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**U.S. ONLINE CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND
ONLINE NEWSPAPER STORIES:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THEIR QUALITY AND VALUE**

By

Serena Carpenter

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

U.S. Online Citizen Journalism and Online Newspaper Stories: A Content Analysis of Their Quality and Value

By

Serena Carpenter

Anyone with access to the internet might hypothetically be a “journalist,” for they can easily publish news content themselves instead of consuming content created by traditional or mainstream news organizations. This transition in power has challenged the definition of what is considered journalism and who should be classified as a journalist.

To address how this transition is affecting the field of journalism, this research focused on the examination of online citizen journalism and online newspaper content. And to explore whether journalists associated with these publications were producing “journalism,” this research identified principles that are considered important to measure by journalism scholars and mainstream journalists to make comparisons. Some of the principles measured are clearly identifiable sources and journalists, a large number of sources, a diversity of sources, topics and viewpoints, the use of local information, official sources, outbound hyperlinks, mobilizing information and multimedia/interactive story elements. Organizational and sociological theory was used to explain why differences in content were expected between online citizen and online newspaper publications.

The first objective of this investigation was to build a foundation of empirical research that demonstrates the value and drawbacks of online

newspaper and online citizen journalism content. Second, this research sought to identify attributes of stories that define quality online journalism. Finally, this investigation laid the empirical groundwork to address the assumptions being made about the contributions of online newspaper and online citizen journalists.

A quantitative content analysis of 480 online newspaper and 482 online citizen journalism stories was conducted. The analysis of citizen journalism sites was limited to sites that dedicated their coverage to a geographic location (e.g., Hamtramck, Mich., Chicago, Ill.) rather than citizen journalists who cover an issue (e.g., entertainment, education). Analysis was also limited to textual stories on the homepage. Intercoder reliability for all variables ranged from .82 to 1.0.

Data indicate that significant differences exist between online newspaper journalism and online citizen journalism stories. Online newspaper journalists revealed more information on the identity of their sources, however, were less open about the background they bring to a story. Online citizen journalists attributed more information to male sources, while online newspapers attributed more official sources. Online citizen journalists were also more likely to include mobilizing, multimedia and local information in their stories, and were more likely to feature a diversity of topics.

Based on elements identified by mainstream journalists and scholars as essential variables to measure, this investigation concluded that online citizen and online newspaper journalists produce “journalism” at varying levels, and the availability of both types of content, citizen and traditional, allow consumers access to a diversity of ideas and opinions.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The question people should ask is not whether someone is called a journalist. The important issue is whether or not this person is doing journalism” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2001, p. 98).

Journalism publications provide a collective space for the public to exchange viewpoints. This aggregating function of the press is essential for democracy to function. Journalists, the people responsible for this role in society, are professionally being challenged by amateur or independent journalists. Both online citizen journalism and online newspapers have faced many criticisms regarding their credibility. Criticism includes their propensity to feature entertainment stories, rather than informing the public on more substantive matters (Brown, 2007, Harris Interactive Poll, 2005; Safran, 2005; Shaw, 2005). This investigation examined whether criticisms against both online citizen journalists and online newspaper journalists are grounded in empirical reality. To accomplish this task, this research compared variables in stories extracted from online newspaper (e.g., *Star Tribune*; *Lansing State Journal*) and online citizen journalism sites (e.g., Westport Now; Metroblogging Portland) to identify the value and the drawbacks of both publication types via a quantitative content analysis.

Mainstream news media are struggling to survive and compete against threats from new competitors. The rise in competition can be attributed to the ease of publishing content online. Current technology is decentralizing the distribution of information, which in return is challenging traditional or mainstream journalist's role as gatekeeper in deciding what information is considered of news

value. Content can be produced and distributed by almost any person via the World Wide Web. This open participation in the news process is challenging the definition of what is considered *journalism*. For most of the 20th century, news has been predominantly the mainstream or traditional media's interpretation of events and issues. Today, citizens can access information produced by sources at the individual level (e.g., their peers) or at the organizational level (e.g., National Institutes of Health). Competition from alternative sources and the developing idea that journalism is participatory has made the mainstream media industry uneasy. This is due to the inability to foresee how online news will advance or profit due to the limited ability to predict how user consumption and online news business models will evolve.

Today's "new" media are really not so new for most of the applications are actually extensions of existing applications or media. Technology has historically converged. For example, the telephone converged with the telegraph by utilizing the same wire lines as the telegraph for limited service. Audio and pictures converged to form television, which heightened an audience members' connectedness to the outside world. In the online environment, the delivery of news is not constrained by text, video or audio; rather, news can be packaged in the format that is most ideal for the communication of that issue. Mainstream or traditional media refer to commercial news organizations that have primarily focused on the delivery of information daily concerning a large geographic (e.g., local, state, national, international) area in either a textual, audio or visual format

offline. In the online realm, audio, video and text can fuse together creating layers that promote a deeper level of understanding.

The blending of broadcast and print applications in online environments is increasingly encroaching on news organization's turf because they must now compete with each other or alternative media (e.g., Wikinews, Facebook, YourHub) to profit (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007). To compete, the field of journalism is evolving due to the social and technological forces, and as it moves forward, a reevaluation of what is considered journalism is occurring (Merritt & McCombs, 2004).

One specific challenge to traditional journalist's role as information providers is online citizen journalists. This research defined an online citizen journalist as *an individual who intends to publish information online meant to benefit a community*. The Knight Citizen News Network lists more than 450 citizen journalism sites in the United States (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007). There are no figures available that estimate the number of citizen journalism content consumers; however, research indicates that anywhere from seven to 12 percent of U.S. adults regularly read blogs (CNN.com, 2005; Hargrove & Stempel, 2007).

The online citizen publishing movement stems from the blogging phenomenon. A "blog" shortened for 'web log' is defined as "a frequently modified web page in which dated entries are listed and archived in reverse chronological order" (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). A blogger can be classified as an online citizen journalist

because bloggers first gained prominence for their coverage of former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott. Bloggers, people who publish on the internet, kept the story alive when the traditional press overlooked perceived racist comments by Lott. The traditional press did not report on it until the bloggers brought the story to the surface leading to the resignation of Lott in 2002 (Shachtman, 2002).

In general, offline citizen journalists have historically acted when existing media were not fully meeting their community's informational needs (Dennis & Rivers, 1974; Kessler, 1984). That sentiment was recently reflected in a survey which reported that 44 percent of U.S. news users felt that traditional journalists were inadequately representing the diversity of issues within their community (Harris Poll, 2007). Online citizen journalists feel as though they can fill that gap (The Institute of Interactive Journalism, 2007a). However, controversy exists for many traditional journalists do not feel that online citizen journalism content should be classified as journalism because it is not as credible or accurate (Gladney, Shapiro, & Castaldo, 2007).

One current debate focuses on whether online citizen journalists should be classified as journalists. Currently, there is a push to classify every person in the United States as a journalist (Alexander, 2002; "Free Flow of Information Act of 2007,"; Papandrea, 2007; Woo, 2005). This move is leading to a debate concerning who is qualified to be called a journalist. Based on the First Amendment, the freedom to speak and publish is everyone's right in the United States, and this does not only pertain to the offline world, but the online one as

well. The assumption of this research is that anyone can be a journalist, however, not everyone who regularly publishes content produces journalism.

Journalists are unique for they play a special role in promoting democracy, interpreting issues, connecting citizens to issues and organizing information in an accurate manner. As stated, the premise of this present research is that any person can be a journalist, but the adherence to journalistic principles is what segregates quality content creators from one another. The criticism against online citizen journalism is that it is of low quality because of beliefs that it focuses on opinion, entertainment and it is inaccurate (Brown, 2007, Safran, 2005; Shaw, 2005). This assumes that journalism has or should have certain standards. But who should define these standards? It is difficult to identify standards that should encapsulate quality journalism (Bogart, 2004). Critical scholars, researchers, consumers, journalists and business leaders would likely each define standards of quality differently.

