human-message interaction is defined as people interacting online with messages, like “choice, levels, control, manipulation, navigation, and/or modifying of form, content, messages, structure, pace, and so forth” (Ko et al., p. 59). Ko et al. (2005) add: “In other words, users can manipulate and customize the messages by alternating colors, shapes, graphics, sounds, and order of message contents” (p. 59). Ko et al. (2005) define their second dimension, human-human interaction, as “two-way, reciprocal communication from senders to receivers and vice versa” (p. 59). Focusing their study primarily on the field of advertising, their examples are nonetheless applicable to online journalism:
In new interactive media ... marketers can deliver information to individual consumers, and the consumers can provide feedback to the marketers. In the context of interactive advertising, this kind of interactivity can be illustrated as providing comments, feedback, and/or personal information to an advertiser, participating in a series of on-line discussions or forums, completing site or product surveys, writing new-product proposals, requesting on-line problem diagnostics, and so forth. (Ko et al., 2005, p. 59)

Other studies (Massey & Levy, 1999; Straubhaar & LaRose, 1996) have also generally pointed to these two dimensions – human-message interactions and human-human interactions – although not necessarily recognizing them by these specific names. Chung & Yoo (2006) expound on these two dimensions by altering the terminology slightly and positioning three dimensions of interactivity on a continuum, which they refer to as “three progressive levels” (p. 9). They are: “medium interactivity,” “human/medium interactivity” and “human interactivity” (Chung & Yoo, p. 9). Medium interactive features rely entirely on “the technology to allow users to exert control, which are considered as lower levels of interactivity” (Chung & Yoo, p. 9). Human/medium interactivity exhibits characteristics of medium interactivity and also allows partial human-to-human communication, for instance, a user expressing an opinion through the Web site. Finally, human interactive features facilitate “user-to-user mutual communication,” (Chung & Yoo, 2006, p. 10) which Chung & Yoo consider to be “higher levels of interactivity” (p. 10).

Deuze (2003) expounds on these dimensions and incorporates aspects of Web site design to include: navigational interactivity, functional interactivity and adaptive interactivity. Navigational interactivity, like Chung & Yoo’s (2006) medium interactivity,
allows the user to “navigate in a more or less structured way through the site’s content,” through various scrolling menu bars and buttons that take users to the “next page,” “back to top” or “home” (Deuze, 2003, p. 214). Functional interactivity, similar to what Chung & Yoo refer to as human interactivity, allows users to “participate to some extent in the production process of the site by interacting with other users or the producers of a particular page or site” (Deuze, 2003, p. 214). Examples might include: e-mail links, bulletin boards or “moderated discussion lists” (p. 214). Adaptive interactivity, similar to what Chung & Yoo refer to as human/medium interactivity, is defined by Deuze (2003) as: “Every action of the user has consequences for the content of the site, as the site’s programming adapts itself to the surfing behavior of every individual user and ‘remembers’ users’ preferences” (p. 214). This allows users to upload, annotate, and discuss their own unique content through chat rooms and other forums.

This current research project focuses on the broad concept of human-human interactions and expounds on varying dimensions under that overarching umbrella of connectedness. For example, a private dialogue between a reader and newspaper staff member (for instance, an e-mail to a reporter) is as much a human-human interaction as a public dialogue between a reader and other readers (for instance, comments posted at the end of news and feature stories). They are just two different components of human-human interactivity facilitated by the newspaper’s Web site, and the concentration remains on how effectively the reader is able to connect with the institution, its staff members, or other readers. The areas of interaction examined in this current study focus on the reader as impetus, that is, readers’ levels of interactivity and online newspapers’ facilitation of those interactive opportunities. This current study builds on previously researched dimensions of general online interactivity and develops more detailed
contributions to U&G research as related specifically to newspaper Web sites’ LOCs, examining five specific dimensions of interactivity within online newspapers:

1. Private: Defined as reader-to-staff member interaction. For instance, “Contact Us” e-mail links, feedback links, or surveys through which readers can submit comments directly to newspaper staff members, but not with the intention of posting for public consumption.

2. Public: Defined as feedback for public consumption. For instance, “Post a Comment” links with stories or staff blogs, through which readers can post feedback for public consumption, either individually or as part of a larger corporate response. Other examples include: message boards, forums and sound offs, “Guestbook” rolls, links to submit announcements, news tips or calendar items, links to submit letters to the editor, opinion polls and survey questionnaires.

3. Real-Time: Defined as readers being able to participate in real-time discourse. For instance, a live chat or discussion, in which readers can join an ongoing discussion with newspaper staff members, public officials, entertainers, athletes, etc., and provide instantaneous back-and-forth dialogue.

4. Social: Defined as readers being able to participate in various social networking media options for which online newspapers are posting links on their home pages more frequently, such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

5. Reader-Submitted Content: Defined as online opportunities for readers to contribute to the newspaper Web site’s editorial content beyond typical feedback links. For instance, user-generated content submitted by readers for public
consumption, like photos, videos, stories, press releases, reader blogs, and podcasts.

Each of these five areas has the reader serving as catalyst, through five different dimensions whose commonality is the LOC. The focus centralizes on the reader’s ability to access and utilize LOCs posted by the online newspaper, whether for private or public consumption, whether as an individual with singular LOC input or as part of a larger body of respondents, whether asynchronously or in real time, whether through simple feedback or supplying actual editorial content. These five dimensions essentially look at all possible LOCs within a common newspaper Web site and delineate the LOCs into logical categories that keep a human interaction element at its core and keep the reader as its center of attention.

Recent studies focusing on the Internet have shown Web sites’ interactive capabilities can provide significant variables in audience members’ uses and gratifications attained. Ko et al. (2005) point out that consumers who are likely to seek information and social interaction from the Internet tend to “stay at a Web site longer to satisfy their corresponding motivations” (p. 66) and also engage in more interaction with others via the Web site. Their study also notes that Internet users tend to develop a more positive attitude for those Web sites that facilitate online dialogue between individuals, this aforementioned “human-human interaction” (Ko et al., 2005, p. 66). These findings could have significant implications for newspapers whose publishers, editors, and Web site coordinators make efforts to post links of connectedness for their online readers.

Addressing media uses and gratifications in specific relation to interactivity within a newspaper’s Web site, significant questions can be raised. Why do journalists encourage readers to send e-mails, or post comments at the beginning or end of writers’
stories or blogs, or sign “Guestbook” rolls, or post entries on message boards, or submit calendar items, or write letters to the editor, or engage in online forums, or participate in polls and surveys, or submit original content like stories and photos? What value do these various forms of editorial input – these LOCs – have for individual journalists, or for the newspaper in general? What value do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that LOCs have for their readers? These questions are answered in this study from the perspective of the newspapers’ online editors/Web site coordinators, laying the groundwork for future studies that will include newspaper owners and publishers, editors and reporters, readers and other participants in the emerging interactive editorial process.

The word “emerging” is appropriate because various studies, including this one, show that currently very few readers are participating in the interactive opportunities that online newspapers offer. In fact, the very interactive capabilities that could place more agenda-setting power into the hands of media consumers are among the least utilized at online newspapers. Northwestern University’s Readership Institute study (2007) points out: “Some of the least common online behaviors are contributing content, communicating with reporters and bloggers, and requesting news alerts sent to mobile devices and RSS feeds. This may be more a reflection of what sites offer than users’ inclinations to use such features” (Peer & Nesbitt, 2007, p. 2).

As the Results section discusses in detail, this current study supports this supposition. An extensive 2008 study by market research consultancy Clark, Martire & Bartolomeo, Inc., also supports this notion and finds that Internet users are not unwilling to interact with and through various Web sites generally, but that they are less willing to interact with and through newspaper Web sites specifically (Martire, 2008). Sponsored by the Newspaper Association of America, the industry study found that while 39% of all
adults with access to the Internet had posted some type of content online, only 7% of those same adults had posted content on a newspaper’s Web site. For instance, photo sharing is popular across the Internet, in general, as 29% of respondents said they had posted photos online, but only 3% had posted photos to a newspaper’s Web site; 29% said they had posted comments to online message boards, but only 8% had posted to message boards hosted by online newspapers; 19% had engaged in social networking online, but only 3% had done so through newspaper Web sites (Martire, 2008). This means Internet users are becoming more familiar with user-generated content opportunities online and are increasingly taking advantage of them, just not through newspaper Web sites.

Interactivity in newspaper Web sites can present a practical application of uses and gratifications study because users are active, making media consumption decisions based on what they obtain from various media links and based on how accessing those links can fulfill consumers’ specific needs. Adding strength to the U&G discourse might be the notion that information and communication technologies have enabled consumers to dialogue with employees at media outlets, exchanging ideas, altering perceptions, expounding on existing concepts, maximizing the fluidity of discussion that interactivity provides, engaging participation, and enhancing the overall news product. Indeed, a feeling of connectedness between consumer and media institution, or between consumer and consumer, might be just the tangible area of research that brings more solidarity to the various U&G schools of thought.

While interactivity and instantaneous feedback might be considered great advantages that online newspapers have over other media, how much the industry will promote those features among readers remains to be seen. Newspaper reporters surveyed
in 2003 overwhelmingly agreed that attaching e-mail addresses to their stories – posted online and in print – is generally “quite useful” in gaining expedient feedback and input that can lead to future story ideas. Their editors generally agreed, noting that increased credibility also accompanies increased visibility and interactivity. “Editors saw improved credibility by encouraging reporter-reader communication, so long as reporters fulfilled the obligation to respond. The study suggests that the benefits outweigh the deficits” (Hendrickson, 2006, p. 64). Stepp (2005) notes: “Of all the Internet’s revolutionary effects, the furthest reaching may involve the transfer not so much of information as of power. That’s because new technology is redistributing power from news producers to consumers” (p. 62). This notion is significant because the technology available to provide LOCs on Web sites is essentially the same for all Web site coordinators, whether at small newspapers or larger newspapers. The difference may lie organizationally in manpower, but it may also lie creatively in corporate vision.

As the Results section of this study discusses in greater detail, there is evidence that both manpower and corporate vision are crucial if newspapers are to take full advantage of the interactive opportunities available through their Web sites. In fact, this current study builds on these understandings to discern how seriously newspapers are taking this notion that Internet users can develop positive attitudes for those “sites that facilitate online dialogue between individuals” (Ko et al., 2005, p. 66), and what they are doing about it. Are they expanding LOCs to meet the needs and expectations of an Internet-prone market or ignoring the typical uses and gratifications sought by consumers? By way of extensive content analysis and through the prism of online editors/Web site coordinators’ survey responses, this study answers this important question.
What Trends Will Emerge in Links of Connectedness?

Until recently, most newspaper journalists saw the Internet primarily as a new way to deliver print content, but many are now realizing a print-Internet hybrid is inevitable or even looking to the Internet as the dominant channel of information delivery, with the printed newspaper being a more localized supplement. Journalists are examining ways to take advantage of the significant market shift in how consumers attain information. Focusing on content as the main draw of any news outlet’s Web site, with archives serving as a means to draw additional audiences (Marren, 2004), journalists continue grappling with the balance between content of the print edition and access to information online.

With message-delivery systems changing literally every day and the Internet factoring so heavily into any new paradigms, where do community and metro newspapers’ interactive capabilities fall into the new media shuffle? As technology avails the same online connective opportunities to staff members at community and metro newspapers, and all newspaper sizes along the spectrum, will the newspaper industry experience an equalizing effect in how interactive opportunities are maximized? As newspaper Web sites become increasingly interactive, questions arise as to how much control over the information product should be afforded to readers. While some might deem citizen journalism as the next great wave in the industry, others might support the notion of leaving the reporting, editing, photography, and gatekeeping to the professionals. After all, while anyone with Internet access can weigh in on topics of interest and post information that ranges anywhere from hearsay to blatant lies, professional journalists are the only ones whose livelihood depends on how well they attain and relay the truth. Kuttner (2007) notes: “Celebrants of the Web contend that the
Internet is freer, more democratic, deliberative, interactive, and civic than the self-interested elites of old media dare admit” (p. 24), but Kuttner also acknowledges that a 2006 State of the News Media Report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that only 5% of blog postings included anything resembling serious journalism.

Schultz (2000) elaborates on the paradox: “Bulletin boards and Internet discussion groups can balance the power and biases of traditional mass media and play an important role in controlling and criticizing journalism as well as in establishing mobilizing types of communication” (p. 207). However, as wide-open unfiltered cyber-dialogue proliferates, a basic communication problem emerges: “The greater the number of communicators, the less time everyone has to listen to others; the smaller the size of interacting groups, the smaller their significance for society as a whole” (Schultz, 2000, p. 207). Much like during any committee meeting that involves several creative individuals with equally valid ideas, if everyone is talking at the same time, very little is accomplished. At the same time, discussions among a few individuals might bring accord more easily but carry less social relevance in projecting results to society on the whole. The smaller the voice – even a collective voice – the smaller the social impact.

In a related thread, the Results section of this study speaks to a nearly universal concern among online editors/Web site coordinators that enabling wide-open dialogue among readers can actually be quite counter-productive as comments by readers cloaked in the anonymity of their screen names can often turn uncivil, sometimes hostile, or even downright nasty. Also, a reality has emerged which recognizes that just because online technology has made uninhibited discourse more readily available to a wider audience does not mean more people will engage in the cyber-dialogue it affords. Just because they can does not necessarily mean they will. Rosenberry (2005) calls the phenomenon a
“cyber-utopian because of a technological determinism” (p. 64) built into the assumptions of those who believed that if you build a system through which everyone might engage in wide-open online discussions, certainly they will take full advantage of the boundless opportunities. “They ignored the point that just because the network makes certain actions and interactions possible doesn’t make them inevitable. … The flaw was assuming it would evolve on its own in a free-form environment” (Rosenberry, 2005, p. 64). Bucy (2003) adds: “The erroneous assumption of most interactivity research (and industry pronouncements) is that two-way communication is uniformly desirable and predominantly associated with positive outcomes. ... Upon close inspection, interactivity’s downsides – its dangers and its pitfalls – may heavily constrain its rosy promise” (p. 6).

It seems even the wide-open world of online discourse requires structured facilitation in order to be effective, relevant, productive, truthful, and beneficial. Newspapers find themselves in a unique position to provide that structured facilitation of open citizen dialogue. This research project determines to what degree they are taking advantage of that positioning in the marketplace, or to what degree they are declining to participate in this unique opportunity.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How Many Interactive Options are Being Offered?

This study adds to the understanding of how and why, that is, how community and metro newspapers are presenting links of connectedness, or LOCs, on their Web site home pages in effort to establish, maintain, and perpetuate online interaction with readers, and why, or why not. Content analysis addresses the question of “how,” showing how many LOCs are posted on newspaper Web site home pages, as well as their screen positioning. Surveys follow content analysis and address the question of “why” or “why not,” attaining feedback from online editors/Web site coordinators who make decisions related to their Web sites’ LOC offerings.

Since newspaper readers are typically more engaged in local civic issues than non-readers, the local newspaper’s Web site might be best suited for promoting online interactivity due to the publication’s traditional standing in the community and its ability to monitor any necessary rules of engagement. Rosenberry (2005) explains:

If facilitation – provision of forums and tools for engagement and establishment of rules and norms – is what it takes to have effective online civic discourse, then doing just that among an already “captive” and interactively engaged audience is one approach online journalists can use to reclaim their eroded Fourth Estate role in ways that are not possible under traditional source-message-channel-receiver models of mass communication. (p. 64)

Others point out that for all its potential at online newspapers, interactivity is still woefully underutilized. Schultz (2000) notes:
Many visions ... claiming that the new technologies will lead to a participatory wonderland are either naïve or well-calculated advertisements. ... Calls for more and better interaction are legitimate. Not only theorists and scholars, but also practitioners have repeatedly criticized the lack of communication between audiences and journalists. (p. 209)

Beyers (2006) adds: “Online newspapers often consider themselves to be interactive when offering a few hyperlinks and mentioning some e-mail addresses” (p. 216). But true interactivity must go beyond a few obligatory hyperlinks and less-than-inviting e-mail addresses. Current technology could potentially address this shortcoming, but will it? This study evaluates scholars’ varying opinions on the viability of interactivity at online newspapers, and quantifies LOCs among community newspapers as compared to larger metro newspapers, measuring their similarities and differences.