To begin to identify what is “journalism,” this research focused on the comparison of online citizen journalism and online newspaper story attributes. The selected attributes in this study are identified as important by journalism scholars and traditional journalists, and in some cases, these measures can qualify as universal standards of quality journalism in the United States. The Project for Excellence in Journalism’s definition of a “good” local television newscast (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), State of the News Media research (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2007) and other research¹ have been used to identify features that

are considered hallmarks of “quality journalism” or elements that are considered important to journalism. Story elements that can be classified as attributes that define *quality* journalism content are 1) the use of identifiable sources and journalists, 2) a large number of sources, 3) a diversity of sources and viewpoints and 4) local information. However, not all attributes used in this study are universally agreed upon elements that characterize quality, but they are considered important to measure. The other attributes used to make comparisons in this research were the use of topics, official and unofficial sources, outbound hyperlinks, mobilizing information and multimedia/interactive story elements. They were not categorized as attributes of quality for three reasons: 1) the element should not be included in every story, 2) the inclusion of the element is considered a debatable attribute or 3) the incorporation of the story element collided with other journalistic principles (e.g., fairness, accuracy).

This research analyzed the selected publications through the use of a quantitative content analysis. This type of analysis is useful for measuring large quantities of data; however, it does limit the story elements that can be examined. The product of a journalist is important to assess because as according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (p.3), “readers ... care about what shows, not how it got there. They judge us on output, not process” (ASNE, 2002). The content analysis compared variables identified in online newspaper stories and online citizen journalism stories to determine the value and drawbacks of each publication type.

Since this research focused on content, it utilized sociological and organizational theories to better understand why differences in online citizen journalism and online newspaper content are likely to exist. Specifically, Shoemaker and Reese's (1995) Hierarchy of Influences on Media Content is utilized. This theory illuminates how a traditional journalist's socialization and training play a significant role in the creation of the final product. Based on this theoretical framework, it is predicted that online citizen journalists and online newspaper journalists will likely be affected by varying influences such as readers, other journalists, organizational constraints, which ultimately produce differences in content.

The overarching purpose of this research is to add to a very limited amount of research on online citizen journalism. Many news organizations are adopting citizen content (Brown, 2005; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). However, little is known about content produced by online citizen journalists (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a; Rosen, 2006). The selected online citizen journalism sites for this study encompass only informational sites where content produced is focused on the informational coverage of a particular geographic area (e.g., Hamtramck, Mich., Chicago, Ill.). The use of online newspapers for comparative purposes can highlight the value of both publication types, especially during a time when negative assumptions are being made regarding the reliability, accuracy and fairness of content produced by both citizen journalists and newspaper journalists (Brown, 2005, Harris Interactive Poll, 2005; Shaw, 2005). Currently, a foundationless line exists

dividing both types of content contributors, but whether such a line should exist is disputable.

In the following section, chapter two, a review of the literature is presented, followed by sociological and organizational theory used to illuminate why differences in content are predicted to exist. Chapter three provides a detailed account of the methodology used to carry out this examination of online citizen journalism and online newspaper Web sites. Chapter four presents the results of the investigation, and chapter five addresses a discussion of the results. In the final chapter, chapter six, conclusions are made including the need for future work.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The literature review addresses the background, concerns and questions raised regarding the value of online citizen journalism and online newspaper content. The literature review begins with a focus on general philosophies toward journalism, and later addresses journalism's relationship to online citizen journalism content including the constraints citizen journalists face in the publishing world. Lastly, the theoretical framework guiding this research is presented, including the research questions.

Philosophies toward Journalism

Journalism holds a special place in society because the stories produced by journalists reflect the issues that affect and define people as a collective. This public collection of information is necessary for democracy to exist. News people assemble complex information so others can better understand information. However, a debate exists over the level of involvement consumers should have in the process of constructing news, which is challenging traditional journalist's role as primary information providers to the public.

The desired level of consumer involvement is a historical debate. In the 1920s, journalist and political commentator Walter Lippman and American philosopher John Dewey debated the role of journalism in democracy, and what role the public should play in the information exchange process. John Dewey believed that the news media should encourage involvement in public affairs through social collaboration. However, Lippman's libertarian views in the 20th century dominated the news media's philosophy toward constructing news. His

paternalistic philosophy toward informing the public empowered journalists because it held that their expertise placed them with moral authority over others in determining the worthiness of information shared with the public. Some critics have claimed that Lippman's approach toward the public, treating them as incapable spectators, encouraged the disconnect that exists today between traditional news journalists and the public (Merritt & McCombs, 2004). Plaisance (2005) added to criticism against the libertarian philosophy stating that "humans are creatures of community and come to self-realization through social life" (p.300). Thus, individuality is discovered through one's relationships with other people, and a diversity of content encourages a greater awareness of self (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Plaisance, 2005; Tilly, 1978).

John Dewey countered the libertarian philosophy by arguing that journalists should entrench themselves in their community so to better pinpoint reality, rather than create it (Dewey, 1985). Dewey's approach emulates the theory of social responsibility, which was intended to address the shortcomings of the libertarian theory. The social responsibility theory posits that news people should act with a social conscience (Peterson, 1966; Plaisance, 2005; Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956), and recent research indicates that journalists are becoming more community-centric (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007). The social responsibility approach began to take form following The Commission on the Freedom of the Press's Report in 1947 (Blanchard, 1977), and eventually fell somewhat more into acceptance with the public journalism movement. Originating in the 1990s, the public journalism philosophy posited that

the press should improve their community by highlighting issues that were of local concern (Rosen, 1999).

Differing philosophies toward informing the public have fueled tension among journalists because some members of the press feel as though all creators of journalistic content have a duty to adhere to certain moral standards (Brown, 2007; Shaw, 2005; Shim, 2006). The ease of publishing content online has permitted anyone with internet access to create content for public consumption. These creators of content do not have to abide by any principles (e.g., accuracy, fairness, thoroughness) when publishing. Thus, anyone can hypothetically be a journalist. The field of journalism is not considered a profession by many outside entities because there are no licensing requirements that mandate journalists to follow guidelines on how to select, construct and disseminate information (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

There are several reasons behind why journalists have not sought professional status. Professionalism has been defined as “the exercise of autonomy, the right to workers to control their own work, frequently with reference to norms developed by professional agencies external to the organizations in which they work” (Tuchman, 1978, p.65). One leading reason behind the field’s controversial move not to seek professional status was their inability to specialize in an area of knowledge (Schramm, 1957). Journalists tend not to be experts themselves in particular areas; rather they rely on outside sources who are experts to help them define news (Gruening, 1924). This source

and organizational dependence affects their behavior, thus, limiting their independence when producing content. Other reasons include training expenses and limited applications of professional rules to unexpected events (Soloski, 1989).

Despite not seeking professional status, some media experts argue that good journalists are distinct from other practitioners (Brown, 2005). Lippman (1922) said that a good journalist understands how to find information. Brown (2005) indicated that information presented to the public must be accurate, and only professional journalists are skilled at checking facts. Academics and professional organizations contend that high-quality journalists are those who create information based on their adherence to ethics so to protect the public from consuming misinformation (RTNDA, 2000; SND, 2006; SPJ, 1996).

Defining Journalism

A historical and current review of journalism definitions is highlighted to demonstrate the complications of defining what is journalism and who should produce journalistic content. Conflict exists as to whether to focus on the definition of the journalist or the definition of journalism, and how one should define a journalist and journalism. This section of the literature review addresses the current controversy.

Definitions of Journalism

Journalism scholars have conceived of "journalism" as something that exists in the minds of journalists. Emery, Ault, and Agee (1973) simply defined

journalism as *a report of things as they appear at the moment of writing* (Emery, Ault, & Agee, 1973, p.11). Camp (1890) surveyed journalists asking them to define *news*. He defined news as *an unpublished event of present interest* (p.260). He claimed that it was unpublished because news existed in the minds of people who published the news.

Based on the selected historical definitions, any person could hypothetically be a journalist. However, 20th century academics and the courts tend to classify journalistic work as a product stemming from those who work at a news organization (Blanchard, 1977; Papandrea, 2007; Woo, 2005). Journalism is an individual, an organizational and a societal entity. Past definitions reflected the likelihood, as Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (1976) recognized, that news was not purely the result of the individual journalist. The authors defined journalism as *of ongoing social process as filtered through the apparatus of the news industry* (Johnstone et al., 1976, p.6).

Journalists have been defined as *those who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information* (Weaver et al., 2007, p.256). Specifically, Weaver et al. defined journalists by drawing a line between news employees and citizens. The authors defined journalists by concentrating their study efforts on full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, editors, public affairs staff and photographers. For the most part, the courts define journalism based on whether a person is employed by a news organization (Papandrea, 2007; Woo, 2005). For example, the Alabama shield law (2005, p.33) states that a journalist is *any person engaged in, connected*

with, or employed by any newspaper, radio broadcasting or television station
(The Bureau of National Affairs, 2005).

Recently proposed definitions concluded that almost everyone should be granted journalistic protections. Papandrea (2007) proposed that everyone who disseminates information to the public should be granted shield law rights, which is the limited right to keep the identity of a source confidential, while Alexander (2002) argued that any person gathering news for dissemination *to the news media* should be considered a journalist. Woo (2005) attempted to define journalism by arguing that the U.S. courts should define journalism by ascertaining whether an individual is “doing journalism” (p.34). The act of journalism consisted of three elements: 1) a person pursuing a story, 2) that was intended for an audience and 3) that was intended to benefit the public or be of social importance. Journalism would then be defined on a story-by-story basis. A newly proposed federal bill (Free Flow of Information Act of 2007, HR 2102) would likely grant citizen journalists immunity from revealing confidential sources if they were engaged in *journalism*, rather than if they were affiliated with a news organization. The bill defined journalism as *the gathering, preparing, collecting, photographing, recording, writing, editing, reporting, or publishing of news or information that concerns local, national, or international events or other matters of public interest for dissemination to the public* (“Free Flow of Information Act of 2007,” 2007, p.7). Currently, 49 states have shield laws or have court rulings that grant journalists protection from revealing their sources (Broache, 2007; Society of Professional Journalists, 2007).

For this present examination, a “journalist” is *an individual who intends to publish information meant to benefit a community*. Thus, both citizen journalists and traditional journalists fall under this definition of a journalist; however, the use of *online citizen journalists* and *online newspaper journalists* are labels used to avoid confusion throughout this research.

It is a First Amendment right to *publish*, and any infringement on that right goes against the ideals of the First Amendment (Blanchard, 1977). “Freedom to publish means freedom for all and not for some. Freedom to publish is guaranteed by the Constitution” (“Associated Press v. United States,” 1945, p.20). *Intent* to publish is important for the rights of journalists must be protected as they gather information, not only when the content has been published for mass consumption.

The intention behind the use of the term *community* for this research is based on previous definitions of journalism. Journalistic information functions to safeguard the existence of democracy; it does this by encouraging people to act as a collective. The duty of the journalist is to serve people – that includes people who make up the masses and people who belong to smaller subgroups. Thus, journalists work to serve specific communities.

A community can refer to a geographic area or refer to a group of people with similar interests (Christensen & Levinson, 2003). There are many definitional examples of the use of community in the term journalism. “News is anything timely which is significant to newspaper readers in their relation to the community, the state, and the nation” (Bleyer, 1918, p. xiii). Laurence Alexander

defined news along the same lines by saying that news is information of public interest concerning the local, state, national or world issues (Alexander, 2002). In a recent survey, most online citizen journalists (79%) classified information on their site as journalism because of the publication's impact on their community (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). Community in this definition refers to a specific geographic location, where people identify themselves as a social unit. A useful definition of community is "the interconnected relationships among people who share a common goal, neighborhood, and/or relationship" (Kurpius, 2000, p.340). Most traditional news organizations utilize geography to identify their advertisers and news users (Lacy & Simon, 1993). However, online is proving that many people don't use geography to define themselves (Chyi & Sylvie, 2001). This definition recognizes that many subcultures can exist within a city or a town, and individuals coexisting in these communities have distinct goals and identities as well.

Quality in Journalism

The proposed definition of a journalist as *an individual who intends to publish information meant to benefit a community* addresses who is considered a journalist, but does not address whether journalists are producing "quality" journalism. The debate over quality has historically plagued journalism as well (Bogart, 2004; Johnstone et al., 1976; Soloski, 1997).

Since the 1920s, news organizations and academic institutions have taught future journalists basic elements and principles that guide them as they

gather news (Johnstone et al., 1976; Weaver et al., 2007). Despite a lack of specified credentials for entering the field, most news employers prefer journalists to have at least a bachelor's degree before they will employ them with their news organization (Johnstone et al., 1976; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006; Weaver et al., 2007). However, citizen journalists are proving that a degree is an unnecessary attribute to produce content online.

There is tension between those who consider themselves online citizen journalists and those who work as a journalist for a news organization. One leading reason is that many citizen journalists are not trained to subscribe to the same standards (e.g., objectivity, independence, thoroughness, fairness, accuracy, etc.) as a journalist working for a news organization. However, many citizen journalists value the independence of creating stories not based on those traditional principles (Gladney et al., 2007; Johnstone et al., 1976; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). Despite the criticism that principles confine journalists, many of these standards have come to define journalism; and thus, concern arises when citizen journalists produce content without certain values in mind (Glaser, 2006; Merrill, 1974). "Journalism requires more than one person and it needs a support structure. It's about editing, questioning and challenging assumptions. Much of what is put on blogs right now is 'opinion'. There are good, thoughtful opinions out there - but they're often presented as fact. There is some journalism happening in the blogosphere, but not much" (Safran, 2005, p.21).

Quality of content is a difficult concept to measure, as Leo Bogart indicated, for quality is linked to time and place (Bogart, 2004). Many basic

principles have stood the test of time. Accuracy, depth and impartiality are examples (Burgoon, Burgoon, & Atkin, 1982); however, it is challenging to quantitatively operationalize broad principles of journalism. Difficulty exists for operational measures can be categorized under more than one principle. For example, the inclusion of a large number of sources could be a measure of accuracy, thoroughness, independence or fairness.

The Hutchins Commission's report is regarded as a broad indicator of what is considered quality. The commission's recommendations included being more comprehensive, offering forums for compromise and criticism, presenting a representative picture, communicating the day's intelligence and featuring the goals and values of society (The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947).

However, no rigorous operational definition of quality exists (Gladney, 1996; Lacy & Fico, 1991; McManus, 1992; Picard, 1998; The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). Most research focuses on the analysis of quality at the publication level based on newspaper editors' opinions of perceived journalistic quality, rather than based on the perceptions of consumers. The present research identified quality indicators at the story level. Research has defined journalistic publication quality based on the proportion of available staff-written to wire service stories and non-advertising content, high ratio of illustrations to text, length of average front page news stories, the use of interpretative pieces versus spot news, number of letters to the editor and the diversity of political columnists available per issue (Bogart, 1989; Lacy & Fico, 1990, 1991). Survey research of editors based on criteria from Bogart's research

identified five factors that define media quality at the publication level: 1) ease of use, 2) localism, 3) editorial vigor, 4) quantity of news and 5) interpretation (Koang-Hyub & Meyer, 2005).