Schultz’s (1999) content analysis study of 100 U.S. newspapers revealed that “many provide only token interactive options” (p. 1) – primarily e-mail links – and very few took advantage of the full breadth of interactive capabilities the Internet offers. While nearly all of the newspapers offered opportunities to e-mail information to the newsroom, few offered any more in-depth interactive opportunities beyond e-mail or “Contact Us” links. A follow-up study by Rosenberry in 2005 examined 47 newspapers’ Web sites and found “the promise of online journalism to create conditions for improved political communication appears to be largely untapped” (p. 67). While the sample is notably small and difficult to generalize to all community and metro newspapers nationwide, the research found that only 3 of 13 interactive devices “used to operationalize online facilitation of cyber-democratic practices” were present at more than half of the 47 newspapers (Rosenberry, 2005, p. 67). A pilot study for this current research project
coded 300 community newspaper Web site home pages and found evidence supporting
these previous studies. E-mail links accounted for 32% of the total LOCs coded, while
links to live chats made up only 4% of the total and reader-generated content links made
up only 3% of the total LOCs coded. Equally notable is the fact that community
newspaper Web sites averaged only 3.43 LOCs per home page in the 2007 pilot study for
this current larger research project (Means, 2007).

One longitudinal study (Greer & Mensing, 2004) covers 1997-2003 and notes that
medium-sized and large online newspapers continue increasing their Web sites’
interactive options each year, but smaller community newspapers, while gaining,
continue to lag behind their larger industry counterparts. Greer & Mensing (2004) note
that, on average, the level of interactivity among the newspapers they studied – a fairly
small sampling which ranged from below 2,000 circulation to more than 1.8 million
circulation – increased 31.2% over the 7-year period studied. However, the rate of
increase and total number of interactive options were smaller among newspapers with
circulations under 100,000. Greer & Mensing (2004) state:

While medium and large newspapers now have equally sophisticated sites, small
newspapers lag behind in every measure analyzed in this study. If adoption rates
of new features at smaller online sites continue at the current pace, they will never
match their larger counterparts. This runs counter to hopes that online publishing
would provide an equalizing factor among news organizations. (p. 110)

Tremayne, Weiss, & Alves (2007) concur: “It is apparent from their data that
innovations are most commonly seen first among the largest papers, then mid-sized
operations, and finally among smaller dailies” (p. 826).
For all the potential value in promoting useful dialogue between newspaper reporters and their readers, simple interactive devices like e-mail can also have their drawbacks (Schultz, 2000). Responding to surveys about the convenience of readers having e-mail access to newspaper reporters due to e-mail addresses being posted with online and printed stories, some journalists noted that while they generally agree the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, they can be distracted from newsgathering duties because they’re bogged down in processing numerous e-mails. Also, news organizations are often spammed with form-letter e-mails promoting a certain cause, criticizing the newspaper’s editorial position on an issue or questioning its news coverage (Schultz, 2000). Indeed, some more ardent critics write off any interactive discursive possibilities of Web site-mediated dialogue as little more than enabling disgruntled readers to file angry rants against the newspaper and each other while hiding behind their screen names, solving nothing. Overall, however, little in-depth academic or professional research has been conducted in the area of interactivity as related to online newspapers, and even less as related specifically to community newspapers.

Also, while research has been minimal concerning interactivity in newspapers’ Web sites, a review of the literature shows even less attention to the screen locations of various LOCs. In fact, essentially no research has been conducted in this area, which is interesting because one might assume that an LOC placed high on the page, with a prominent button, would be more inviting to the Web site visitor than an LOC that requires a great deal of scrolling to find. Newspaper journalists who tell their Web site visitors to “Contact Us” or “Post a Comment” with conveniently located highly visible buttons would seemingly be sending a more engaging message than those who bury those invitations in hard-to-find places.
One peripheral study researches what Farkas (2005) calls “explicit structure” (p. 9) of documents – whether Web sites or printed – and examines “display-unit properties” (p. 9) of various document mediums. “The structure of print and on-screen documents is made explicit through headings and links” (Farkas, 2005, p. 9). A logical component of explicit structure applying to newspaper Web sites would be that the most important information is always posted on the home page of the site, generally at the top of the home page. Farkas notes explicit structure applies to Web sites in the form of headers and links, generally in a hierarchical arrangement that alerts users to the most important information at the top of the page and to information of declining importance as users move down page. “The home page (the top of the hierarchy) provides links to the various branches of the hierarchy, and these branches split and split again at each level of the hierarchy” (Farkas, 2005, p. 10). Generally, however, little scholarly research has been conducted to determine how news Web site design and hierarchy of links and headers assist users in retrieving information (Li, 2002). Even less has been conducted to determine any effects an online newspaper’s hierarchical Web site design might have on interactivity and links of connectedness.

In this current study, analysis of central tendency determines if newspapers of different circulation ranges approach their interactive opportunities differently, examining the total number of LOCs posted on the newspaper Web sites’ home pages and also the LOCs’ screen locations to assess ease of access for site visitors. Also examined in measures of central tendency are relationships between newspapers’ circulation and the total number of LOCs presented on newspaper Web sites’ home pages. Nominal data describes LOC screen locations. Research questions related to the LOC content analysis are studied as follows:
**RQ1:** How often are newspaper Web sites presenting the five dimensions of interactivity through LOCs on their home pages? These dimensions are: Private, Public, Real-Time, Social, and Reader-Submitted Content.

**RQ2:** What are the screen locations of the LOCs that represent the five dimensions of interactivity, within visible frame upon opening the Web page or outside of visible frame?

**RQ3:** Is there any relationship between newspaper circulation size and the number of LOCs posted on the home pages of studied newspapers’ Web sites?

**Can New Media Assist in Community Building?**

New media’s interactive capabilities can potentially overturn traditional understandings of feedback and civic discourse, and the resulting social influence might also add further meaning to our conventional understandings of *community*. Traditionally defined in terms of social geography – “for instance a small town removed by space and relationship from a metropolitan area, or a university whose campus is set apart from a surrounding city and whose students and faculty share similar academic understandings, interests and goals” (Means, 1998, p. 14) – information and communication technologies are continually altering classic concepts of community. Singer & Gonzalez-Velez (2003) note: “Our traditional notion of community as a geographically constrained entity already has been challenged by the concept of community as a communication phenomenon, based more on sharing a reality with others than on occupying proximate physical space” (p. 343). Hartelius (2005) states: “Generally, a community is created through identification and difference among members and outsiders. The members of the community identify with one another while recognizing internal differences, which creates alliances and oppositions with the community” (p. 73).
Shepherd & Rothenbuhler (2001) expound on communication’s connection to community building:

Communication can … be seen as participating in the process of constructing community, allowing us to identify how hopes, dreams, plans, debates, disagreements, negotiations, self-delusions, disappointments, and frustrations all participate equally with happiness and commonality in the substance of the communication of community. (p. 160)

Social researchers are often concerned with some of these more abstract concepts that see beyond community as place, also seeing it as “process, institution, interaction, feeling, cognition, structure, or others” (Rothenbuhler, 1991, p. 64). While some would argue that online-virtual communities create artificial environments where members are “deeply distracted from what is real” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 75), others favor an equally plausible notion that communal relationships developed in online-virtual neighborhoods are as functional as any cultivated outside the “hyperreal world” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 75). In referring to traditional media, Webster & Ogles (1988) said nearly two decades ago that “purposeful agenda-setting holds great potential for crystallizing socially responsible action,” describing “community integration” as a means of “community involvement and hence a vehicle for social change” (p. 42). Why could that not be applied to a new media landscape in which all lines of communication should be working together like sidewalks that connect the homes in a neighborhood?

In this current research project, the e-mailed survey of online editors/Web site coordinators determined why some decision-makers are embracing interactivity while others are less interested. Surveys asked in-depth questions of online editors/Web site coordinators to learn how important they believe LOCs are to the overall success of their
newspapers. Research questions related to the industry survey delineate: personal and organizational variables; perceived accessibility and connectedness of newspapers; perceived importance of interactive LOCs; newspaper Web traffic, circulation, and overall revenue; feedback and popularity of LOCs; the availability issue within the “Digital Divide;” advantages and disadvantages of newspaper Web site interactivity, and the future of interactivity through LOCs.

This study looks at personal and organizational variables more from a supportive expository standpoint, rather than for any specific correlation analysis, to simply provide a clear understanding of exactly who is in charge of Web sites at newspapers, how long they have been in the business, how long their newspapers have posted an online edition, and how important their Web sites are to the overall newspaper product. These concerns were addressed in the survey because a review of the literature revealed that few studies had focused on these institutional demographics as related to newspaper Web site interactivity. One study in 2003 provides peripheral information concerning who are the journalists working the Web sites, suggesting that those who write and edit for online newspapers “differ from traditional journalists on important demographic and professional variables” (Johnson & Kelly, 2003, p. 116). For instance, “online journalists are significantly younger than their traditional counterparts” (p. 116). The study showed that nearly 80% of respondents had worked as journalists for more than 10 years, and that more than 50% had worked at their current newspaper for more than 10 years. The same survey also reported that 77.5% of online editors said they ran content on their newspapers’ Web sites that was “identical or mostly identical to content in the print version,” and that 82% said they had “at least some control over what appeared in the Web version of the paper” (Johnson & Kelly, 2003, p. 124). Although these figures do
not specifically address any possible connections between general demographics and beliefs about Web site interactivity or the value of LOCs, they are at least helpful in adding to the picture of who are the journalists typically directing Web site content. The industry survey in this current study brings that demographic picture into greater focus by asking respondents how many years they have been employed at their current newspaper and how long they have been in the newspaper business.

As online delivery of information becomes more prevalent at newspapers large and small, are editors and publishers establishing distinct positions for Web designers and site managers or are they attaching those duties to existing jobs of reporters and editors? The literature indicates that larger metro newspapers generally staff their Web sites as somewhat-autonomous departments, but smaller newspapers add Web site management to the tasks of existing reporters and editors, which often adds to their level of stress. Russial (2009) notes:

Studies have documented job dissatisfaction among copy editors, especially at small papers, and burnout, in part the result of technological demands. Pressures have grown at larger newspapers too, where declining ad revenue has led to deeper staff cutbacks and increasing workloads. At the same time, pressure is growing to produce more content specifically for the Web. (p. 9)

Another study examines management practices at U.S. weekly newspapers that maintain Web sites, noting the challenges of staffing the site with already limited personnel numbers. In a survey of weekly newspapers, Adams (2008) noted two of the top questions posed by newspaper staff members before the Web edition’s initial launch were: “Will it require extra work?,” and “Whose responsibility is it to update the Web site?” (p. 69). The survey portion of this current study sheds additional light on these
personnel issues by asking respondents their job title related to coordinating their newspaper’s Web site and also inquiring about any other job duties they may have in addition to coordinating the Web site. Additional general survey questions ask online editors/Web site coordinators when their newspaper launched its Web site, how they rank the Web site’s significance to the overall product of the newspaper, how many full-time editorial staff members are employed at the newspaper, and how the newspaper staffs the Web site.

The survey portion of this current study also examines issues like perceived accessibility and connectedness of newspapers, perceived importance of interactive LOCs and user-generated content, instant feedback and popularity of LOCs, reader-to-reader discourse channeled through the newspaper Web site, general Web traffic, circulation, and overall revenue generation. These Likert-scale questions are included because these areas are interrelated in possibly determining how successful online newspapers will be in the future. Gaining an understanding of online editors/Web site coordinators’ opinions about these areas could add to the discourse significant to the level of investment newspapers sink into their online product and interactive options. This is especially relevant considering that one newspaper readership survey in 2007 showed that 67% of respondents had never even visited their local newspaper’s Web site, and that “people in smaller markets are less likely to have visited their newspaper’s Web site than in larger markets” (Peer & Nesbitt, 2007, p. 1). Therefore, is it sensible for online editors/Web site coordinators to concern themselves too much with how interactive their Web sites are or how much feedback they are generating when “the majority of Internet users are still not yet fully conversant with this type of technology”? (Martire, 2008, p. 5). Or is this precisely the reason they should be concerned with interactivity, in order to cultivate a
market that is relatively untapped? One study of the top 40 U.S. media markets indicates that newspaper Web sites are offering “a growing amount of interactivity and information accessibility” and seemed “intent on bringing audiences closer to the news” (Bucy, 2004, p.110). While findings from Bucy’s (2004) study, like many others, “are promising in the sense that local news operations seemed to realize the value of features that enhance usability” (p. 110), few studies ask specific questions of online editors/Web site coordinators who handle newspaper Web site content and interactive devices on a daily basis. There are studies that assess the number and quality of interactive links – in generally small-sample terms – but few if any that ask online editors/Web site coordinators how accessible they believe their newspapers are to their readers through those interactive links, or how important they consider those links to be in cultivating a sense of connection to their readership, or in generating Web site traffic, increasing newspaper circulation or contributing to the publication’s bottom line. This current study does both, bridging the gap between what newspapers are doing in the area of interactivity and why online editors/Web site coordinators who work most closely with their Web sites’ interactive links believe it matters.

Just as some neighborhoods do not have sidewalks, in an online community there are some people who do not have access to the Internet. The availability issue of America’s “Digital Divide” must account for a certain level of disconnect between those who are able to participate in communal dialogue through opportunities online and those who are unable because they do not have Internet access. As of June 2009 there were 227.64 million Internet users out of a population of 307.21 million in America, meaning 74.1%, or nearly three out of every four U.S. residents, regularly go online, according to Internet World Stats’ Internet Usage and Population Statistics (2008). Of those Internet
users, 79.01 million had broadband connections, or 34.7% of Internet users and 25.7% of
the total population (www.internetworldstats.com/america.htm#us). A 2006 study by
Horrigan and Murray showed that only 24% of rural adults – classified as those living
outside of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) – had broadband Internet in their
homes, compared to 39% of urban and suburban adults living in MSAs.

A more recent study – a 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center’s Internet &
American Life Project that involved interviews with 2,253 Americans – found that 63%
of adult Americans now have broadband Internet connections at their homes, marking a
15% increase from 2008 and a significant 54% increase from 2007 (Pew Research Center
Internet & American Life Project, 2009, para. 1). Also, 46% of consumers in rural areas
had broadband, compared to 38% in 2008 (Pew Research Center Internet & American
Life Project, 2009, para. 10). The National Telecommunications Information
Administration estimated that 39% of rural residents had broadband in 2008 (Lasar,
2009). Granted, these statistics are not specific enough to account for those members of
the population who have Internet access but decline to take advantage of it or for those
who might be considered too young to go online. While researchers concede these
numbers represent only estimates, they do show a noticeable gap between the Internet
haves and have-nots. And while broadband availability in rural markets grew 16% in the
2 years between 2007 and 2009, outpacing growth in metropolitan areas by 5 percentage
points, it is those rural areas that remain considerably behind the national average in
broadband availability and Internet usage. The 75% broadband penetration in rural
markets remains well below the national average of 89%
(www.internetworldstats.com/am/us.htm).
According to a 2007 study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service and posted on Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics (2008), 63% of all rural households in America “had at least one member access the Internet, compared with 73% of urban households” (www.internetworldstats.com/am/us.htm). According to a May 2009 study by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), mobile broadband networks cover 95.6% of the total U.S. population, but that breaks down to 82.8% coverage of the nation’s rural population compared to 99% of America’s non-rural population (FCC, 2009). By definition, broadband penetration means how many households have access to a faster broadband Internet connection (as opposed to the slower dial-up connection), while Internet usage means how many individuals actually go online on a regular basis. Penetration equates to Internet access while usage equates to utilization of that access. Broadband penetration and usage matter in discussions about interactivity because some of the higher-end forms of LOCs require faster Internet connections in order to be attractive to users. Studies show that while “some activities are nearly universal,” like e-mail, others are utilized less often depending on connection speed (Hargittai, 2007, p. 3).