Gladney identified 17 standards of excellence finding that circulation size is a factor related to the perception of what is considered publication quality by small and large newspaper editors. Large newspapers tend to value staff enterprise, staff professionalism, comprehensive news coverage and interpretation, while small newspapers favor local news, community values and community leadership (Gladney, 1990). Other recent research by Gladney and others (2007) revealed that online editors and other news employees identified 38 indicators of online quality, 12 of which are related to general content quality.² However, the majority of Gladney's indicators of news quality lack the precision necessary to evaluate whether news outlets are adhering to standards of quality, but their research does support that differences exist regarding the definition of quality between small and large newspaper publications.

The goal is to identify objective standards of quality that can be applied across all publication types based on input from scholars and journalists. This research defines quality at the story level. The Project for Excellence in Journalism's definition of a "good" local television newscast (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001), State of the News Media research (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2007) and other past research have been utilized to identify features that are considered hallmarks of "quality journalism." Elements used in this research to define *quality*

journalism are 1) the use of identifiable sources and journalists, 2) a large number of sources, 3) a diversity of sources and viewpoints and 4) the use of local information.

The other attributes used to make comparisons were a diversity of topics, and the use of official sources, outbound hyperlinks, mobilizing information and multimedia/interactive story elements. These attributes were measured for descriptive purposes for not all Project for Excellence in Journalism and other research characteristics used in this study are universally agreed upon elements that characterize quality. They were not categorized as attributes of quality for three reasons: 1) the element should not be included in every story, 2) the incorporation of the story element collided with other journalistic principles or 3) the inclusion of the element is considered a debatable attribute. For example, the inclusion of “mobilizing information” in stories can demonstrate the news outlet’s desire to civically engage their community; a tenet considered important by smaller news outlets (Gladney, 1990). However, the incorporation of this information can be uncomfortable for journalists for its inclusion may create the appearance of bias (Lemert, 1984).

The inclusion of official and unofficial sources can be debated as a positive story attribute as well. Many debates tied to quality are premised on the notion that principles can collide with one another. For example, incorporating a greater number of official or expert sources may increase the *accuracy* of the story, but then the story may not be as *balanced* due to the exclusion of less elite sources. Which is a better reflection of reality, the one with more official sources

or the one with a balance of official and unofficial sources? Thus, measurable standards need to be more fully developed by journalism scholars.

A greater understanding of issues can occur as well when journalists include story attributes such as video and audio (Gladney et al., 2007; Pavlik, 2001). These attributes offer a deeper level of understanding by making the story more easily digestible. Research indicates that a high ratio of illustrations to text and multimedia richness are considered indicators of quality (Bogart, 1989; Gladney et al., 2007). However, not all stories warrant multimedia elements. For example, government stories tend not to be visually appealing, and the inclusion of too many multimedia rich elements can cause a cognitive overload (Lang, 2000).

Criticisms of the Traditional Press

Criticisms regarding the quality of content do not always stem from technology. The influence of yellow journalism has had a significant impact on today's journalism. Yellow journalism in the late 1800s and early 1900s, which was considered the "new" journalism at one time, featured sensational content. This type of journalism was considered unprofessional because news organizations printed exaggerated headlines and stories to drive up circulation. It was pegged as sensationalistic because critics claimed it deteriorated the value of journalism. This form of journalism encouraged the field to seek respect from their readers by using more fair and objective methods of reporting. The desire for a more scientific approach to journalism and the need for more technical skills

encouraged future journalists to seek a liberal arts college education (Bleyer, 1918; Hutchins et al., 1966; Johnstone et al., 1976; U.S. Department of Labor, 2006).

Objective or more detached reporting became the standard in the 1930s. It was in the 1950s when the press began to question the strict objective approach to journalism when journalists published, and did not verify or question, Senator Joe McCarthy's inaccurate accusations of people being communists. It was the strict adherence to objective reporting that encouraged journalists to fear presenting information that had the appearance of bias (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Critics maintained that this strict, more standardized approach to journalism limited a journalist's ability to go beyond reporting just the facts, instead of interpreting whether those facts truly reflected reality (Dennis & Rivers, 1974; Johnstone et al., 1976; Kiplinger, 1936; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 1995). Other authors have pointed out that many journalists continue to follow the straight reporting formula because of deadline pressures, lack of creativity or their inability to interpret complex events (Dennis & Rivers, 1974). Recent research revealed that online citizen journalists seek to interpret how an issue affects their community, rather than the straight description of facts (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a).

Standardization also encouraged the daily press to concentrate on issues that appealed to the masses. Stories can be written for readers at the neighborhood, the state, the national or the international level. A daily newspaper is more likely to focus on issues that affect the largest mass of people to meet

the news organization's goal of mass circulation (Merrill, 1974). The mass-appeal approach, which means that journalists focus their content on people who are more similar, rather than the dissimilar, which has led journalists to become dependent on a few sources to decipher the complicated implications of issues on a much broader level, while not attending to more hyperlocal and diverse issues (Marzolf, 1991; Shim, 2006; Tuchman, 1978). The criticism is that a heavy dependence on a few elite sources to decipher an issue has led to inaccurate or nonexistent depiction of community-level issues. Online citizen journalists feel that they cover local information not found in mainstream media, solve community-level problems and increase local voter turnout via their community coverage (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a).

The Rise of Online Citizen Journalists

The behavior of traditional journalists is connected to the long roots of professional norms and principles, and rarely do they deviate from those norms (Ettema, Whitney, & Wackman, 1997; Shim, 2006; Soloski, 1997). As technology has infiltrated the mediascape, concern has erupted over the validity of the information produced by alternative sources. History can offer some guidance in foreseeing how the definition of what is considered journalism is affected as a new technology challenges the status-quo. Although, it is difficult to predict how journalism will evolve online (Carey, 1998); history can shed some light on how "new media" create conflict, and thus, change.

It is the fear of new competition, rather than capitalizing on the potential of new technology is one motivator for change for organizations. Print and broadcast journalists have been socialized to view each other as competition, and have been known to criticize each other's reporting based on the medium with which they identify with (Singer, 2004), and the undeveloped nature of new technology provides verbal ammunition against internet competitors. Critics originally viewed television as a "hybrid monstrosity" of newspapers and radio news, possessing "no merits" of either medium (Micklethorn, 1957, p.304) and was compared to that of "tabloid newspapers" (Foster, 1958, p.45). The Ohio Association of Radio News Editors was quoted as saying "Radio news will be the last thing to fall in the wake of TV. I don't think TV news will ever be any good" (Heath, 1950, p.409).

The radio, once considered a plaything, forced newspapers to redefine their role as information providers. Radio was considered only useful for the "mentally deficient" (Bent, 1929, p.348) and was not viewed as a "serious competitor" to newspapers (Palmer & Gilmore, 1958, p.29). By 1960, almost every home owned both a radio and television set (Balk, 2006; Schramm, 1960).

Many concerns regarding the quality of television and radio content were valid because the primary original mission of both was to entertain, not to inform (Sarnoff, 1966). However, Schramm criticized people who passed judgment on television saying that it was an irresponsible attitude because "it neglects that fact that television doesn't all have to be trash. Television is potentially one of greatest windows to the world. If television is a great social waste, what a loss we

are suffering! And whose fault is it? Basically, it is the fault of the people who don't watch it and don't do anything about improving it" (Schramm, 1966, p.352).

Conflict can encourage organizations to invest in bettering their product (Tichenor, Donahue, & Olien, 1980). Competition from radio encouraged newspaper organizations to capitalize upon their strength as in-depth interpreters of information, rather than trying to out-scoop radio news organizations (Bent, 1929). When faced with television rivals, radio organizations refocused their efforts by changing content, developing new talent, targeting local consumers and by offering more affordable advertising (Chester & Garrison, 1956; Chester, Garrison, & Willis, 1963; Lawton, 1961).

Online Citizen Journalism and Traditional Journalism

Online newspapers are likely to adapt and to learn from their competitors as well, as history has shown. One current example is the adoption of online citizen journalism content by traditional news organizations. For example, Gannett Company, Inc., the publisher of *USA Today*, has committed to incorporating more citizen-generated content. One way it is incorporating more citizen content is by asking readers to act as watchdogs and researchers for their news stories (Howe, 2006). CNN.com's I-Report averages 3,000 citizen journalism submissions per month (Bergman, 2007). Citizen journalism content is attractive to online news organizations for the majority of it is produced by people who will give it to news organizations at no cost; an attractive feature for news organizations as they struggle to profit online (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2007; Scott, 2005).

Online Citizen Journalism Constraints

Academic research on online citizen journalism publications is limited; however, differences in content may be attributed to the perceived variation in their consumers. Citizen-generated content is more likely published for smaller, more homogenized audiences on a less regular basis, which in return encourages citizen journalists to produce content dissimilar from that of daily newspaper journalists (Johnstone et al., 1976; Tichenor et al., 1980).

Research conducted on alternative, neighborhood, weekly, urban, dissident and community-oriented publications can shed light on citizen journalism publications. All these types of publications can be categorized as “smaller” publications. Smaller publications primarily cover issues or events that affect small communities, neighborhoods or suburban areas. In many cases, these types of publications are available to the public at no cost (Lacy, 2002). Smaller publications, whether urban or rural, tend to emphasize community consensus over conflict, advocacy over objectivity and interpretation over straight reporting (Donahue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1972; Gladney, 1990; Hindman, 1998; Janowitz, 1952; Johnstone et al., 1976; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a; Reader, 2006; Tichenor et al., 1980). Smaller publications balance their community's needs and their desire to produce professional journalistic content. However, their allegiance typically leans toward their community (Donahue et al., 1972; Reader, 2006; Weaver et al., 2007). Their duty as information providers has been typically to promote the status quo by producing stories that align with their own and their local community leaders' viewpoints (Hindman, 1998;

Janowitz, 1952). Citizen journalism content can present a different voice in the marketplace. This voice, however, tends to be reflective of their own voice, and their targeted audience is usually other like-minded consumers. This perceived similarity between the smaller publications and the public positively influences trust levels toward these types of publications (Meyer, 2004).

Citizen journalists can either work alone or for an organization. This research focuses on people who write about a specific geographic area (e.g., Hamtramck, Mich., Chicago, Ill.), rather than on one particular issue (e.g., entertainment, education). Research on citizen-run publications in the 1970s can be used to make more closely related comparisons. These type of publications, typically urban, accepted content from amateur journalists who reported on issues of direct personal interest to them. Their purpose as an informational source was to promote community cohesion and to fill an informational gap left by traditional journalists (Gaziano & Ward, 1978).

New forms of journalism are typically disorganized and viewed as not credible; however, what binds these forms of alternative journalism is their “dissatisfaction with existing standards and values,” which includes the availability of news options in the marketplace (Dennis & Rivers, 1974; Hindman, 1998, p.1). Research has shown that good local weeklies can even substitute daily newspapers as an informational source (Lacy & Dalmia, 1993). Research on neighborhood and weekly publications indicates that many of their journalists value public affairs reporting, and many journalists attend almost every city council meeting (Duncan, 1952; Ward & Gaziano, 1976). Recent survey research

supports this sentiment, many online citizen journalists felt that their online publications solve community-level problems and increase local voter turnout (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a).

The greatest constraints on alternative publications are economic in nature, which means that their future is uncertain (Duncan, 1952; Gaziano & Ward, 1978; Kessler, 1984). Many publications have not been found to survive past the life of the person who initiated the publication for most people who start these types of publications are resource-poor (Johnstone et al., 1976; Kessler, 1984). This may be because smaller news outlets tend to staff fewer, more inexperienced journalists who are not paid substantial salaries (Demers, 1994).

Online citizen journalists must be creative for potential sources for revenue are limited. *OhmyNews*, based in Korea, is a prominent international player in the citizen journalism, earns most of its money from advertisements and voluntary subscriptions, but recently has faced some financial difficulties (Hua, 2007; Kim & Hamilton, 2006). Kessler (1984) identified three sources of revenue for citizen content: 1) support from a resource-rich individual or group, 2) subscription or single-copy sales or 3) advertising profits. Kessler indicated, however, that selling subscriptions did not usually work because citizen content readers tend to be less economically stable.

Resources traditionally play an important role in the thoroughness of reporting by the journalist (McManus, 1994). The growth and continued existence of smaller publications is dependent on volunteers willing to contribute content (Gaziano & Ward, 1978). However, the internet allows new ventures to start up

with a minimal amount of investment. Recent research revealed almost half (49%) of online citizen media site operators surveyed indicated that they felt they did not need money to keep their site running (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). In the past, smaller news organizations had to hire both journalists and delivery people to survive. Today, door-to-door carriers are unnecessary (Kessler, 1984).

In summary, news organizations rely heavily upon standardized news values to create content. Debates surface because many of these values have been defined by the news industry, rather than based on public input (Lacy & Fico, 1990; 1991). Citizen journalists are less likely to be concerned with conflict, objectivity or timeliness as news values because they have not been socialized or educated to adhere to those news values (Atwood & Grotta, 1973; Johnstone et al., 1976; Merrill, 1974). Journalists from smaller publications, such as online citizen journalists, may value community consensus, which may mean less critical analysis of issues as they avoid stories that offend their local readers (Donahue et al., 1972; Janowitz, 1952; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). Research must be conducted beyond speculative relationships to more precisely determine what differences truly exist between both publication types to more precisely understand their value to society because as research has shown differences do exist between larger and smaller publications (Gladney, 1990, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Sociological theory is useful in explaining how content is produced; however, current theories may not be applicable to online citizen journalism sites. The theory presented explains constraints on traditional media content, and many of these constraints on traditional media are dissimilar from citizen constraints, which will likely to contribute to differences in content. Traditional journalists who work for an organization will more likely conform to organizational norms, and thus, behave in a more predictable manner because they share the same goals, skills and values whereas citizen journalists experience a greater level of independence (Breed, 1955; Janowitz, 1952; Merrill, 1974; Shoemaker & Reese, 1995; Sigal, 1973; Tichenor et al., 1980). The following section utilizes sociological theory to explain online newspaper constraints.

Online Newspaper Constraints

News is a social process that evolves from the influence of many different factors. Shoemaker and Reese's Hierarchy of Influences (1995) contends that constraints on traditional media content occur at five different levels: the individual, the routine, the organizational, the extramedia and the ideological level. This research focuses on two of those levels, routine and organizational influences, to explain why online newspapers are expected to differ from online citizen journalism publications.

The Routine Level

Online citizen journalism content should differ from that of content produced by mainstream online newspaper news organizations because citizen journalism news is less of a reflection of routine influences. Newspaper

employee's reliance on routines affects how news is constructed. Past research on traditional media products has shown that as time has progressed, news organization employees have increasingly relied on routines to accomplish daily tasks in an efficient manner (Berkowitz, 1997; Epstein, 1973; Shoemaker & Reese, 1995). Routines are a coping mechanism to deal with continual deadlines and heavy work loads. Shoemaker and Reese define routines as "those patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs" (p.105). The routinization of behavior affects a journalist's ability to adhere to principles (e.g., accuracy, fairness, transparency) that guide them when constructing news. Deadlines pressure journalists to sacrifice the thoroughness and the accuracy of their stories (Epstein, 1973; Greer & Mensing, 2006; Ha & James, 1998). A typical news day for a traditional journalist consists of a journalist finding a story idea, pitching the idea to the editor, tracking down sources to interview, and lastly, writing the story for perhaps both the print and web edition. However, many journalists are fortunate if they only receive one story assignment throughout the day. To survive reoccurring time deadlines, routines evolve.