By surveying online editors/Web site coordinators whose Web sites include various devices aimed at creating connections with and among readers, this portion of the study determines if any true sense of community can be constructed online via newspapers’ facilitation. While this current study does not account for specific urban markets with exceedingly high Internet penetration and usage, or specific rural pockets with exceedingly low Internet penetration and usage, clear recognition and understandings of the availability issue within the “Digital Divide” are addressed in the industry survey portion of the study.
Open-ended questions asked online editors/Web site coordinators what they perceived to be advantages and disadvantages of offering LOCs on their newspapers’ Web sites, and also what they predict the future of interactivity through LOCs will bring to their newspapers. As discussed in the Literature Review, a common assumption is that interactivity must be a positive goal for newspapers to strive for through their Web sites, that connecting reporters to readers has productive benefits, and that engaging readers in public discourse can only lead to more site visits, deeper community building, and greater participation in civic issues. While survey respondents agree this can certainly be the case, they also align with Bucy’s (2003) reconsideration of interactivity’s “rosy promise,” in which he claims it is an “erroneous assumption” to deduce that interactivity will always enhance mediated communication. He points to research that suggests more – as in more links of connectedness and more opportunities for Web site visitors to interact – is not always better. “Online, interactive features may exact a considerable cognitive and emotional cost by demanding more patience, expertise, and cognitive resources of the user, increasing the likelihood of confusion, frustration, and reduced memory. ... Too much interactivity can have harmful results” (Bucy, 2003, pp. 24-25).

The remaining research questions are as follows:

**RQ4:** What are the personal profiles of online editors/Web site coordinators in the sample newspapers?

**RQ5:** What are the organizational profiles of the sample newspapers?

**RQ6:** How accessible and connected to their readers do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive their newspapers to be?

**RQ7:** How important do online editors/Web site coordinators believe it is to provide interactive options for their newspapers’ readers?
RQ8: Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps generate more traffic to their newspapers’ Web sites?

RQ9: Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps increase circulation for their newspapers’ print editions?

RQ10: Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps generate revenue for their newspapers?

RQ11: How do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive readers’ feedback and the popularity of their newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings?

RQ12: Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive the availability issue of the “Digital Divide” as factoring into their newspapers’ decisions regarding their Web sites’ interactive offerings?

RQ13: What do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of posting LOCs?

RQ14: What do online editors/Web site coordinators foresee as their newspaper Web sites’ interactive plans for the future?
CHAPTER IV
METHODS

The two studies for this research project are content analysis of newspaper Web site home pages and surveys of online editors/Web site coordinators. The level of connectedness a newspaper has with its readers was determined through the counting of LOCs on newspaper Web site home pages over a 2-week period. Descriptive data, gathered and analyzed in the content analysis, synthesize with the line of questions for surveys conducted with online editors/Web site coordinators of newspapers.

Study I: Content Analysis

For this study, a content analysis of community and metro newspaper Web sites’ home pages was conducted by categorizing and counting examples of LOCs, and also by coding for their locations on the pages. The population is newspapers in the United States of America. The content analysis functions to inform, with “description as a goal” (Riffe et al., 2005, p. 14), and to coordinate with surveys of online editors/Web site coordinators. Together, these two methods will lead to additional future research that might include industry and reader surveys, focus groups, textual analysis, case studies, and ethnographic studies.

Counting LOCs and identifying their locations on newspaper Web sites’ home pages enables researchers to describe the various types of interactive communication in terms of how well the various devices might connect local readers to their newspaper. Through this counting and coding, researchers establish similarities and differences between community newspapers and metro newspapers of various circulation sizes in regard to how they employ Internet technologies to connect with their readers.

Assembling a thorough, generalizable study of how community and metro newspapers
are utilizing the Internet to connect with local readers on a more personalized basis (or declining to do so) provides information journalists can use in determining how to keep readers interested in their news products. It also creates a foundation on which to build scholarly research in the field of online newspaper interactivity. This area of study is seemingly wide open as very few content analyses (and none recently) address links of connectedness at community newspapers as compared to metro newspapers, so the fact-gathering process must begin with casting a fairly large net.

**Operational Definition**

As stated in the Introduction, LOCs are defined operationally in this study as any links on the home page of a newspaper’s Web site that allow readers to submit input – whether feedback or new material – to the newspaper institutionally, to individual reporters personally, or to interact with reporters, other readers or various civic leaders and public officials asynchronously or in real time. The emphasis for LOC is two-way or multi-way interaction. The LOC categories were developed from a small-sample pilot study to ensure the list would be exhaustive and thorough, covering essentially every LOC currently available through media Web sites.

Locations of the links of connectedness were coded for whether the LOCs are in the visible frame of a standard computer monitor upon opening of the page or whether scrolling down page is required to see the LOC. The inference is that newspapers presenting LOCs within the visible frame of a standard computer monitor are placing higher priority on those LOCs than on those which can be found only after scrolling down the page. For instance, a “CONTACT US” e-mail link clearly displayed on the navigation bar (perhaps with a highly visible button) would appear far more inviting than a tiny “contact us” link at the bottom of the page. As each newspaper’s Web site was
opened and maximized on an average-sized computer monitor (19-inch), researchers coded for LOCs that were visible in the viewing area upon opening of the page and also coded for those LOCs that required scrolling down page.

The 15 LOCs are sectioned into five dimensions of interactivity (with coding sheet abbreviations in parentheses): Private (Pr), Public (Pu), Real-Time (RT), Social (S), and Reader-Submitted Content (RSC). Researchers identified LOCs on newspaper Web site home pages and coded them into categories specific to their dimensions of interactivity. There is also a 16\textsuperscript{th} category, LOC Community (LOCC), which falls outside the five dimensions and 15 specific categories because it is a link that takes readers to a virtual community that includes a variety of LOCs all in one clearinghouse location. Finally, there is a 17\textsuperscript{th} category, “Other,” to account for any possible LOCs that do not fall clearly under the first 16 categories of LOC.

The following are the five dimensions of interactivity, with their specific LOC coding categories explained under each dimension:

1. Private (Pr): These are links through which readers can submit comments directly to newspaper staff members, but not with the intention of posting for public consumption. For example:

- E-mail: Commonly identified with a tag like “Contact Us,” these links take site visitors directly to an e-mail service, enabling them to send e-mails directly to an editorial staff member at the newspaper.

- Feedback/Reader survey: These links often lead to forms that readers can fill out and submit to the newspaper, to assist staff members in improving their product.
Other: Any additional Private (Pr) LOCs that do not fall under these specific categories.

2. Public (Pu): These are links through which readers can post feedback for public consumption, either individually or as part of a larger corporate response. For example:

- “Post a Comment”: Generally found with a story or staff blog, these links allow readers to post comments about the story or blog, and allow other readers to respond to those comments.
- Message board/Forum/Sound off: Geared toward groups with particular or general interests, these links let readers post messages for discussion or sharing of documents.
- “Guestbook”: These links allow readers to sign in and submit brief comments about topics of the newspaper’s choosing or of their own choosing.
- Submit event: These links allow readers to submit announcements, news tips or items for calendars posted on the newspaper’s Web site.
- Submit letters to the editor: These links allow readers to submit online versions of traditional letters to the editor.
- Opinion poll/Questionnaire: Ongoing polls or questionnaires about various current topics, with results posted on the Web site.
- Other: Any additional Public (Pu) LOCs that do not fall under these specific categories.

3. Real-Time (RT): These links allow readers to join ongoing discussions and participate in real-time discourse, providing instantaneous back-and-forth dialogue. For example:
Live chat/Discussion: These links allow readers to enter an ongoing or scheduled forum online, discussing a particular topic or topics with several other Web site visitors.

Other: Any additional Real-Time (RT) LOCs that do not fall under this specific category.

Social (S): These links allow readers to participate in various social networking media options. For example:

Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn: These links allow readers to utilize these social networking sites that connect people through text narratives, forums, images, videos, shared links, etc.

Twitter: These links allow readers to utilize this social messaging tool that connects people through brief text message updates 140 characters in length or less.

Other: Any additional Social (S) LOCs that do not fall under these specific categories.

Reader-Submitted Content (RSC): These links provide opportunities for readers to contribute to the newspaper Web site’s editorial content beyond typical feedback links. For example:

Reader-submitted photos/videos: These links allow readers to submit their own photos and videos for posting on the Web site.


Reader-submitted blog: These links allow readers to submit their own blogs for posting on the Web site.
• Reader-submitted podcast: These links allow readers to submit their own podcasts – audio broadcasts via an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed – for posting on the Web site.

• Other: Any additional Reader-Submitted Content (RSC) LOCs that do not fall under these specific categories.

**Sampling Frame**

Since no content analysis of this scope has been conducted, and since there is no standard sampling frame for “community” or “metro” newspapers (Jeffres et al., 1999, p. 87), the sampling frame for this study was drawn from categories determined by ranges of newspaper circulation. For instance, these are the 19 circulation ranges sampled: under 2,000; 2,000-3,999; 4,000-6,999; 7,000-9,999; 10,000-14,999; 15,000-19,999; 20,000-29,999; 30,000-39,999; 40,000-59,999; 60,000-79,999; 80,000-99,999; 100,000-149,999; 150,000-199,999; 200,000-249,999; 250,000-299,999; 300,000-349,999; 350,000-399,999; 400,000-449,999; 500,000 and above.

The researcher in this current study derived these specific circulation ranges in order to provide a clear gap-free picture of the overall newspaper industry, with a pronounced focus on community newspapers. Therefore, smaller-circulation community newspapers are assigned to more categories in order to contrive more detailed comparisons individually between each other, as well as collectively to larger metro newspapers. For instance, there are two circulation ranges with increments of only 2,000, beginning with the smallest newspapers in America, those with circulations under 2,000. There are also two circulation ranges with increments of only 3,000, thereby accounting for a total of four circulation ranges before reaching the 10,000-circulation mark. No similar study to date has had four circulation ranges studied below the 10,000-circulation
mark. Moving above 10,000 circulation, there are two circulation ranges with increments of 5,000; two circulation ranges with increments of 10,000, and three circulation ranges with increments of 20,000. Beginning with 100,000-circulation newspapers, the ranges proceed upward in increments of 50,000. This is because every newspaper in the top 100 circulation in America was coded, rather than sampled randomly. In fact, every newspaper with circulation of 80,000 and above was coded in this study. This purposive sampling is necessary because there are only 120 American newspapers with circulations of 80,000 and above (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2009) and this study aims to be as thorough as possible. The specificity of sampling 19 individual circulation ranges allows not only for the detailed study of considerably narrow ranges of newspaper circulation – for current and future study – but also for the collapsing of circulation ranges in order to present a broader picture of LOC utilization in the community and metro newspaper industry.

The annual *Editor & Publisher International Year Book (2009)* (Maddux, Diaz-Villa, & Chironna, 2009) provided circulation data from which to establish a sampling frame. How often the newspaper is published – for instance, weeklies, bi-weeklies, and dailies – was also taken into account. In listing circulation statistics for U.S. newspapers, the *Editor & Publisher International Year Book (2009)* (Maddux et al., 2009) uses the following audit reporting methods: Audit Bureau of Circulations; Certified Audit of Circulations; Circulation Verification Council; Verified Audit Circulation, and sworn statements of circulation. Circulation figures are for Sept. 30, 2009, the most recent statistics available at the time of this research project.
Coding Overview

Once the sampling frame was established, the sample for content analysis consists of 30 randomly selected American newspapers in each of the 10 circulation ranges below 80,000, for a total of 300 newspaper Web sites. States were chosen randomly (non-replacement), and then every third newspaper listing a Web site was selected from each state’s list and recorded under its specific circulation range (1-10) until each circulation range had 30 units of analysis. More than 300 newspapers were initially selected and listed on coding sheets to account for dead links, incorrect Web addresses, Web sites that failed to load or newspapers that have gone out of business. To account for the remaining nine circulation ranges, every newspaper listed in the Editor & Publisher International Year Book (2009) (Maddux et al., 2009) that has a circulation of 80,000 and above was coded. This brings the total sample of newspapers analyzed to 418. Number of days published (i.e. weeklies, bi-weeklies, and dailies) was also noted on coding sheets. While this sampling does not reach every community and metro newspaper in America, it is certainly thorough, uniform, extensive, and generalizable. It also reaches each of the top 100 circulation newspapers in America, which is the most thorough sampling to date for this type of study.

When examining how newspapers are utilizing LOCs on the home pages of their Web sites in order to establish, maintain, and perpetuate online interaction with and among readers, we must first determine how many overall LOCs they are averaging per newspaper, and which LOCs they are most commonly employing. As we have established, this content analysis is not for determining any perceived effects the LOCs may or may not have on Web site visitors (that is the role of surveys and follow-up research), but simply to describe the various LOCs that community and metro
newspapers post on their Web site home pages, thereby offering a better understanding of the priorities placed on LOCs. Coding for page placement of those LOCs (in frame or out of frame) attaches additional meaning to those priorities. Researchers also ran cross-tabulation analysis to determine relationships between newspaper circulation sizes and likelihood to post certain LOCs.

**Coder Reliability**

A pretest for intercoder reliability employed two graduate assistants, who examined 42 randomly selected newspaper Web sites, because that number represents 10% of the size of the overall sample of 418 newspapers (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). After the two graduate assistants attended training sessions on identification of specific LOCs on the newspaper Web site home pages, another 42 newspapers were randomly sampled and coded for LOCs. The two coders attained a dependable 95.6 percentage of agreement. The five dimensions – Private, Public, Real-Time, Social, and Reader-Submitted Content – broke down to the following percentages of agreement:

1. Private: 95.8%
2. Public: 93.7%
3. Real-Time: 100%
4. Social: 94%
5. Reader-Submitted Content: 98.2%

Total reliability: 95.6%

Looking at the individual LOC categories, the lowest value of agreement was 89.3% under “Submit event,” and the highest value of agreement was 100%, which came under “Reader-submitted podcast” and “Live chat/discussion.”

**Study II: Industry Surveys**

With a trend of LOC utilization established among sampled newspapers, questionnaire surveys were administered via e-mail to gather feedback from newspapers’
online editors/Web site coordinators. Questionnaire surveys were e-mailed to all 418 newspapers sampled in the content analysis. Self-administered questionnaires were used, rather than individual interviews, so that “information can be obtained to make valid generalizations about the population being studied” in a quantitative manner (Berger, 2000, p. 189). The e-mail addresses that the newspapers list in the Editor & Publisher International Year Book (2009) (Maddux et al., 2009) were used to generate the master e-mail list for administering the online survey. For those newspapers failing to list an e-mail address in the Editor & Publisher International Year Book (2009) (Maddux et al., 2009), researchers logged onto the newspapers’ Web sites and found the most applicable e-mail address listings. One e-mail was sent to each newspaper, with instructions to forward the online survey to the publication’s chief online editor/Web site coordinator, and only one response was allowed per newspaper in order to avoid the possibility of multiple responses being submitted by the same respondents.