Routinization also allows news organizations to invest less in their news product. For example, Epstein's (1973) study of CBS, NBC, and ABC television news networks found that many news corporations purposely understaffed their newsroom for their goal was to staff the minimum number of people needed to fill each "news hole"³ rather than hiring enough people to accurately report the diversity of their community. The number of traditional news employees

continues to grow smaller, increasing the workloads in American newsrooms, which leaves fewer people to fill the same or a larger news hole for the print and online edition. Weaver and his colleagues confirmed this downsizing trend, finding that there were 6,000 fewer journalists in 2002 than there were in 1992 (Weaver et al., 2007). Census figures, as cited by Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman (1976), indicated 102,555 people working as reporters or editors in 1960; the U.S. Department of Labor (2006) reported that 64,000 people worked as journalists in 2004. The 2007 State of the Media research reported that daily newspaper newsrooms lost five percent of their staff between 2000 and 2005, and the authors predict that this trend will continue as time progresses.

The routinization of behavior makes learning a new technical or communication skill daunting unless leadership continually pushes for the change especially when faced with a shrinking newsroom. Routines are reflections of rewarded behavior, and news employees tend to revert to old habits when faced with uncertainty, which affects their ability to learn new online technical and writing skills (Pentland & Rueter, 1994; Scott, 1987; Sutcliffe & McNamara, 2001). People working in uncertain conditions cling to routines when faced with periods of change, which includes the current transition online. The Uncertainty Reduction theory posits that people seek out the safest way of behaving to avoid suffering consequences from management (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Thus, it is difficult for socially-complex organizations to encourage new behavior. If management does not or does not know how to implement change among employees, employees will likely “mindlessly” continue

to do as they have been rewarded in the past. Thus, online newspaper content should probably still reflect that of a traditional print newspaper because of the unlikelihood that an organization will extensively alter how it produces content (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Ettema et al., 1997; Pentland & Rueter, 1994; Scott, 1987; Sutcliffe & McNamara, 2001).

The Organizational Level

News professionals working in a newsroom modify their behavior to meet the organizational need to profit, even if those values conflict with their own personal values (Breed, 1955; Epstein, 1973). Many newspaper journalists adhere to ethics and principles as best as they can in an environment with numerous constraints and relationships affecting their behavior. Journalists have the greatest independence when constructing information during the news-processing stage, where they determine an angle for a particular story (Johnstone et al., 1976). For most part, a journalist has little power in a bureaucratic setting. Ettema, Whitney and Wackman (1997) contend that news is a product produced by people who are low in hierarchy; and thus their weapons against organizational power are the canons of journalism (Peterson, 1966). Principles allow journalists to question upper management motives; however, as long as news is primarily a product of organizations, routines will affect the online newspaper news product because organizations survive by adhering to patterned behavior, which includes past behavior and defined roles (Bantz, 1997; Ettema et al., 1997). These defined roles encourage the repetition of specific daily tasks. Repetition is how news organizations increase efficiency and productivity. Bantz

et al. compared the newsroom to that of a factory contending that each person acts as a laborer, and they tend not to deviate from their assigned role due to internal and external pressures (Bantz, McCorkle, & Baade, 1997). Singer discovered that print journalists had a difficult time transitioning in a converged newsroom due to ingrained habits and an unwillingness to change how they reported and wrote stories (Singer, 2004).

Principles are first learned by journalists during their education. Education was considered a key element in becoming a journalist beginning in the 1920s. A 1926 *New York Times* article indicated that not just anybody can be a journalist because a journalist must possess a large body of general knowledge, not just specialized knowledge in a few particular areas, which encouraged the push for journalists to obtain a liberal arts education, especially following World War II (Johnstone et al., 1976; Marzolf, 1991; Will, 1926).

Survey research has shown that journalists with higher levels of education experience greater dissatisfaction levels with their work (Johnstone et al., 1976). Weaver and his colleagues (2007) found that 40 percent of reporters felt as though they have complete freedom to go after stories that they deem of importance. This unhappiness could be attributed to the numerous constraints that journalists face while working in the field. An increasing number of layoffs are pressuring newspaper journalists to produce multiple stories under severe deadlines. Deadlines push journalists to cover and write stories in a straight, more restrictive manner, rather than interpretive, leaving many journalists to feel

dissatisfaction with their job because of their lack of creative dependence (Johnstone et al., 1976).

Frustration exists as most journalists do not tend to seek monetary rewards for their work following graduation, but rather they crave the freedom to craft the information they gather. Freedom consists of having more control over their stories. A news employee's control over their stories is limited because a story is not usually the result of one individual, especially in larger, more hierarchical organizations (Johnstone et al., 1976; Weaver et al., 2007). To maintain the loyalty of employees within a newsroom, authors have argued that journalists should be granted greater freedom (Johnstone et al., 1976). Smaller news organization employees report higher satisfaction levels with their work when compared to employees at larger news organizations due to higher levels of perceived autonomy. As such, online citizen journalists are more likely to experience autonomic independence. This does not mean that citizen journalists will not be susceptible to social forces. Indeed, citizen journalism content may reflect the value system of their community, rather than that of an organization.

Attributes of Journalism

This research used past variables from the Project for Excellence on Journalism and other research to identify journalism attributes that are considered important to journalism scholars. The Project for Excellence (2006b) on Journalism is a research organization that specializes in using empirical methods to evaluate the press.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) defined quality local television news in the late 1990s based on input from television news professionals and academics. The PEJ identified quantifiable features that were considered hallmarks of local television news. Features representing quality included the use of enterprise stories, multiple viewpoints, a large number of sources, expert sources and stories that reflect the community (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2001).

The Project for Excellence in Journalism's State of the News Media (2004; 2005; 2006a; 2007) research also assessed whether news organizations in America are producing journalism of high caliber by identifying quantifiable traits via a content analysis of one single day's publication. A team of researcher's analyzed variables such as the use and number of sources, topics, multiple viewpoints, geographic focus of a story, story tone and story origination.

Based primarily on the previously mentioned research and other studies, this investigation identified several story attributes that are considered important to journalism. Those variables included the examination of the use of sources, specifically the number, the official make-up, source gender and diversity of multiple viewpoints. Secondly, the investigation looked at content diversity which included topic diversity and the willingness of the journalists to link to content not produced by the host organization. Thirdly, the transparency of sources and journalists was examined. Lastly, the likelihood that the journalists would incorporate information that encourages civic engagement and a deeper level of

understanding was also analyzed. This following section addresses the literature that supports the examination of these variables.

Diversity

Diversity is a principle that is tied to media quality as it is related to the ideal that a greater diversity of ideas fuels democracy (Napoli, 2007). The U.S. Supreme Court demonstrated the constitutional importance of diversity in the *Associated Press v. United States* (1945). “[The First] Amendment rests on the assumption that the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public, that a free press is a condition of a free society” (p.20). The technical capabilities of the online environment should allow users access to a greater diversity of information. However, mainstream news organizations want to remain in control, and thus, they are working to diminish diversity in the marketplace. Kessler (1984) has argued that traditional news organizations are avid defenders of the status quo.

Diversity has many dimensions that occur at many different levels making it difficult to define (Napoli, 1999). This research analyzed source and content diversity at the story level. The Project for Excellence in Journalism research was primarily used to define features that make up story diversity (e.g., Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2001; 2007). This section first addresses source diversity, and then content diversity as measures of diversity contained within a story. Research has shown that source diversity and content diversity are distinct

measures, and are not always correlated (Voakes, Kapfer, Kurpius, & Chern, 1996).

Source Diversity

The most common definition of diversity is source diversity due to their significant influence on a story (Voakes et al., 1996). For the purposes of this research, a source is a provider of attributed textual information. Sigal (1973) said that news is the end-product of a bargain between their sources and the journalists themselves. Other researchers argue that rarely are stories a product of journalistic initiative, but rather the result of a source's influence (Tichenor et al., 1980).