The survey was sent on seven different occasions between Feb. 16, 2010, and April 17, 2010 – at various days and times to ensure the most productive response rate possible considering the different deadline schedules for the various newspapers in the sample – with each resend going to newspapers whose online editors/Web site coordinators had not already responded to the survey. When the survey was officially closed on April 17, 2010, there were 55 responses, with 54 of those (98.2%) completing the entire survey. Of those 55 survey responses, 49 were from online editors/Web site coordinators at newspapers below 150,000 circulation and 6 were from newspapers 150,000-and-above circulation. On average, 79 of the e-mails were returned on each send from the Mail Delivery System as “undeliverable” for various reasons, and it was impossible to determine how many of the e-mailed surveys arrived safely to the
newspapers but were sent directly to the recipients' Spam folders, never to be seen by potential respondents. Accounting for the 55 completed surveys and for the 79 returned e-mails only (and not accounting for those e-mails tagged as Spam by the recipients' e-mail servers), the overall response rate reached 16.2%. While this response rate is not ideal, it is large enough to make generalizations to the sampled population, and the qualitative responses proved insightful and valuable.

The surveys employed multiple-choice and Likert scale questions for quantitative calculation, and some open-ended questions for qualitative discussion. Since online editors/Web site coordinators at smaller community newspapers might also be reporters and/or editors, a survey question assisted respondents in distinguishing those duel or multiple editorial roles. Personal descriptive data sought in the questionnaires included respondents’ position(s) at the newspaper, years employed at the newspaper, and years employed in the newspaper business. Organizational descriptive data sought in the questionnaires included how long the newspaper has posted a Web site, editorial staffing issues, and the Web site’s significance to the overall newspaper product. The questionnaires are predominantly analytic, or explanatory surveys (Berger, 2000) because they examine why online editors/Web site coordinators are utilizing interactive options their Web sites provide and with what perceived effects, or why they are choosing not to.

The survey questionnaires specifically address RQ4-RQ14. Table 1 shows how each RQ is addressed through the questionnaire.
Table 1

*How Each RQ is Addressed through the Questionnaire*

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<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Question(s) in Survey addressing RQ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ4</td>
<td>Questions 1-4</td>
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<td>RQ5</td>
<td>Questions 5-8</td>
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<td>RQ6</td>
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<td>RQ13</td>
<td>Questions 22-23</td>
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<tr>
<td>RQ14</td>
<td>Question 25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Questions 1-4 in the survey address RQ4, which examines personal variables by asking respondents how long they have been in the newspaper business, how long they have been employed at their current newspaper, their job title, and any other job duties they have in addition to coordinating the newspaper Web site.

Questions 5-8 in the survey address RQ5, which examines organizational variables by asking respondents how long their newspaper has posted a Web site, how important they believe their Web site is to the overall product of the newspaper, how many full-time editorial staff members are employed at the newspaper, and how the newspaper staffs the Web site.

Questions 9-12 in the survey address RQ6, which examines how accessible and connected to their readers the online editors/Web site coordinators perceive their newspaper to be. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* the following statements: “Our newspaper is
accessible to our readers;” “Our staff members are accessible to our readers through the Web site;” “Our newspaper is connected to our readers;” “Our Web site connects us to readers more effectively than our print edition.” Cronbach’s Alpha was computed to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 9-12, Alpha=.801) with the total score for each respondent, and comparing that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004).

Questions 13-15 in the survey address RQ7, which examines how important online editors/Web site coordinators believe it is to provide interactive options for their newspapers’ readers. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statements: “It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to provide instant feedback to our editorial staff members;” “It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to provide their own original content;” “It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to communicate online with other readers.” Cronbach’s Alpha was computed to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 13-15, Alpha=.994) with the total score for each respondent, and to compare that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004).

Question 16 in the survey addresses RQ8, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of LOCs as being helpful in generating more traffic to newspaper Web sites. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statement: “The various interactive offerings of our newspaper’s Web site help to generate more overall traffic on the Web site.”
Question 17 in the survey addresses RQ9, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of LOCs as being helpful in increasing circulation for the newspaper’s print edition. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statement: “The various interactive offerings of our newspaper’s Web site help to increase circulation for our newspaper’s print edition.”

Question 18 in the survey addresses RQ10, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of LOCs as being helpful in generating revenue for their newspaper. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statement: “The various interactive offerings of our newspaper’s Web site help to generate more overall revenue for our newspaper.”

Questions 19-20 in the survey address RQ11, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of readers’ feedback and the popularity of their newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statements: “Our newspaper often receives feedback from readers through the Web site;” “Our newspaper’s interactive offerings are popular among our readers.” Cronbach’s Alpha was computed to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 19-20, Alpha=0.952) with the total score for each respondent and to compare that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004, p. 283).

Questions 21 and 24 in the survey address RQ12, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of the “Digital Divide” as factoring into decisions regarding their Web sites’ interactive offerings. Question 21 was a Likert scale
selection type, and Question 24 was open-ended for qualitative analysis. On a Likert scale, respondents were asked to rate along a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree the following statement in Question 21: “The availability issue within the ‘Digital Divide’ – that is, the fact that a certain percentage of our newspaper readers do not have Internet access – factors into our newspaper’s decision regarding the interactive offerings of our Web site.” Question 24 asked for a brief narrative response to: “When making decisions about your Web site and its interactive offerings, how does your newspaper address the fact that a certain percentage of your readers do not have Internet access?”

Questions 22-23 in the survey address RQ13, which examines online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of posting LOCs on their newspaper’s Web site. They were both open-ended questions for qualitative analysis. Question 22 asked for a brief narrative response to: “What are some advantages of your newspaper’s Web site offering interactive opportunities to your readers?” Question 23 asked for a brief narrative response to: “What are some challenges or problems of having your Web site offer interactive opportunities to your readers?”

Question 25 in the survey addresses RQ14, which examines what online editors/Web site coordinators foresee as their newspaper Web site’s interactive plans for the future. Question 25, an open-ended question for qualitative analysis, asked for a brief narrative response to: “What are your interactive plans for your newspaper’s Web site in the future? In other words, do you plan on launching new interactive options for your readers? Please explain.” Table 2 is a reliability table that shows the percentage response rate for each survey question.
Table 2

*Reliability: Percentage Response Rate for Each Survey Question*

| Question 1: 100% | Question 10: 98.2% | Question 19: 98.2% |
| Question 2: 100% | Question 11: 94.5% | Question 20: 98.2% |
| Question 3: 100% | Question 12: 96.4% | Question 21: 98.2% |
| Question 4: 100% | Question 13: 94.5% | Question 22: 90.9% |
| Question 5: 100% | Question 14: 96.4% | Question 23: 94.5% |
| Question 6: 100% | Question 15: 98.2% | Question 24: 92.7% |
| Question 7: 100% | Question 16: 94.5% | Question 25: 90% |
| Question 8: 100% | Question 17: 96.4% |
| Question 9: 98.2% | Question 18: 96.4% |
CHAPTER V
RESULTS

Content Analysis – An Overview of the Process

In the content analysis phase of this study, results begin with standard frequency distributions that show overall mean averages of LOCs per newspaper for all 418 newspapers coded, and also break down mean averages of LOCs in the various circulation ranges. This proved useful in determining how the LOC mean averages at newspapers in specific circulation ranges compared to the overall mean averages, and to each other. Frequency distributions were also calculated for each of the five dimensions and for each of the 15 individual LOC categories, both overall mean averages for all 418 newspapers coded and also the mean averages within the various circulation ranges. Means were also calculated for LOCs that were posted within the main viewing frame of newspaper Web site home pages on a standard 19-inch monitor (“in frame”), and for those LOCs that could be found below the main frame (“out of frame”). These “in frame” and “out of frame” means were calculated overall on the total 418 newspapers coded and also for newspapers in the various circulation ranges (individual ranges and collapsed ranges). The “in frame” and “out of frame” means were also calculated according to the five dimensions as well as the 15 individual LOC categories.

Standard frequency distributions were calculated on the 418 newspapers coded as well as the individual circulation ranges (and collapsed ranges) – and on all five dimensions and 15 categories, and “in frame” vs. “out of frame” – to provide evidence that newspapers of different circulation ranges approach their interactive opportunities differently. Table 3 lists the 19 circulation ranges sampled and the number of American newspapers in each circulation range sampled at the time of this study.
The 19 circulation ranges were also collapsed into broader circulation ranges, so that more decipherable totals can be presented and broader ranges can be examined. For instance, the original 19 circulation ranges were collapsed together to present the following eight (8) broader ranges. Table 4 lists the number of American newspapers in each collapsed circulation range sampled at the time of this study.

**Table 3**

*The 19 Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range 1-8</th>
<th>Number of Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) under 2,000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) 2,000-3,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) 4,000-6,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) 7,000-9,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) 10,000-14,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) 15,000-19,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) 20,000-29,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) 30,000-39,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) 40,000-59,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) 60,000-79,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) 80,000-99,999</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) 100,000-149,999</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) 150,000-199,999</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14) 200,000-249,999</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) 250,000-299,999</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) 300,000-349,999</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) 350,000-399,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) 400,000-449,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) 500,000 and above</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 19 circulation ranges were also collapsed into even broader circulation ranges, so that more generalizable totals can be presented and broader ranges can be examined. For instance, the original 19 circulation ranges were collapsed together to present the following four broader ranges. Table 5 also includes the number of American newspapers in each collapsed circulation range sampled at the time of this study.

**Table 4**

*Eight Collapsed Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range 1-8</th>
<th>Number of Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2) under 2,000-3,999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4) 4,000-9,999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6) 10,000-19,999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8) 20,000-39,999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10) 40,000-79,999</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12) 80,000-149,999</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15) 150,000-299,999</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19) 300,000-500,000 and above</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 19 circulation ranges were also collapsed into even broader circulation ranges, so that more generalizable totals can be presented and broader ranges can be examined. For instance, the original 19 circulation ranges were collapsed together to present the following four broader ranges. Table 5 also includes the number of American newspapers in each collapsed circulation range sampled at the time of this study.
Table 5

*Four Collapsed Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>LOCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-4) under 2,000-9,999</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-8) 10,000-39,999</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12) 40,000-149,999</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-19) 150,000-500,000 and above</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, LOC results from the 19 individual circulation ranges were collapsed to present the two broadest circulation ranges, under 150,000 and above 150,000. This is done so that the means of LOCs in the two broad circulation ranges can be compared, offering a larger picture of LOCs to complement the more-detailed categorical divisions of circulation. Table 6 also includes the number of newspapers in each collapsed circulation range sampled at the time of this study.

Table 6

*Two Collapsed Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-12) under 150,000</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-19) 150,000 and above</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In fact, these two broad under-150,000 and 150,000-and-above ranges were used as a starting point for statistical analysis because they explicitly divide the largest 66 newspapers in America from the rest of the sample. Since there is no industry standard that conveniently separates “large” newspapers from “community newspapers,” this dividing line establishes a clear distinction by which a framework for statistical analysis can be established.
Content Analysis Results – Cumulative Averages

On the Web site home pages of the 418 newspapers coded in the content analysis, a total of 2,038 LOCs were counted. Since the mean per newspaper provides the most valuable measure of central tendency in a content analysis study of this magnitude, only the means per newspaper will be noted in these results. Complete totals are listed in Appendix A. The overall mean of LOCs per newspaper Web site home page is 4.875, which breaks down to a mean of 1.734 LOCs “in frame” per newspaper, and 3.141 LOCs “out of frame” per newspaper. These results establish that, on average, fewer than two LOCs are offered to newspaper Web site visitors when they open the site and display it full screen on their monitors. Then, upon scrolling down the page, Web site visitors will find, on average, just over three more LOCs. This is significant because a typical newspaper Web site might contain more than 100 links “in frame” when opening the site, but fewer than 2 on average are LOCs.

Research Question 1

How often are newspaper Web sites presenting the five dimensions of interactivity through LOCs on their home pages? These dimensions are: Private, Public, Real-Time, Social, and Reader-Submitted Content.

Private: The Private dimension included two LOC categories: “E-mail” and “Feedback/Reader survey.” The mean for this dimension was .524 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page.

Public: The Public dimension included six LOC categories, making it the largest and most inclusive dimension in the study: “Post a Comment,” “Message board/Forum/Sound off,” “Guestbook,” “Submit event,” “Submit letters to the editor,” and “Opinion Poll/Questionnaire.” The mean for this dimension was 2.043 LOCs per
newspaper Web site home page, making it the most utilized dimension of LOCs in the study.

Real-Time: The Real-Time dimension included one LOC category, making it the smallest dimension in the study: “Live chat/discussion.” The mean for this dimension was .041 per newspaper Web site home page, making it practically non-existent.

Social: The Social dimension included two LOC categories: “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” and “Twitter.” The mean for this dimension was 1.311 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page, making it the second-most utilized dimension of LOCs in the study, which is interesting because it contains only two categories. This indicates newspaper Web sites are tapping into the rise in popularity of social media.

Reader-Submitted Content: The Reader-Submitted Content dimension included four LOC categories: “Reader-submitted photos/videos,” “Reader-submitted story/press release,” “Reader-submitted blog,” and “Reader-submitted podcast.” The mean for this dimension was .725 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page.

Research Question 2

What are the screen locations of the LOCs that represent the five dimensions of interactivity, within visible frame upon opening the Web page or outside of visible frame?

Looking at newspaper Web site home pages for the 418 newspapers sampled, only 35.6% of the total 2,038 LOCs coded were “in frame” (N=1,734), while the other 64.4% were “out of frame” (N=3,141), requiring scrolling down page to find. In four of the five specific dimensions of interactivity, the majority of LOCs fell “out of frame,” meaning that most of the LOCs – individually and also collectively in their respective dimensions – required scrolling down page to find. The only exception was the Real-
Time dimension, in which total LOCs – whether “in frame” or “out of frame” – were negligible.

Private: The Private dimension included two LOC categories: “E-mail” and “Feedback/Reader survey.” Only 27.4% of LOCs in the Private dimension were “in frame” (N=.143) per Web site home page, while 72.6% were “out of frame” (N=.380), requiring scrolling down page to find.

Public: The Public dimension included six LOC categories: “Post a Comment,” “Message board/Forum/Sound off,” “Guestbook,” “Submit event,” “Submit letters to the editor,” and “Opinion Poll/Questionnaire.” Only 35.2% of LOCs in the Public dimension were “in frame” (N=.720) per Web site home page, while 64.8% were “out of frame” (N=1.323), requiring scrolling down page to find.

Real-Time: The Real-Time dimension included one LOC category: “Live chat/discussion.” In this dimension, 58.8% of LOCs were “in frame” (N=.024) per Web site home page, while 41.2% were “out of frame” (N=.017), requiring scrolling down page to find.

Social: The Social dimension included two LOC categories: “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” and “Twitter.” Only 35.4% of LOCs in the Social dimension were “in frame” (N=.464) per Web site home page, while 64.6% were “out of frame” (N=.847), requiring scrolling down page to find.

Reader-Submitted Content: The Reader-Submitted Content dimension included four LOC categories: “Reader-submitted photos/videos,” “Reader-submitted story/press release,” “Reader-submitted blog,” and “Reader-submitted podcast.” Only 39.3% of LOCs in the Reader-Submitted Content dimension were “in frame” (N=.285) per Web
site home page, while 60.7% were “out of frame” (N=.440), requiring scrolling down page to find.

Examining Individual LOC Categories

Looking at individual LOC categories, the two most prevalent LOC categories overall – including both “in frame” and “out of frame” – were “Submit event” (i.e. announcements, news tips, or items for a calendar) in the Public dimension, and “Twitter” in the Social dimension. The “Submit event” category averaged .792 LOCs per home page (.280 “in frame” and .512 “out of frame”), which is still fewer than one per newspaper Web site. The “Twitter” category averaged .737 LOCs per home page (.268 “in frame” and .469 “out of frame”), which is also fewer than one per newspaper Web site. The next most popular individual LOC categories were “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” in the Social dimension, which averaged .574 LOCs per Web site home page (.196 “in frame” and .378 “out of frame”), and “Reader-submitted photos/videos” in the Reader-Submitted Content dimension, which averaged .533 LOCs per home page (.184 “in frame” and .349 “out of frame”).

There were also LOC categories that were noticeable by their absence from newspaper Web site home pages, or by being nearly non-existent. Of the total 418 newspapers coded, there were zero LOCs in the category of “Reader-submitted podcast” and very few LOCs in categories one might consider fairly logical in the realm of connectivity. For example, “Post a Comment” averaged .081 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page, which is fewer than one per 10 newspapers, including both “in frame” and “out of frame.” The LOC “Reader-submitted blog” averaged .072 per newspaper Web site home page, which is also fewer than one per 10 newspapers, including both “in frame” and “out of frame.” The LOC “Guestbook” averaged .043 LOCs per home page,
which is fewer than one per 20 newspapers, including both “in frame” and “out of frame.” As mentioned, the LOC “Live chat/Discussion,” an area with great potential for newspapers, averaged .041 LOCs per home page, which is also fewer than one per 20 newspapers coded, including both “in frame” and “out of frame.” Finally, the “LOC Community,” a catch-all clearinghouse link to various types of interactive options, was also nearly non-existent, averaging .060 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page, which is slightly higher than one per 20 newspapers, including both “in frame” and “out of frame.”

Content Analysis Results – Circulation Ranges

Research Question 3

Is there any relationship between newspaper circulation size and the number of LOCs posted on the home pages of studied newspapers’ Web sites?

In examining this RQ, the circulation figure of 150,000 was chosen as a dividing point because it differentiates between the largest 66 newspapers in America and the remainder of the newspapers in the sample. While definitions of “community newspapers” vary and have never been universally declared from an industry perspective, this dividing point of 150,000 circulation at least clearly delineates between the largest newspapers in America and the rest, providing an analytical framework on which to construct a diagram of LOC differentiation between large metro dailies and regional or community newspapers.

In fact, one reason this current study examines many circulation ranges – from under 2,000 to the largest in America – is due to this absence of a single common industry-wide historically accepted definition of “community newspapers.” In order to present a clear description of what the newspaper industry is doing in the area of
interactive LOCs, several circulation ranges must be examined, from very small rural weeklies, to small community bi-weeklies, to rural or suburban dailies, to mid-sized regional dailies, to large metro dailies, to the largest national dailies. Or how about large suburban weeklies? Or small community dailies? Or large metro bi-weeklies? Assigning newspapers to these categories would be left to little more than guesswork if not for the fact that this study breaks down several specific circulation ranges and collapses tight ranges into broader ranges. This process begins with collapsing enough circulation ranges to examine the largest dailies in America (150,000 and above) in comparison to the rest of the sample (below 150,000).

Moving beyond cumulative results to examine specific circulation ranges, patterns emerge that seem logical when collapsed but which deviate slightly from logical assumptions when examining narrower circulation ranges. For instance, the mean average number of LOCs per newspaper Web site home page in the below-150,000 circulation range (collapsing all circulation ranges below 150,000) is 4.761, which breaks down to a mean of 1.787 LOCs “in frame” per newspaper, and 2.974 LOCs “out of frame” per newspaper. The mean average number of LOCs per newspaper Web site home page in the 150,000-and-above circulation range (which includes the 66 largest newspapers in America) is 5.485, breaking down to 1.454 “in frame” per newspaper, and 4.030 “out of frame” per newspaper.

Similar to what we see when looking at overall cumulative results, these results mean that, on average, fewer than two LOCs are offered to newspaper Web site visitors when they open the site and display it full screen on their monitors, whether they are looking at newspapers under 150,000 circulation or the largest newspapers in America.
Examining total LOCs at newspapers above and below 150,000 circulation, one might consider the results to be fairly logical. That is, the largest newspapers in America average more LOCs (5.485) on their Web site home pages than the smaller newspapers in America (4.761). However, when looking at collapsed ranges we see a notable exception. The circulation range 80,000-149,999 actually has a mean average of 7.942 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page (3.173 “in frame” and 4.769 “out of frame”), well above the cumulative mean average and every other circulation range studied. In fact, this is a full 3.067 LOCs more than the cumulative mean average for all newspapers studied, and 2.457 LOCs more than the largest 66 newspapers in America. This possibly indicates that newspapers in this circulation range are realizing better than newspapers in any other range the potential value that LOCs add to their newspapers, bringing cause for future research into this specific circulation range.

Table 7 examines mean total LOC postings on newspaper Web site home pages within the following four broad circulation ranges.

Table 7

*Mean Total LOC Postings within Four Broad Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circulation Range</th>
<th>LOCs</th>
<th>“In frame”</th>
<th>“Out of frame”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9,999</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.983</td>
<td>1.817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-39,999</td>
<td>4.992</td>
<td>1.908</td>
<td>3.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-149,999</td>
<td>6.616</td>
<td>2.518</td>
<td>4.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000-500,000 &amp; above</td>
<td>5.485</td>
<td>1.454</td>
<td>4.030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 examines mean total LOC postings on newspaper Web site home pages within eight narrower circulation ranges.
Table 8

Mean Total LOC Postings within Eight Narrower Circulation Ranges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circulation Range</th>
<th>LOCs</th>
<th>“In frame”</th>
<th>“Out of frame”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3,999</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000-9,999</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.117</td>
<td>2.283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-39,999</td>
<td>4.883</td>
<td>1.817</td>
<td>3.067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-79,999</td>
<td>5.467</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000-149,999</td>
<td>7.942</td>
<td>3.173</td>
<td>4.769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000-299,999</td>
<td>5.277</td>
<td>1.553</td>
<td>3.723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300,000-500,000 &amp; above</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.211</td>
<td>4.789</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining LOC Dimensions Per Circulation Ranges

Of the five dimensions of interactivity, the Social dimension represented the highest mean average LOCs in the 150,000-and-above circulation range, at 2.076 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page. This dimension, which includes the categories “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” and “Twitter,” broke down to .530 LOCs “in frame” and 1.545 “out of frame.” Next highest in the 150,000-and-above circulation range was the Public dimension, which averaged 1.561 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page. This dimension, which includes the categories “Post a Comment,” “Message board/Forum/Sound off,” “Guestbook,” “Submit event,” “Submit letters to the editor,” and “Opinion Poll/Questionnaire,” broke down to .394 LOCs “in frame” and 1.167 “out of frame.”

Comparatively, in the below-150,000 circulation range, these two dimensions were reversed, with the Public dimension rating highest in LOC mean average and the Social dimension ranking second. The Public dimension represented the highest mean
average LOCs, at 2.133 per newspaper Web site home page, breaking down to .781 “in frame” and 1.352 “out of frame.” In this circulation range, the Social dimension represented the next highest LOC mean, at 1.168 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page, breaking down to .452 “in frame” and .716 “out of frame.”

This comparison indicates greater attention to the more traditional methods of online interactivity (Public dimension) at newspapers below 150,000 circulation, while the largest newspapers in America have clearly recognized the coming of age of social media (Social dimension). It is also worth pointing out that the Social dimension had comparatively strong numbers of LOCs at newspapers of all circulations when considering this dimension is represented by only two individual categories, while the Public dimension is represented by six individual LOC categories. If there is a trend to note here, it is that all American newspapers are recognizing the value of embracing social media within their Web sites.

Another observation was the interest in Reader-Submitted Content at newspapers below 150,000 circulation, as this dimension averaged .764 LOCs per home page, while the 150,000-and-above circulation newspapers averaged .515 LOCs per home page in this dimension. This indicates that newspapers below 150,000 circulation appear more interested in having readers submit photos, videos, stories, press releases, and blogs than newspapers above 150,000 circulation.

Using the two circulation ranges (below-150,000 and 150,000-and-above) as independent variables, and using the five dimensions of interactivity (Private, Public, Real-Time, Social, and Reader-Submitted Content) as dependent variables, a t test was calculated to determine significance of the differences in mean LOC values for each dimension in each circulation range. Whereas .64 is the sum of all differences between
the five dimensions in the two circulation groups ($\sum D$), and 1.42 is the sum of the differences squared between groups ($\sum D^2$), the $t$ value is .495 ($t = .495, p < .05$).

Looking at the following collapsed circulation ranges and individual dimensions, the Public dimension produced the highest mean LOC postings per newspaper Web site home page in every range except one, 150,000-500,000 and above. Table 9 breaks down four broad circulation ranges and the mean number of LOCs per dimension.

Table 9

*LOCs Per Dimension in Four Broad Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circulation range</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Real-Time</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Reader-Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9,9999</td>
<td>.375</td>
<td>1.542</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-39,999</td>
<td>.542</td>
<td>2.267</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>1.308</td>
<td>.692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-149,999</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>2.625</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>1.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000-500,000+</td>
<td>.894</td>
<td>1.561</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>2.076</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 breaks down eight narrower circulation ranges and the mean number of LOCs per dimension.

Table 10

*LOCs Per Dimension in Eight Narrower Circulation Ranges*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circulation range</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Real-Time</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Reader-Submitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3,9999</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000-9,999</td>
<td>.483</td>
<td>1.883</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000-19,999</td>
<td>.667</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>1.017</td>
<td>.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000-39,999</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>1.983</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>.667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000-79,999</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>2.333</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000-149,999</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td>2.962</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.058</td>
<td>1.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000-299,999</td>
<td>.809</td>
<td>1.532</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>2.064</td>
<td>.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300,000-500,000+</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>1.632</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>2.105</td>
<td>.684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examining Individual LOC Categories Per Circulation Ranges

Looking at individual LOC categories, one thing the two broadest circulation ranges have in common with the overall cumulative totals would be the prevalence of “Submit event” (i.e. announcements, news tips, or items for a calendar) in the Public dimension and “Twitter” in the Social dimension. However, when looking at the 150,000-and-above circulation newspapers (the 66 largest newspapers in America), the “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” category, also in the Social dimension, ranked close to these other two categories, again indicating a greater attention to social media at the largest newspapers in America during the time of this study. In the 150,000-and-above circulation newspapers, the “Twitter” category averaged 1.242 LOCs per home page (.348 “in frame” and .894 “out of frame”), with the “Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn” category averaging .833 LOCs per home page (.182 “in frame” and .652 “out of frame”). In the below-150,000 circulation range, the “Submit event” category averaged .827 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page (.310 “in frame” and .517 “out of frame”), whereas the “Twitter” category averaged .642 LOCs per home page (.253 “in frame” and .389 “out of frame”). See Appendix A for complete results.

Examining LOCs in Narrower Circulation Ranges

At the other end of the connectivity spectrum, we see that the smallest newspapers in America also post the fewest LOCs on average, generally providing little more than one or two ways in which Web site visitors can e-mail the newspaper. We also see those LOC averages generally increase as circulation increases. Newspapers below 4,000 circulation average 2.2 LOCs per Web site home page, with 1.2 of those falling in the Public dimension. Newspapers in the 4,000-9,999 circulation range average 3.4 LOCs per
home page, with 1.883 of those falling in the Public dimension. Newspapers in the 10,000-19,999 circulation range make a leap of nearly two LOCs per home page to an average of 5.1 LOCs, with 2.55 falling in the Public dimension. Newspapers in the 20,000-39,999 circulation range average 4.883 LOCs per Web site home page, with 1.983 of those falling in the Public dimension. This circulation range represents the only slight dip in an otherwise-steady upward trend. Newspapers in the 40,000-79,999 circulation range average 5.467 LOCs per Web site home page, with 2.333 of those falling in the Public dimension. As mentioned, newspapers in the 80,000-149,999 circulation range average the most LOCs of any circulation range, representing the peak at 7.942 per home page, with 2.962 falling in the Public dimension. Newspapers in the 150,000-299,999 circulation range average 5.277 LOCs per Web site home page, with 1.532 falling in the Public dimension. Finally, newspapers in the 300,000-and-above circulation range, representing the 19 largest newspapers in America, average 6.0 LOCs per Web site home page, with 2.105 coming in the Social dimension and 1.632 coming in the Public dimension. See Appendix A for complete results.

Survey Results

The e-mailed survey of online editors/Web site coordinators revealed notable trends for analysis, in that there was strong general agreement to questions related to the importance of the newspapers providing interactive options for their readers. Even though it might be argued that the content analysis results indicate newspapers in general are taking a fairly passive approach to interactivity, offering relatively few LOCs to their readers and even fewer in prominent screen locations, the survey results generally indicate that online editors/Web site coordinators perceive real value in offering interactive options and remaining connected to readers through their newspapers’ Web
sites. This possible disconnect is explored in the Discussion section, but first, the survey results are examined.

To see an overall picture of the importance online editors/Web site coordinators place on LOCs and interactivity, three questions with considerable relevance to LOCs on newspaper Web site home pages are combined, examining the importance placed on offering readers a way to, a) provide instant feedback to editorial staff members, b) provide their own original content, and, c) communicate online with other readers. These three questions are at the heart of interactivity provided through LOCs, and 71.7% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that these three areas of connectivity are important to their newspapers. Three associated questions relate to the newspapers’ accessibility and connectivity, examining the following: a) Our newspaper is accessible to our readers, b) Our staff members are accessible to our readers through our Web site, and, c) Our newspaper is connected to our readers. Combining results of these three survey questions, 89.4% of responding online editors/Web site coordinators either agreed or strongly agreed with these statements.

**Research Question 4**

What are the personal profiles of online editors/Web site coordinators in the sample newspapers?

Questions 1-4 on the survey addressed this research question. Survey Question 1: The average number of years respondents have been employed at their current newspaper is 9.6. Survey Question 2: The average number of years respondents have been employed in the newspaper business is 19.7. Survey Question 3: The majority of job titles listed came under the heading of “Other,” at 58.2% of respondents’ answers, while “online editor” made up 12.7%, “Web site editor” made up 10.9%, “Web site manager” made up
7.3%, “director of new media” made up 5.5%, “Web site coordinator” made up 3.6%, and “Electronic editor” made up 1.8%. This falls in line with the next question on the survey, which addressed the other job duties held by those who generally handle responsibilities of a newspaper’s Web site. Survey Question 4: The vast majority of respondents, 50.9%, claimed “editor” as another job held at the newspaper, in addition to coordinating the Web site. Some 21.8% said they “have more than one job in addition to the Web site,” 10.9% said the Web site is their “only job,” 7.3% listed “other,” 3.6% said “publisher,” 3.6% said “graphic artist/designer,” 1.8% said “reporter,” and none said “photographer.”

Research Question 5

What are the organizational profiles of the sample newspapers? Questions 5-8 on the survey addressed this research question. Survey Question 5: The majority of newspapers, 60.0%, launched their Web sites more than 10 years ago, while 20.0% launched their Web sites 7-10 years ago, 10.9% launched their Web sites 4-6 years ago, 9.1% launched their Web sites 1-3 years ago, and none launched their Web sites less than one year ago. Survey Question 6: The vast majority of respondents, 61.8%, said their Web site is “very important” to the overall product of the newspaper, while 29.1% said “somewhat important,” 1.8% had “no opinion,” 7.3% said “not very important,” and none said “completely useless.” Survey Question 7: In response to the question of how many full-time editorial staff members are employed at the respondent’s newspaper, the average was 43.6 editorial staff members, ranging from as few as one to as many as 200. Survey Question 8: In response to the question of how the newspaper staffs the Web site, 36.4% said “it is part of several staff members’ job duties,” 36.4% said “it is a full-time position for more than one staff member,” 18.2% said “it is part of one staff member’s
job duties,” 3.6% said “it is a full-time position for one staff member,” and 5.5% said “other.”

Research Question 6

How accessible and connected to their readers do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive their newspapers to be? Questions 9-12 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach’s Alpha was computed (Alpha=.801) to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 9-12) with the total score for each respondent, and to compare that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004). Combining results of questions 9-12 to produce a measurement of online editors/Web site coordinators’ attitudes about how accessible and connected they believe their newspapers are to readers, 75.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their newspapers are in fact accessible and connected to their readers. Looking at results of the four individual questions that address RQ6:

Question 9 made the following statement: Our newspaper is accessible to our readers. Table 11 shows Likert scale results (SD=.604).