Gans (1992) argued that multi-perspectival news or diversity in the selection of sources is the answer to reducing the unconscious biases of reporters. Gans believed that the presence of a diversity of viewpoints alleviates the distortion in news because journalists are prone to include sources that they know encouraging the incorporation of a diversity of sources forces journalists to search beyond the usual suspects. The adherence to efficiency, routines and principles by traditional journalists has been said to actually affect the diversity of content publicly available (Ettema et al., 1997; Soloski, 1997; Tuchman, 1978). For example, the principle of balance, the citing of opposing quotes, has limited the diversity of sources contained within a story (Gillmor, 2006). This criticism against the use of the balance principle is that it creates the appearance of no middle ground leaving the public to believe that they have little or no power in solving the issue (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Smith, 2003).

Some people hope that the movement of publications online will lead to an increase in the diversity of sources available within the news media (Gillmor, 2004; Pavlik, 2001). This research assessed the diversity of source types and source viewpoints. Source diversity was defined based on the number of sources, official makeup of sources, gender and viewpoints presented by sources selected by the journalist.

Number of Sources. To ensure diversity and accuracy, a journalist must obtain information from a number of sources who vary in expertise, according to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2001). The greater number of sources used by the journalist, the more likely the story should reflect the issue accurately. State of the News Media (2006a) research indicated that national online sites were more likely to contain a greater number of sources per story than when compared to weekly alternative newspapers or metro daily newspapers.

Official and Unofficial Source Use. The heavy reliance on official sources by the news media is one of the most common criticisms of the press (Lemert, 1989). Official sources are more likely to cater to news routines by being on time, reliable and articulate (Dimitrova, Kaid, Williams, & Trammell, 2005; Gans, 1979; Gans, 1992; Sigal, 1973; Steele, 1995; Tuchman, 1978). Journalists depend heavily upon official sources for they have little time to seek and to develop new sources unless the organization is large in size (Lowrey, Becker, & Punathambekar, 2003; Powers & Fico, 1994; Schudson, 2003; Sigal, 1973; Smith, 2003).

News organizations also rely on official sources to help them define news (Ettema et al., 1997). Breed argued that journalists cite and do not challenge official sources because officials are supposed to be representatives of their community, and thus, reflections of themselves. To question their leaders is to question their national and community pride (Breed, 1958). This unquestioning respect enables official sources to spin information in their favor affecting constructed reality. The reliance on official sources can shut out other perspectives for other source types may not understand the news construction process. Their dominating inclusion has led to the criticism that the traditional news media presents a limited version of reality because of its heavy dependence on expert and elite voices (Fishman, 1988; Pavlik, 2001; Tuchman, 1978).

The desire to gain respect from critics has led to an increased attraction to official sources. The inclusion of official sources creates the appearance of a more objective and credible report (Schudson, 2003; Sigal, 1973; Smith, 2003). However, Schudson (2003) argued that good journalism involves empathy and connecting information to people, and recent research indicates that the reliance on official sources is declining. A content analysis reported that the use of official sources found on the front pages of elite newspapers declined by ten percent over a 50-year period (1950-2000) in the United States with the use of official sources peaking in 1960 (Shim, 2006).

Online newspapers tend to focus on government and business topics, thus, their stories should contain a high number of official sources. However, this

does not necessarily mean that online citizen journalism stories will contain fewer official sources overall because editors of small publications tend to put high value on input from local community leaders such as politicians, business people and the clergy (Duncan, 1952; Janowitz, 1952; Powers & Fico, 1994).

There is no set standard regarding whether the incorporation of official and unofficial stories should be balanced, or whether stories should contain a greater number of official sources for they are more likely to be experts on subjects (Lacy, personal communication, June 15, 2007). The Project for Excellence in Journalism (1999) authors contended that the inclusion of expert sources is an indicator of credibility. Many critical scholars assume that the imbalance of official and unofficial sources represents an injustice or misrepresentation of reality (Lemert, 1989). However, unofficial sources tend not to be in-depth experts on topics, and as such, tend to be utilized for opinion or emotional quotes (Lacy, personal communication, June 15, 2007).

Gender of Sources. The gender of the sources cited within an article can be a measure of diversity as well. The news media more frequently cite official sources, who tend to be people of power. The dominant inclusion of male sources may indicate that women are not regarded as people of high status. Research shows that men are cited and photographed more often than women, especially in business and sports sections (Len-Rios, Rodgers, Thorson, & Yoon, 2005; Potter, 1985; Rodgers & Thorson, 2000; Zoch & Turk, 1998). Survey research indicates that journalists do not consciously select sources based on their gender (Powers & Fico, 1994). The present exploratory research assessed

whether the inclusion of female sources differs in online citizen journalism publications when compared to online newspaper publications.

Multiple Viewpoints. Gillmor (2005) stressed the importance of checking with more than one source to ensure the completeness of a story. Deadlines loom hourly for journalists, leaving them with little time for thorough coverage of an issue. Due to continual deadlines, journalists have learned to skim the surface of issues by relying heavily on media-planned events and official sources (Cunningham, 2003). This reliance shapes content, and this is why the Project for Excellence in Journalism authors argued that journalists should include viewpoints from multiple sources because the incorporation of one or only a few viewpoints limits a person's understanding of an issue (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2006a). Past research by PEJ has found that online stories tend to include a greater number of sources when compared to that of print newspapers, and print newspapers carry a greater number of sources when compared to broadcast publications (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006a). Their content analysis did not reveal why online stories feature a greater number of sources when compared to print stories.

It is expected that online newspaper stories should possess a larger number of viewpoints when compared to other publications because both their online and offline editions feature more sources than any other type of publication available in America. The present research examined whether news stories featured predominantly one viewpoint or multiple viewpoints in stories that were considered controversial. The multiple viewpoints variable was categorized

under source diversity rather than content diversity as each viewpoint was defined by varying attributions, rather than overall content.

Content Diversity

Content diversity is distinct from source diversity for the inclusion of a diversity of sources does not always equate to a diversity of ideas in articles. Voakes et al. defined content diversity as the dispersion of representation of ideas. Smaller publications have been shown to contain greater content and source diversity. Voakes et al. speculated that in their study that reason the behind the higher level of content diversity in smaller papers was because they featured a greater number of wire stories (Voakes et al., 1996), while Lee (2007) contends that large newspapers aim to attract the largest audience, which diminishes the variability in content option. The present investigation excluded wire stories in its analysis to better pinpoint trends across stories.

The Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press first stressed the need for the news media to paint a more representative picture of society through diversity (Blanchard, 1977; The Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947). The Hutchins Commission stressed this need for diversity, in part, due to the increasing consolidation of news organizations (Blanchard, 1977; Siebert et al., 1956). Content can promote a greater of awareness of self when people are exposed to differing ideas, which ultimately should lead to a more accurate depiction of society (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Plaisance, 2005; Tilly, 1978). Diversity of content was measured by analyzing the diversity of topics and access to alternative forms of information featured within a story.

Primary Topic. The Project for Excellence in Journalism (2002) said that the more topics covered by the news organization, the better the news organization because a diversity of topics will likely better reflect a community in its entirety. Topics affect the level of citizen engagement, according to a quantitative and qualitative content analysis that examined the outcomes (e.g., volunteering; increased public and private funding) of public journalism projects (Nichols, Friedland, Rojas, Cho, & Shah, 2006).

Smaller communities have been said to focus their coverage on athletics, human interest and social events (Janowitz, 1952; Tichenor et al., 1980), while larger publications tend to concentrate on crime and government topics. Recent research reported that government (24%), military/national security (12%) and crime (10%) dominated U.S. elite newspaper front pages (Shim, 2006). For both small and large traditional media publications, State of the News Media (2006) research indicated that topics such as crime (23%), business (19%), government (18%) and foreign relation (9%) stories were reported in greater proportion compared to other story topics such as celebrity/entertainment (4%), accident/disaster (3%), science (3%) and election (2%). This research addressed the diversity level of stories utilizing Simpson's D which focuses on the proportions across categories, and is considered an optimal measure for diversity due to its interpretative capability (McDonald & Dimmick, 2003; Simpson, 1949).