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.0%(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0.0%(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50.0%(27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>48.1%(26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 10 made the following statement: Our staff members are accessible to our readers through our Web site. Table 12 shows Likert scale results (SD=.834).
Table 12

*Question 10: Our Staff Members are Accessible to Our Readers through Our Web Site*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
<td>14.8%(0)</td>
<td>51.9%(28)</td>
<td>29.6%(16)</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 11 made the following statement: Our newspaper is connected to our readers. Table 13 shows Likert scale results (SD=.645).

Table 13

*Question 11: Our Newspaper is Connected to Our Readers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0%(0)</td>
<td>0.0%(0)</td>
<td>11.5%(0)</td>
<td>53.8%(27)</td>
<td>34.6%(26)</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 12 made the following statement: Our Web site connects us to readers more effectively than our print edition. Table 14 shows Likert scale results (SD=1.097).

Table 14

*Question 12: Our Web Site Connects Us to Readers More Effectively than Our Print Edition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.5%(4)</td>
<td>20.8%(11)</td>
<td>37.7%(20)</td>
<td>22.6%(12)</td>
<td>11.3%(6)</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 7

How important do online editors/Web site coordinators believe it is to provide interactive options for their newspapers’ readers? Questions 13-15 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach’s Alpha was computed (Alpha=.994) to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 13-15) with the total score for each respondent, and to compare that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004). Combining results of questions 13-15 to produce a measurement of online editors/Web site coordinators’ attitudes about how important they believe it is for their newspapers’ Web sites to provide interactive options for their readers, 73.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed these options are important. Looking at results of the three individual questions that address RQ7:

Question 13 made the following statement: It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to provide instant feedback to our editorial staff members. Table 15 shows Likert scale results (SD=.816).

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0%(0)</td>
<td>3.8%(2)</td>
<td>23.1%(12)</td>
<td>46.2%(24)</td>
<td>26.9%(14)</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 14 made the following statement: It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to provide their own original content. Table 16 shows Likert scale results (SD=.869).

Table 16

*Question 14: It is Important for Our Web Site to Offer Readers a Way to Provide Their Own Original Content*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
<td>7.5%(4)</td>
<td>17.0%(9)</td>
<td>58.5%(31)</td>
<td>15.1%(8)</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 15 made the following statement: It is important for our Web site to offer readers a way to communicate online with other readers. Table 17 shows Likert scale results (SD=.960).

Table 17

*Question 15: It is Important for Our Web Site to Offer Readers a Way to Communicate Online with Other Readers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
<td>11.1%(6)</td>
<td>18.5%(10)</td>
<td>50.0%(27)</td>
<td>18.5%(10)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 8

Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps generate more traffic to their newspapers’ Web sites? Question 16 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. With one survey question measuring this RQ,
73.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that posting LOCs helps generate more traffic to their newspapers’ Web sites. Looking at results of the question that addresses RQ8:

Question 16 made the following statement: The various interactive offerings of our newspaper’s Web site help to generate more overall traffic on the Web site. Table 18 shows Likert scale results (SD=.929).

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Rating Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>21.2% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50.0% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>23.1% (12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 9

Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps increase circulation for their newspapers’ print editions? Question 17 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. With one survey question measuring this RQ, only 22.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that posting LOCs helps increase circulation for their newspapers’ print editions, while 47.2% were neutral on the question, and 26.4% disagreed. Looking at results of the question that addresses RQ9:

Question 17 made the following statement: The various interactive offerings of our newspaper’s Web site help to increase circulation for our newspaper’s print edition. Table 19 shows Likert scale results (SD=.874).
Table 19

*Question 17: The Various Interactive Offerings of Our Newspaper’s Web Site Help to Increase Circulation for Our Newspaper’s Print Edition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.8%(2)</td>
<td>26.4%(14)</td>
<td>47.2%(25)</td>
<td>18.9%(10)</td>
<td>3.8%(2)</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 10

Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive that posting LOCs helps generate revenue for their newspapers? Question 18 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. With one survey question measuring this RQ, only 47.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that posting LOCs helps generate revenue for their newspapers, while 24.5% were neutral, and 22.6% disagreed. Looking at results of the question that addresses RQ10:

*Question 18: The Various Interactive Offerings of Our Newspaper’s Web Site Help to Generate More Overall Revenue for Our Newspaper*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.7%(3)</td>
<td>22.6%(12)</td>
<td>24.5%(13)</td>
<td>39.6%(21)</td>
<td>7.5%(4)</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 11

How do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive readers’ feedback and the popularity of their newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings? Questions 19-20 on the survey addressed this research question, with respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Cronbach’s Alpha was computed (Alpha=.952) to correlate the score for each survey question in the grouping (questions 19-20) with the total score for each respondent, and to compare that to the variability for all individual scores (Salkind, 2004). Combining results of questions 19-20 to produce a measurement of online editors/Web site coordinators’ perceptions of readers’ feedback and the popularity of their newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings, 71.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their newspaper Web sites’ interactive links often generate feedback from and are generally popular with their readers. Looking at results of the two individual questions that address RQ11:

Question 19 made the following statement: Our newspaper often receives feedback from readers through the Web site. Table 21 shows Likert scale results (SD=1.117).

Table 21

| Question 19: Our Newspaper Often Receives Feedback from Readers through the Web Site |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Strongly disagree               | Disagree        | Neutral         | Agree           | Strongly agree  | Rating avg.     |
| 5.6%(3)                         | 9.3%(5)         | 11.1%(6)        | 46.3%(25)       | 27.8%(15)       | 3.81            |
Question 20 made the following statement: Our newspaper’s interactive offerings are popular among our readers. Table 22 shows Likert scale results (SD=.960).

Table 22

Question 20: Our Newspaper’s Interactive Offerings are Popular Among Our Readers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.9%(1)</td>
<td>11.1%(6)</td>
<td>18.5%(10)</td>
<td>50.0%(27)</td>
<td>18.5%(10)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 12

Do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive the availability issue of the “Digital Divide” as factoring into their newspapers’ decisions regarding their Web sites’ interactive offerings? Questions 21 and 24 on the survey addressed this research question. Question 21 had respondents answering on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, while Question 24 was open-ended for qualitative analysis. With one Likert scale question measuring this RQ, only 37% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the “Digital Divide” was a factor in decisions regarding their Web sites’ interactive offerings, while 33.3% disagreed, 18.5% were neutral, and 11.1% strongly disagreed. Looking at results of the Likert scale question that addresses RQ12:

Question 21 made the following statement: The availability issue within the “Digital Divide” – that is, the fact that a certain percentage of our newspaper readers do not have Internet access – factors into our newspaper’s decisions regarding the interactive offerings of our Web site. Table 23 shows Likert scale results (SD=1.202).
Table 23

Question 21: The Availability Issue within the “Digital Divide” – That is, the Fact That a Certain Percentage of Our Newspaper Readers Do Not Have Internet Access – Factors into Our Newspaper’s Decisions Regarding the Interactive Offerings of Our Web Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Rating avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.1%(6)</td>
<td>33.3%(18)</td>
<td>18.5%(10)</td>
<td>27.8%(15)</td>
<td>9.3%(5)</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 24 on the survey was an open-ended question that addressed this research question from a qualitative perspective: “When making decisions about your Web site and its interactive offerings, how does your newspaper address the fact that a certain percentage of your readers do not have Internet access?”

Approximately half of the 51 respondents to the open-ended question said the “Digital Divide” is not necessarily a consideration in making decisions about the newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings. Many respondents said they consider the two delivery methods – print and online – to be two different platforms with two audiences, although recognizing some overlap in audiences and noting that the printed newspaper must always cater to those readers with limited or no Internet access. One respondent said: “We don’t consider our online newspaper site to be an exact copy of print. They are two separate products with their own audiences. Using this philosophy we rarely encounter an area where we have to worry about readers without Internet access.”

Another respondent added: “We simply do everything we can to make our print edition great as well as our Web site. We view our Web readers as separate groups.” Another expounded: “While we do have some crossover users, our paper looks at online and
subscription readers as two separate audiences. Our Web site focuses on enriching the experience for our online audience.” Another respondent said the realization that some readers do not have Internet access and are therefore unable to access LOCs through the newspaper’s Web site is “not a major factor.” The respondent said:

We consider that a value-added feature that sets the Web site apart from the print edition. We will live with the fact that not everyone will be able to access it from home, but encourage those who are interested to access the information from a public computer, such as at the local library.

Another added: “We understand that some people don’t have the Internet, so we try and make sure that we have some of the information in the newspaper instead of always sending people to our site or another Web site.”

Highlighting some of the other representative narrative responses:

■ “We encourage readers without Internet access to visit the local branch of the public library. Libraries have tons of public-access computers, and we make it really easy to access anything online.”

■ “For those readers, we offer our print edition.”

■ “All readers – including print – have access to our newsroom via telephone, mail and visit.”

■ “There is simply no way to guarantee that all offerings will be available to all users. We do recognize, however, that even those who don’t have Internet access within their home often use other means to surf.”

■ “The lack of Internet access has little role in what, when and why we post stories to the Web. Sometimes the competition is with other local media outlets to get the news out first.”
“Although many of our readers do not have Web access a few utilize the library’s Internet access to surf and check out our site and contribute to it.”

Only a few respondents said the fact that a certain percentage of their newspapers’ readers do not have Internet access weighs into their decisions about what to offer in the print edition and what to offer online. One respondent said:

This is a large factor as to why we do not put a lot of resources into our Web site. Most of our readers are senior citizens or live in rural areas with either no Internet access or dial-up connections. It is possible we could gain more younger readers by having a more interactive Web site, but it is a big risk to spend the resources on that possibility.

Another said: “It weighs heavily into decisions about whether a project will be presented graphically or in a multimedia format.” Finally, one respondent recognized the timeliness of the question while honestly pointing out the dilemma it raises: “We have no strategy. Even in a meeting of top editors recently, no one had an answer to that question. My solution is to reach them through their Facebook-connected children.”

Research Question 13

What do online editors/Web site coordinators perceive as the advantages and disadvantages of posting LOCs? Questions 22-23 on the survey were open-ended questions that addressed this research question from a qualitative perspective.

Question 22: “What are some advantages of your newspaper’s Web site offering interactive opportunities to your readers?”

While there was no single majority theme to point to when analyzing answers to this question, there were a number of insightful answers that addressed engaging Web site visitors in various ways that ultimately build a stronger sense of community among
newspaper readers. Readers who participate in the various interactive opportunities a newspaper offers through LOCs posted on the Web site can find themselves more invested in the overall news product. They gain a sense of ownership because they are contributing to the product, and they contribute more frequently to the product because their sense of ownership is encouraged. It is a cycle that could ultimately build loyalty, or certainly maintain it, “creating a community that feels it has a role in the news process and ownership of the product,” as one respondent said. “It also gives reporters and editors direct access to how readers feel about issues and what is important to them.” Another respondent noted:

Interactive content helps give readers an almost live, instantaneous snapshot of the current thinking of the community. Not only do users invest more time in the site, but they invest more of themselves. They become part of the local dialogue and maybe even the local color. Interactive content helps build the online community and its personal network.

Another respondent added that LOCs enable an “immediate connection with readers that provides an opportunity to connect with them on a much deeper level than newsprint can.” Another added: “Readers have a ‘say’ and more participation, more ownership of the product. They are also able to connect on issues with others in the community.”

This personal interest might also manifest when readers see their news tips being investigated and ultimately reported, as one respondent pointed out: “There have been many times posters have tipped us off to new stories, which has for the most part taken the place of folks calling in to tip off some news stories.” Another noted: “It helps in news gathering by allowing reporters to seek out sources.” Adding to the dialogue about
reader as reporter/editor, another respondent said: “Sometimes we receive word of news or events that we might have missed otherwise. Readers can act as editors, pointing out mistakes that we can then correct online and in print.” Measurability is also a key consideration: “It helps increase the things we can measure that contribute directly to our success – attention, participation, engagement and reach within and outside our circulation area.” Also speaking to the issue of accountability, another respondent added:

Everyone in the newsroom receives hourly updates of data that provides us with how our stories rank throughout the day. Readers are allowed to post photos, submit press releases, add event items and provide commentary on stories. Our site also provides a tally of the top stories of the day, top comments and top videos and photo galleries.

Other comments pointed to a local newspaper Web site’s ability to maintain connections and therefore perpetuate a sense of community, even among those readers who have moved out of the region, offering a reminder that community is not limited to the confines of geographic borders: “Through our Web site, we have the ability to instantly connect to readers who have an interest in our community, though they may not live in our circulation area,” and, “It allows people who have left their hometown to comment on issues.”

Highlighting some of the other representative narrative responses:

■ “It gives the reader [the opportunity] to feel like they can express themselves when they want to, as opposed to once every few months in a letter to the editor, for example.”

■ “We have a means to receive instant feedback from our readers, as well as a way to generate more content than our staff can produce, which we can reverse-publish.”
“Allows us to gain a sense of what readers feel is important and are focusing on.”

“We have seen increases in submitted news with the option now on the Web site.”

“Being a small town, it would be a place to bring people together on hot topics and to share opinions instead of relying on hearsay and gossip.”

And there is certainly a logical connection between Web traffic, story generation, and a newspaper’s bottom line: “We engage them more with our content, thus driving page views and frequency of visits. They engage each other in dialogue. We drive more page views and revenue. We have the opportunity to poll them about current topics and we can mine their comments for other stories.” Recognizing the importance of reaching a younger readership in maintaining that bottom line, one respondent said: “Younger readers and those who identify themselves as alienated by mainstream print media seem to relate more to the same news and information when packaged online in an interactive format.”

Question 23: “What are some challenges or problems of having your Web site offer interactive opportunities for your readers?”

Whereas the previous survey question focused on the advantages of newspaper Web sites offering LOCs and tallied various answers that were across the board, the question about disadvantages of posting interactive LOCs brought answers that were considerably more narrow, centering primarily on inappropriate behavior from Web site visitors posting churlish comments. Nearly half of the 52 respondents cited monitoring and policing discourteous comments as their greatest challenge. The fact that so many online editors/Web site coordinators shared the same concerns about mean-spirited
discourse facilitated through their newspapers’ Web sites might predicate a need for future research into this particular finding, either through textual analysis, case study, or both. As stated in the Literature Review, online dialogue that allows participants to hide behind screen names can often turn ugly. As one respondent noted: “Because of the anonymity, it gets nasty on the forums and boards. Monitoring comments can become quite a task.” Another adds: “Our anonymous comments sometimes bring out the ugliness of our community. Managing them takes more staff time than most people realize.” Keeping online conversations “on course and civil” requires constant attention, which then speaks to the issue of how to best utilize a newspaper’s editorial resources: “Monitoring the forum items is difficult. Since many of us share the duties, it takes a chunk of time out of our day to be sure someone isn’t trying to put undesirable [comments] on it.” Another added: “Commenting brings out the worst in people. A significant amount of manpower goes into pruning the harmful comments made by readers.” Persistent antagonism allowed to dominate online discourse could have a backlash effect that turns readers away from the very forums newspapers are trying to encourage: “Unfortunately, a lot of negativity persists among our readers. They often attack each other, sources of our stories and local readers in a hurtful way. Many in the community feel we should simply cut this off.” Some respondents indicated that’s exactly what they have done: “We do not allow comments on news stories because we believe they can and often do change the tone we wished to present in the initial story.”

Highlighting some of the other representative narrative responses:

- “Readers want to talk ... few want to listen. Discussion often turns into bickering among intolerant views.”
“The problems are the same as the opportunities. A lot of it has to do with inappropriate behavior and name-calling.”

“Comments can sometimes get nasty, but we allow readers to flag other comments that should be removed. We do not monitor comments.”

“They tend to attract people with extreme views that are not necessarily reflective of the overall population.”

“Reader comments are a challenge to monitor. They get out of hand if not managed.”

Steering interactivity toward civil and productive discussion is a time-consuming challenge, which leads to the theme of approximately one-fifth of the answers to this survey question: staffing. While newspapers are working to increase traffic on their Web sites through interactive opportunities like LOCs, they are often doing so with dwindling staff sizes. As one respondent noted: “Monitoring inappropriate content and general moderation, we simply do not have the staff with the time for this. We would like to stimulate discussion by interacting with readers, but again, [we] have an issue of time.” As another pointed out, “manpower and the lack of revenue to increase manpower to put more effort into it” seems to be a disheartening observation of the industry’s current state. One respondent seemed frustrated: “If it is so important, and it is, then let us commit more resources to it.” Since monitoring online discourse and the manpower issues often related to that time-consuming process made up nearly three-quarters of the answers to Question 23 on the survey, clearly this indicates a need for further research in this area.

**Research Question 14**

What do online editors/Web site coordinators foresee as their newspaper Web sites’ interactive plans for the future? Question 25 on the survey was an open-ended
question that addressed this research question from a qualitative perspective: “What are your interactive plans for your newspaper’s Web site in the future? In other words, do you plan on launching new interactive options for your readers? Please explain.”

Serving as a microcosmic indicator of what the entire newspaper industry is currently grappling with, answers to this final survey question were all over the spectrum of possibilities, from respondents with a clear vision of their interactive plans for the future to those who are asking the same questions among themselves as they move into the unknown. Answers included ideas related to increased social networking, user-generated content options, mobile editions, pay walls for e-editions, photo galleries, high-definition television and iPad interfacing, centralizing online operations, text alerts, community news sites, reverse publishing, new online forums, geo-communities, blogs, videos, podcasts, and, as one respondent summarized, “constant change.”

Highlighting some of the more forward-thinking narrative responses:

■ “We do plan to continue to develop new options and expand those we have. One project will be to develop an online community around the key regional topics. We’ll direct the conversations and invite participation from regional leaders and citizens-at-large. The conversation will flow from print to our Web sites and back to print. We’re also expanding interaction with our users through social networks. We’ll go to them, share with them the things we’re working on and pull them back to our sites.”

■ “In the near future we will offer community pages where readers can upload their own stories, photos and/or events. These elements will be evaluated for reverse publishing back into print as well as fully published online.”
“We plan to increase the amount and ease of reader contributions, as well as focus on geo-communities. We are constantly reviewing our policies on moderation and transparency.”

“We have a number of new options we are working on now, including interfaces in the new platforms coming out from the iPad to widescreen TV. Since it is a matter of years (I say two) before all of America has high-speed Internet access and everyone accesses the Internet on their TV at home, we are rushing to create platforms that best display and deliver our content. We are also thinking of how we can better connect the print readers to our Web site, which is what most of our readers are – we call them crosstrainers.”

“It is our duty to determine what ways people will want to communicate with each other in the future and to be there. We will launch whatever interactive options are necessary to achieve that.”
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

Significance of Findings

Looking at the big picture of how much emphasis newspapers are currently placing on providing links of connectedness – LOCs – to their readers, one must look no further than the quantitative data to realize the qualitative answer is: Not very much. While newspaper Web site home pages post a variety of links – ranging from dozens to hundreds depending on the sites – they average fewer than five links aimed at connecting to readers and encouraging their interactivity with the newspaper and its staffers, or interactivity with other readers. Of those 4.875 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page, only 1.734 do not require scrolling down page in order to find. This even includes drop-down tabs across the top of most common Web sites. Therefore, the other 3.141 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page require scrolling down page to find, and sometimes that means scrolling all the way down the page to find links practically buried at the bottom. Casual observation of a newspaper Web site home page whose LOC numbers are representative of this overall average might lead visitors to deem the sites’ interactive options to be anything but inviting. A Web site with a few hundred (or several hundred) links but only a handful of LOCs is certainly not encouraging much interactivity.

The survey of online editors/Web site coordinators indicates that newspapers generally place a great deal of importance on how well they connect with their readers and engage citizens they reach. There were three questions on the survey that determined the level of importance newspapers’ online editors/Web site coordinators place on their readers being able to provide instant feedback to editorial staff members, post their own
original content on the newspapers’ Web sites, and communicate online with other readers. These three areas speak to the core of newspaper Web site interactivity through links of connectedness, and survey results indicate respondents place significant value on these three areas. As demonstrated in the Results section, 71.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that these three areas of connectivity are important to their newspapers. That breaks down to: 73.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that it is important for newspaper Web sites to offer readers a way to provide instant feedback to editorial staff members (a rating average of 3.96); 73.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that it is important for newspaper Web sites to offer readers a way to provide their own original content (a rating average of 3.77); and 68.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that it is important for newspaper Web sites to offer readers a way to communicate online with other readers (a rating average of 3.72).

Additionally, when online editors/Web site coordinators were asked if they believe their newspapers are accessible and connected to their readers, they generally responded favorably. As indicated in the Results section, 89.4% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with statements about their newspapers being accessible to readers, their newspaper staff members being accessible to readers, and their newspapers being connected to readers. That breaks down to: 98.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that their newspaper is accessible to readers (a rating average of 4.44); 81.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that their newspaper’s staff members are accessible to readers through their Web site (a rating average of 4.06); and 88.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that their newspaper is connected to their readers (a rating average of 4.23).
With the vast majority of respondents firmly believing their newspapers are connected to their audiences and accessible through their Web sites, and that instant feedback, user-generated content and online community building through interactive devices are indeed important, then why aren’t there more than 1.734 LOCs available to site visitors when they open the home page of a typical newspaper’s Web site? Why do they have to scroll down page to find any more, and why are there only 4.875 total LOCs per newspaper Web site home page? Are these numbers considered to be high, or is there a considerable disconnect between what online editors/Web site coordinators believe their newspapers are doing to interact with readers in a cyber-community and what they really are doing?

The results of two more survey questions add to the perplexity when respondents indicate their newspapers generally receive solid feedback from readers through their Web sites and that their interactive offerings are popular among readers. Combining these two survey questions, 71.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the notion that their newspaper Web sites’ interactive offerings are utilized regularly by readers. That breaks down to: 74.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that respondents’ newspapers often receive feedback from readers through the Web site (a rating average of 3.81); and 68.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that their newspapers’ interactive offerings are popular among readers (a rating average of 3.72).

As analyzed in the Results and Discussion, overall perceptions of providing links of connectedness to readers have been positive from survey respondents who work closely with their newspapers’ Web sites – and more pertinently the sites’ interactive devices – on a daily basis. They generally agree that it is important for their newspapers
to offer methods through which readers can communicate with them as institutions, with their reporters and editors as individuals, and with each other as members of a community. They also generally believe their newspapers are connected to their readers and accessible to their readers through their Web sites, and they also generally believe their Web sites’ LOCs are popular and commonly utilized in providing feedback to their newspapers. The average newspaper across all circulation ranges provides 4.875 LOCs per Web site home page, ranging from a low of 2.2 LOCs at the smallest community newspapers in America to 6.0 LOCs per home page at the largest newspapers in America. If community-building is a legitimate concern among newspaper editors and publishers who strive to maintain loyal audiences while enlisting new readers who are more predisposed to embracing new media’s interactive opportunities over traditional ink-on-paper products with limited feedback options, results of this study certainly shed light on a possible disconnect between what is happening and what needs to be happening.

Community Building in a Cyber-Environment

Some predominant linguists, interactionists, and media scholars characterize online communication and the development of online relationships as “another step in the gradual decline of American civic life” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 75), forwarding the notion that a true social connection can be made only through “an embodied, face-to-face interaction,” while a virtual community can exist “only as long as its members experience the presence of each other in alternative ways” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 73).

The things that motivate people to experience a sense of communal belonging are “feelings of membership and influence, including a shared emotional connection,” Hartelius (2005, p. 74) states, “along with the integration and fulfillment of needs” (p.
Without a “physical space or embodied interactions, a shared sense of community would need to evolve from these feelings alone for individuals who identify as members of a virtual community” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 74).

In other words, Hartelius (2005) proposes that any sense of community cannot be fully realized without a “physical space” in which interpersonal communication can occur, and that any “social interactions through a screen” (p. 74) will never adequately fit that bill, only threatening and depleting “traditional communities in terms of social cohesion, identification and participation” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 74). “It is important to note that few if any scholars who offer optimistic views of the virtual community describe it as a substitute for, or a more promising alternative to, traditional communities” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 76). A primary reason is that readers who participate in online discussions – like those facilitated through newspapers’ Web sites – can easily manipulate their personas when presenting themselves to an online audience, whereas person-to-person contact more accurately reveals actual personas. Under this line of reasoning, a water-cooler discussion of an issue reported in the local newspaper would be more productive than online discussion between two people hiding behind screen names. Speaking to this point would be the predominant concerns in this study voiced by online editors/Web site coordinators that conversations taking place through their newspapers’ Web sites often deteriorate quickly and turn downright ugly because discussants are able to hide behind the anonymity of screen names that protect their true identity. People become braver – and nastier – when they don’t have to physically face the person or groups they are criticizing. The self-presentation concept, also known as impression management, suggests that individuals present a certain role or routine while appearing in
public settings, performances that might differ considerably from how they behave in private face-to-face settings (Goffman, 1959).

Applying the concept to online communities, virtual members develop their characters by, first, determining the type of impression they want to make to other community members online, and then choosing how they execute that manufactured impression (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). In an online community, where identities are essentially impossible to verify, the impressions, opinions, connections, and emotions developed in the virtual world can be based on constructed personas of manufactured characters. Managing or controlling what others think of you through staging “an online performance” (Trammell & Keshalashvili, 2005, p. 96) can render differences between truth and image virtually indistinguishable. Online interactive communication can be spontaneous and real, but it can also be a deliberate process that allows participants to convey themselves any way they choose, like actors performing in public. It allows the actors to write, manipulate, edit, and re-edit their lines before performing them – or posting them – in the virtual world. Online interaction between sources and readers, or between readers and other readers, might prove to be revealing, but it is not spontaneous, which allows plenty of room for altering one’s image, controlling its presentation and determining the impression it makes.

So, how can a sense of community be built on a network of staged performances, fabricated personas, acerbic commentary, and even blatant lies? A paradox arises. On one hand, fundamentals of community building are being violated, while on the other hand, online technologies have enabled citizens to participate in ways they perhaps never would under traditional communication models. As one survey respondent noted, whereas a typical newspaper reader might never take the time to write a letter to the editor and mail
it to the local newspaper, he/she might take the time to open the newspaper’s Web site and log a comment. As other survey respondents agreed, online newspapers might bring more people into discussions about topics of concern to them, even while the discussants’ manufactured identities might diminish the credibility of their posted comments.

Hartelius (2005) points out two renowned interactionists, Putnam and Kraut, who argue that “the allegedly social technologies on which Internet communities are founded have paradoxically negative social and psychological impacts on community involvement and interpersonal relationships” (p. 75). Meanwhile, Rheingold (2000) supports a “more organic approach that posits virtual communities as Petri dishes with growing colonies of biological microorganisms” (p. xxviii), and he invites us to “deepen our understanding of the virtual community by conceptualizing it not as a monolithic community, but as an ecosystem of subcultures held together by the pursuit of ‘common goods’ – social network capital, knowledge capital and communion” (Rheingold, 2000, xxviii). This commentary might be exemplified by those online editors/Web site coordinators who said they make the concerted effort to monitor online dialogue while continuing to encourage discourse facilitated through their newspaper Web sites, rather than simply pulling the plug and shutting down all discourse, productive or otherwise.

The term “instrumental agenda-setting” (Webster & Ogles, 1988, p. 42) has traditionally been used to describe a proposal that newspapers should take an active role in facilitating civilized dialogue that can lead to community building among conscientious citizens, concerned members of the media, and newsmakers themselves (Means, 1998). The question is: How can communicators in the online world maximize their agenda-setting potential as a means to building community in the so-called “real” world (Kraut, 1998), effectively blurring any perceived lines between the two social
spheres? There are new media analysts who say that even though the Internet is perceived as a social tool in a tech-forward community, more realistically it is, by design, a tool that discourages social communal efforts by isolating its participants. At best, some might say, it is virtually ineffective in the area of community building and, at worst, it is actually detrimental to any real community-building efforts in that it encourages isolationism and reduces social involvement.

However, it seems Webster & Ogles’ (1988) “purposeful agenda-setting” has relevance in the newspaper industry as publications shift more toward online delivery and online interaction with readers, due to the legitimacy newspapers bring to the discourse. Dialogue facilitated through a newspaper carries more credence and seriousness than dialogue carried in any of the myriad chat rooms, social networking sites, or blog forums. Online forums facilitated through credible media outlets like newspapers might effectively “provide a space to gather individuals under a common goal” and “through that unifying process, we recognize signs of a community under development” (Hartelius, 2005, p. 78). This “civic landscape” can be characterized as growing exponentially with useful information bouncing between Internetworked groups and individuals. In a partial departure from traditional media forms that permeate information from a singular technological source, Bimber (2000) sees a “deinstitutionalization and growing pluralism of civic life” (p. 331). While Hartelius (2005) cautions that “such developments may undermine the coherence of the public sphere” (p. 78) he is also optimistic about the “possibilities inherent in this process” (p. 78). Newspaper Web sites could provide the infrastructure through which constructive virtual communication takes place, enabling Bimber’s (2000) “pluralism of civic life” while also preserving the “coherence of the public sphere.”
Interactive links of connectedness – these LOCs that were at the center of this research project – can enhance communal sensibilities, regardless of participants’ identities, credibility, or depth of knowledge about issues being discussed online. About one such link, blogs, Gregg (2006) notes:

They encourage collaboration as much as competition. The participatory nature of writing, response and counter-argument on blogs allows for ongoing debate, critical refinement and thinking-in-process. They create the conditions for collegiality, brainstorming and frank, fast feedback while also generating and maintaining interest, enthusiasm and motivation. (p. 154)

These can all be seen as elements relevant to the development of community, even if some characters online are manufacturing their “public” personas, acting on artificial premises and managing their images. Hutchins (2004) adds: “Cyberspace, a virtual corridor between places, is electronically mediated, creating fluid, free-floating transterritorial associations” (p. 582).

If discourse facilitated through newspaper Web sites can establish a public dialogue about topics important to society or to communities therein, then it might stand to reason that agenda-setting capabilities of new media could fuse those virtual and non-virtual worlds, rendering them inseparable in the task of community building. If new media have the power to isolate, certainly they have the power to integrate as well, effectively breaking down socio-geographical constrictions of community building. Applying redefined concepts of agenda-setting to traditional notions of community building, new media researchers might be able to connect tech-forward ideas with classical understandings of journalism to enhance the overall flow of information in specific social spheres and within society as a whole.
Professional Application

As a journalist for a dozen years that included the era in which the Internet flickered on for the first time through CPUs that boasted 33MHz as blazing fast (approximately 1/60th of the speed common in today’s most basic laptops) and quickly grew in popularity to become nearly as common as cable television, this researcher has participated in the enormous adjustment that all traditional newspapers have undergone, and continues to maintain that as long as the message remains valuable as a product – that is, local news, sports, opinions, and entertainment – community and metro newspapers will thrive regardless of their medium. In order for newspapers to remain viable and their message to remain valuable, editors and publishers must constantly seek to determine what is important to readers. Constantly examining new platforms for journalistic message delivery, they must remain invested with their readers through the various links of connectedness that keep their profession relevant throughout the perpetually evolving technological landscape of our modern media marketplace.

Limitations of Research

While the content analysis study was as extensive, detailed, and exhaustive as any to date and the survey study was properly designed and executed, the survey response rate was low, thereby prohibiting correlation analysis between responses from certain specific circulation ranges and LOC counts in those ranges. Also, as is the case with any e-mailed survey, it is difficult to ensure that those who answered survey questions were, in fact, the specific respondents sought, that is, online editors/Web site coordinators. Nevertheless, when looking at the larger picture of LOCs and respondents’ overall perceptions of what interactivity means to their newspapers and to their readers, the response rate produced valid and generalizable results.
Prospects for Future Research

Follow-up research might include textual analysis of online dialogue facilitated through newspaper Web sites, especially after learning a primary concern of online editors/Web site coordinators is the incivility of discourse facilitated through newspaper Web sites.

After noting newspapers’ proclivity toward posting links to social media on their Web site home pages, future research might delve into this trend more deeply, studying whether this is merely a brief embrace of popular culture or something more meaningful.

Another possible area for future research might be the circulation range that posted the highest mean average of LOCs – the 80,000-149,999 circulation range – because its 7.942 LOCs per newspaper Web site home page were not only well above the cumulative mean average, but also 2.457 LOCs higher than the mean average for the largest newspapers in America.

Additional follow-up research might include case studies of newspapers whose Web sites post high and low numbers of LOCs, analyzing the challenges of moderating and updating online interactivity, especially at smaller community newspapers where resources are limited.

Additional follow-up research might also include interviews and focus groups consisting of publishers, editors, reporters, and newspaper readers to determine the importance they place on newspaper Web sites’ links of connectedness.

Additional follow-up research might also include ethnographic studies examining the day-to-day routines of employees at newspapers where emphasis is placed on interactivity, and at newspapers where little or no emphasis is placed on interactivity.
Also, while the content analysis in this research project focuses on community and metro newspapers in the United States of America, a follow-up content analysis might replicate this study using international newspapers as the sampling population.
Sampling Frame

Since no content analysis of this scope has been conducted to this point, and since there is no industry-recognized sampling frame in existence for “community” or “metro” newspapers (Jeffres, Cutietta, Lee & Sekerka, 1999, p. 87), the sampling frame for this study was drawn from categories determined by ranges of newspaper circulation. These are the 19 circulation ranges sampled:

1) under 2,000 8) 30,000-39,999 15) 250,000-299,999
2) 2,000-3,999 9) 40,000-59,999 16) 300,000-349,999
3) 4,000-6,999 10) 60,000-79,999 17) 350,000-399,999
4) 7,000-9,999 11) 80,000-99,999 18) 400,000-449,999
5) 10,000-14,999 12) 100,000-149,999 19) 500,000 and above
6) 15,000-19,999 13) 150,000-199,999
7) 20,000-29,999 14) 200,000-249,999

The annual *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook (2009)* provided circulation data from which to establish a sampling frame. How often the newspaper is published – for instance, weeklies, bi-weeklies, and dailies – was also noted on coding sheets, but circulation figures were the key determinant in categorization. In listing circulation statistics for U.S. newspapers, the *Editor and Publisher International Yearbook (2009)* uses the following audit reporting methods: Audit Bureau of Circulations; Certified Audit of Circulations; Circulation Verification Council; Verified Audit Circulation, and sworn statements of circulation. Circulation figures are for Sept. 30, 2008, the most recent statistics available at the time of this research project.
Coding

Once the sampling frame was established, the actual sample for content analysis consists of 30 randomly selected American newspapers in each of the 10 circulation ranges below 80,000, for a total of 300 newspaper Web sites. States were chosen randomly (non-replacement), and then every third newspaper listing a Web site was selected from each state’s list and recorded under its specific circulation range (1-10) until each circulation range had 30 units of analysis. More than 300 newspapers were initially selected and listed on coding sheets (that is, 35 for each circulation range) to account for dead links, incorrect Web addresses, Web sites that fail to load or newspapers that have gone out of business. Since there are 30 or fewer newspapers in each circulation range above 80,000, researchers coded every newspaper in ranges 11-19. Here are the circulation ranges 11-19 and the number of American newspapers in each circulation range sampled at the time of this study:

11) 80,000-99,999: 22
12) 100,000-149,999: 30
13) 150,000-199,999: 24
14) 200,000-249,999: 15
15) 250,000-299,999: 8
16) 300,000-349,999: 8
17) 350,000-399,999: 2
18) 400,000-449,999: 1
19) 500,000 and above: 8

With 300 newspapers coded in circulation ranges 1-10 and 118 newspapers coded in circulation ranges 11-19, this brings the total sample of newspapers analyzed to 418. Number of days published (i.e. weeklies, bi-weeklies, and dailies) are also noted on coding sheets. Researchers accessed sampled newspapers’ Web sites through entering their Web addresses in the browser window.
Categories of Links of Connectedness, LOCs

The LOCs are sectioned into five dimensions of interactivity that encompass 15 categories of specific LOCs on home pages of newspaper Web sites. There is also a 16th category, “LOC Community,” which falls outside the five dimensions and 15 specific categories because it is a link that takes readers to a virtual community that includes a variety of LOCs all in one clearinghouse location. Finally, there is a 17th category, “Other,” to account for any possible LOCs that do not fall clearly under the first 16 categories of LOC. To keep the specific LOCs organized on the coding sheets and ensuing analysis, the LOC categories are numbered according to the dimension they fall under and their ordered number. See the attached coding sheet for details.

The LOCs are sectioned into these five dimensions of interactivity (with dimension abbreviations in parentheses):

1. Private (Pr): Defined as reader-to-staff member interaction. For instance, “Contact Us” e-mail links, reader surveys or feedback links through which readers can submit comments directly to newspaper staff members, but not with the intention of posting for public consumption.

2. Public (Pu): Defined as feedback for public consumption. For instance, “Post a Comment” links on stories or staff blogs, through which individual readers can post feedback for public consumption. Other examples include: message boards, forums, sound offs, “Guestbook” rolls, submit events (e.g. announcements, news tips or items for a calendar), submit letters to the editor, opinion polls and survey questionnaires.

3. Real-Time (RT): Defined as reader being able to participate in real-time discourse. For instance, live chats or discussions in which readers can join an ongoing
discussion with newspaper staff members, public officials, entertainers, athletes, etc., and provide instantaneous back-and-forth dialogue.

4. Social (S): Defined as reader being able to participate in various social networking media options for which online newspapers are posting links on their home pages more frequently, such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

5. Reader-Submitted Content (RSC): Defined as online opportunities for readers to contribute to the newspaper Web site’s editorial content beyond typical feedback links. For instance, user-generated content submitted by readers for public consumption, like photos, videos, stories, press releases, reader blogs, and podcasts.

Based on these five dimensions of interactivity, researchers identified LOCs on newspaper Web site home pages and coded them into the following specific categories. Note that coding sheet numbers and dimension identifier abbreviations are included in parenthesis next to the category name. The first number represents which of the five dimensions the LOC falls under, and the second number is the LOC’s ordered number. These numbers and abbreviations correspond to those on the attached coding sheet. Also note that dimension identifiers and coding sheet abbreviations are included at the end of each category’s definition, to provide additional clarification. Finally, there are coding notes at the end of each category, as necessary, to provide additional information on identifying specific LOCs on Web site home pages. These are the 17 LOC categories, definitions, and specific notes (as necessary) on identification of LOCs:

• E-mail (1.1 Pr): Commonly identified with a tag like “Contact Us,” these links take site visitors directly to an e-mail service, enabling them to send e-mails directly to an editorial staff member at the newspaper. Private: Pr. Note: In order to be coded under “Contact Us,” links must take visitors directly to an e-mail service or to a window that
allows for posting messages, without having to search for or click on any additional secondary links, and without having to register.

- Feedback/Reader survey (1.2 Pr): These links often lead to forms that readers can fill out and submit to the newspaper, to assist staff members in improving their product. Private: Pr.

- “Post a Comment” (2.3 Pu): Generally placed with a story or staff blog, these links allow readers to post comments about the story or blog, and allow other readers to respond to those comments in a dialogue thread. Public: Pu. Note: In order to be coded under “Post a Comment,” links must be visible on the home page of the Web site (rather than at the end of stories or blogs) and must invite site visitors to post a comment, rather than links that allow site visitors to read previously posted comments.

- Message board/Forum/Sound off (2.4 Pu): Geared toward groups with particular or general interests, these links let readers post messages for discussion or sharing of documents. Public: Pu

- “Guestbook” (2.5 Pu): These links allow readers to sign in and submit brief comments about topics of the newspaper’s choosing or of their own choosing. Public: Pu

- Submit event (2.6 Pu): These links allow readers to submit announcements, news tips or items for calendars posted on the newspaper’s Web site. Public: Pu. Note: In order to be coded under this category, the link label must contain verbiage that calls the Web site visitor to action. Examples include: “submit event,” “submit announcement,” “news tip,” “submit items for calendar,” “submit story ideas,” etc.

- Submit letters to the editor (2.7 Pu): These links allow readers to submit online versions of traditional letters to the editor. Public: Pu
• Opinion poll/Questionnaire (2.8  Pu): Ongoing polls or questionnaires about various current topics, with results posted on the Web site. Public: Pu

• Live chat/Discussion (3.9  RT): These links allow readers to enter an ongoing or scheduled forum online, discussing a particular topic or topics with several other Web site visitors. Real-Time: RT

• Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn (4.10  S): These links allow readers to utilize these social networking sites that connect people through text narratives, forums, images, videos, shared links, etc. Social: S

• Twitter (4.11  S): These links allow readers to utilize this social messaging tool that connects people through brief text message updates 140 characters in length or less. Social: S

• Reader-submitted photos/videos (5.12  RSC): These links allow readers to submit their own photos and videos for posting on the Web site. Reader-Submitted Content: RSC. Note: In order for a link to be coded under this category, the link label must contain verbiage that calls the Web site visitor to action. Examples include words like: “submit,” “send us,” “give us,” “contribute,” “share,” etc.

• Reader-submitted story/press release (5.13  RSC): These links allow readers to submit news/feature stories and press releases for posting on the Web site. Reader-Submitted Content: RSC. Note: In order for a link to be coded under this category, the link label must contain verbiage that calls the Web site visitor to action. Examples include words like: “submit,” “send us,” “give us,” “contribute,” “share,” etc.

• Reader-submitted blog (5.14  RSC): These links allow readers to submit their own blogs for posting on the Web site. Reader-Submitted Content: RSC. Note: In order for a link to be coded under this category, the link label must contain verbiage that calls the
Web site visitor to action. Examples include words like: “submit,” “send us,” “give us,” “contribute,” “share,” etc.

- Reader-submitted podcast (5.15 RSC): These links allow readers to submit their own podcasts – audio broadcasts via an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed – for posting on the Web site. Reader-Submitted Content: RSC. Note: In order for a link to be coded under this category, the link label must contain verbiage that calls the Web site visitor to action. Examples include words like: “submit,” “send us,” “give us,” “contribute,” “share,” etc.

- LOC Community (16 LOCC): These links fall outside the previous 15 specific categories because they take readers to a virtual community that includes a variety of LOCs all in one clearinghouse location. Note: In order for a link to be coded under this category, the word “community” must be in the link label. When the Web site visitor clicks on the “community” link, there must be two or more ways to submit information, indicated with link labels that include words like: “submit,” “send us,” “give us,” “contribute,” “share,” etc.

- Other (17 OTHER): Any additional interactive links that do not fall under these specific links of connectedness. Note: If a link label says “submit” without specifically indicating its type of LOC, it is coded under this category.

Locations of LOCs

Recognizing that a “CONTACT US” e-mail link clearly displayed on the navigation bar (perhaps with a highly visible button) would appear far more inviting than a tiny “contact us” link at the bottom of the page, researchers also coded for LOCs’ location on the home pages of newspaper Web sites. As a newspaper’s Web site was opened and maximized on an average-sized computer monitor (19-inch), researchers
coded for LOCs that are visible in the viewing area upon opening of the page and also
coded for those LOCs that require scrolling down page. These are referred to in the
analysis as “in frame” and “out of frame.”

Other Sampling Notes

When two circulations were listed – one paid and one free – researchers recorded
the larger of the two circulation figures. When more than two circulations were listed –
for instance weekdays, weekends, Sundays, etc. – researchers recorded the first
circulation figure listed. Although the list of states was generated randomly, researchers
eventually sampled all 50 states in order to fill circulation ranges 1-9. In fact, to complete
the sample for newspapers under 80,000 circulation, some of the 50 states were randomly
sampled a second time, moving the first newspaper up one place in the selection order
and then sampling every third newspaper until all circulation ranges were completed.

Other Coding Notes

Also on the coding sheets researchers documented additional information that
might prove helpful in further analysis. In addition to the newspaper’s name, the city and
state where it is published were noted, along with the population of the city it serves
(where available). Population figures, which were available for daily newspapers only
and not for weekly newspapers, are from the 2000 U.S. Census, the most recent census at
the time of this project. In recording U.S. Census figures for daily newspaper readership
areas, researchers recorded the first census figure listed. In addition to the circulation
range (1-19) of the newspaper, its specific circulation was also noted. Also recorded were
specific days of the week the newspaper is published, along with the name of the
newspaper’s owner (where available). When a “Group” or “Parent Company” was listed
instead of “Owner,” the group name or parent company name was recorded as owner.
When a “Representative” was listed instead of “Owner” or “Group” or “Parent Company,” the representative’s name was recorded as owner. In addition to the Web site address of the newspaper, who the site is powered by was also noted, if available on the Web site’s home page. All of this additional information was recorded for possible follow-up research that might include case studies and other methodologies in which these details might prove useful.
# CODING SHEET TOTALS

## CUMULATIVE TOTALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>2.038</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1.30</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<td>1.04</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Average LOCs (by Dimension)</td>
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<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.03</td>
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</table>

Sheet # 1-17  
Date: 7/16/10

Cumulative total newspapers coded 4,118
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total LOCs (by Category)</th>
<th>Average LOCs (by Category)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category A</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category B</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category C</td>
<td>789</td>
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</table>

**AVERAGES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Average LOCs for this circ. range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category A</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category B</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category C</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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**TOTALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total LOCs (by Dimension)</th>
<th>Average LOCs (by Dimension)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 1</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension 2</td>
<td>567</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dimension 3</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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**CODING SHEET TOTALS**

**PER CIRCULATION RANGE**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total LOCs (by Category)</th>
<th>Average LOCs (by Category)</th>
<th>Average LOCs (by Division)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback/Reader survey</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Post a Comment&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message board/Forum/Sound off</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Guest Book&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit letter to the editor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options and/or e-service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line chat/Discussion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook/MySpace/LinkedIn/Twitter</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Reader-submitted photos/videos&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Reader-submitted podcast&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;1st REC Reader-submitted blog&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;2nd REC Reader-submitted blog&quot;</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;LOC Community&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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</table>

**TOTAL LOCs (by Division):** 1.458

**Average LOCs per newspaper for this circulation range:** 1.458
### Circulation Range (1-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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### Collapsed Circulation Ranges (1-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1-9 Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</tbody>
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### Total Newspapers Coded in This Circulation Range

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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**CODING SHEET TOTALS**

**PER CIRCULATION RANGE**

#### Totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email/Feedback</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Board/Forum/Thread</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guestbook</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit letters to the editor</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions/Questionnaire</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live chat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LOCs</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Average LOCs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email/Feedback</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Board/Forum/Thread</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guestbook</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit letters to the editor</td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinions/Questionnaire</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live chat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LOCs</td>
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</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Average LOCs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email/Feedback</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Message Board/Forum/Thread</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guestbook</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit letters to the editor</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions/Questionnaire</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live chat</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total LOCs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Average LOCs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email/Feedback</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Board/Forum/Thread</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Guestbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinions/Questionnaire</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live chat</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Radio/Video</td>
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<tr>
<td>Radio/Video</td>
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**Sheet #** 1 | **Date:** 11/11/10

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<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Comments</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message Board/Forum/Thread</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guestbook</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Radio/Video</td>
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<tr>
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**137**
### CODING SHEET TOTALS

**PER CIRCULATION RANGE**

#### TOTALS

<table>
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<th>Category</th>
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<th>Total LOCs by Dimension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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#### AVERAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Average LOCs by Category</th>
<th>Average LOCs by Dimension</th>
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