The diversity of topics was not considered as an indicator of story quality because diversity within an organization is not as essential as diversity within the marketplace. A diversity of topics within a publication does not necessarily

always equate to a diversity of content because a publication can frame topics from the same perspective. For example, a small newspaper may always present issues from a community-level perspective. It is the unique treatment of topics that better represents content diversity, which can take place when multiple entities publish information on the same topic.

Hyperlink Use. The use of within site or outbound hyperlinks can be used to determine a journalist's freedom to link to outside content. Hyperlinks direct users to another web page of content. Outbound links connect to content not produced by the publication, and within site links direct users to content produced by the home site.

Links to outside content give readers increased access to a greater diversity of information produced by authors not working for the publication. The blogging phenomena encouraged the trend to link to outside content. Bloggers link to outside sources because links give credit to outside sources, provide background information and demonstrate a blogger's connection with other bloggers. Bloggers cultivate their community by linking their blog to outside blogs. This gesture in return prompts the linked blogger to reciprocate, increasing the readership of their blog. One study by Harp and Tremayne (2006) found that the inability to be linked to by other bloggers prevented female bloggers from becoming as popular online.

The journalist's willingness to link to outside content demonstrates the journalist's willingness to acknowledge that they are not sole experts in deciphering an issue, but they can be experts in identifying reliable sources who

can break down an issue for the public. A hyperlink is an acknowledgement that a source is credible, and it can also demonstrate to the public what information was used to construct the story (Dimitrova & Neznanski, 2006; Hiler, 2002; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus & Wright, 2005).

Studies have shown that rarely do journalists link to content outside of their host site; instead, they typically link to only information contained within the host news site, rather than acting as a portal to outside information. A study examining the immediate coverage of the Timothy McVeigh execution by 15 online U.S. newspapers found that the majority (94.8%) of newspaper stories linked to content within the newspaper's own site (Dimitrova, Connolly-Ahern, Williams, Kaid, & Reid, 2003). In addition, Rosen found that the majority of journalists who blog do not link to content outside of their host newspaper site (Rosen, 2006).

Concern arises as to whether journalists should link to information outside of the news organization because they may be responsible for the veracity of the content. One news organization, the BBC News, has attempted to abstain from that responsibility by posting a disclaimer that they are not responsible for content created by outside sources (BBC News, 2007).

Transparency

The principle of transparency essentially means openness and can be accomplished through showing the consumers how the news staff made its editorial decisions and gathered background information on their sources. The Center for Citizen Media (2007) defines transparency in the form of a verb – the

act of disclosure. Bias is inevitable; however, what is more important is that a journalist or an organization reveals their background information.

Transparency protects against biased sources manipulating the news media to their benefit (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Most journalism codes of ethics stress the importance of identifying sources fully (Associated Press Managing Editors, 1994; Associated Press, 2006; RTNDA, 2000; SPJ, 1996). This type of information illustrates to users how the journalist's story was built. However, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) said that the news media rarely reveal how they construct a story, which they claim creates a wall between the user and the journalist. Other research supports the unwillingness of traditional journalists to be transparent in what sources were used to construct their story (Moeller et al., 2007). The use of fully identified sources and journalists were measures of transparency.

Anonymous Sources. The use of anonymous or unnamed sources undermines the credibility of information presented to the public, which fuels the loss of confidence in journalism (Neiman Reports, 2005). The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2005) revealed that a little more than half (52%) of the people that it surveyed believed that the reliance on unnamed sources could lead to faulty or unreliable information. Research has shown that over time readers have become less accepting regarding the use of anonymous governmental sources. Riffe (1980) argued that the use of such sources sacrifices the believability of news stories. Categories such as war and government tend to attribute more anonymous sources than entertainment or

lifestyle categories (Martin-Kratzer & Thorson, 2007). Government and war topic categories are more controversial in nature, thus, some sources do not feel safe fully identifying themselves to the public. For the most part, newspaper publications do not contain a high number of anonymous sources (Zoch & Turk, 1998). This may be because traditional journalists are trained to fully identify a source. Research has shown that national publications are more likely to cite anonymous sources (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006a). This may be because they tend to cover more government and national security topics than more local publications (Shim, 2006).

Source Transparency. Even if sources are named, the amount of information provided about a source can vary. Critics have urged news organizations to become more transparent in their reporting by identifying their sources fully including their titles and their association to the story (Moeller et al., 2007).

Journalist Transparency. Transparency not only includes revealing the background of the source, but also the background information of the journalist as well. Shoemaker and Reese (1995) contend that how journalists see themselves, including their biases, ultimately affects content. Full disclosure of a journalist's background is a reflection of how accountable the journalist is willing to be toward their work. The posting of a journalists' phone number, direct email address and profile helps citizens access the journalist and better recognize what history the journalist brings to a story. The Radio-Television News Directors Association code of ethics states that it is the news organization's responsibility

to respond to public concerns (RTNDA, 2000). Communication opportunities are also related to an increase in civic knowledge (Nichols et al., 2006).

Dan Gillmor, a leader in online journalism and director for the Center for Citizen Media at Harvard University, contends that the news media has performed poorly in being transparent themselves (Gillmor, 2006). In the case of electronic information, even if a direct email address of a reporter is posted, rarely do journalists respond (Randle, Davenport, & Lunt, 2006; Ye & Li, 2006) as news people are not allotted enough time and resources to respond to consumers (Fishman, 1988).

Not only were the availability of an email address and a journalist profile used to assess transparency, but the commenting capabilities adjacent to each story were measured as well. Comment links or boxes present readers a more transparent approach to communicate with the journalist. Based on observations, a public conversation evolves when the journalist responds to the person commenting by using the comment box. The comment option offers users an option to publicly communicate with an author of content regarding the veracity and the quality of the journalist's reporting, and the journalist the opportunity to respond to their critique (Gillmor, 2006; Lowrey & Anderson, 2005). This option to publicly express one's views has been regarded as a highly necessary element of journalism (ASNE, 2006; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Associated Press, 2006; SND, 2006; SPJ, 1996). However, the comment option can increase a news outlets' work load. Many news organizations have comment screening policies in

place for fear of publishing offending comments or being sued for libel (Walters, 2007).

Civic Engagement

The news media is considered an agent for civic engagement; however, objectivity and detachment have been the hallmarks of journalism throughout the 20th century, which has meant the straight recording of events with little thought to using their stories to increase involvement in local public affairs. The Committee for Concerned Journalists (2002) stressed the importance of journalists not being neutral, but rather acting independently from “narrow interests” while serving “citizen debate” (p.1). News publications can act as a public forum where people share information. The process of sharing information allows them to better understand their identity as a member of their community, and their relationship to their community (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2006; Plaisance, 2005; Tilly, 1978). The media can promote the existence of these relationships by informing the public of opportunities to participate in their community. A large portion of online citizen journalists feel their duty as information providers is to encourage community participation (The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). Research has shown that people who consume news content online or offline for informational purposes are more likely to participate in their community (Kebbel, 1985; McLeod et al., 1996; Moy, Manosevitch, Stamm, & Dunsmore, 2005; Paek, Yoon, & Shah, 2005; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). This investigation examined whether journalists provided information that educates

people how to act on an issue, and whether the online publications were concerned with creating content that reflects local issues or events.

Mobilizing Information. The inclusion of information that enlightens users how to act on issues of personal concern hypothetically encourages them to become involved in their community. Lemert et al. (1977) defined mobilizing information as any information that allows people to act on attitudes they already possess (Lemert, Mitzman, Seither, Cook, & O'Neil, 1977). Mobilizing information includes phone numbers, meeting times, recipes, Web site addresses, etc. Lemert and Ashman (1983) argued that by not including this type of information, news organizations are encouraging elite sources to edge out outside viewpoints. Such information promotes community involvement and issue awareness (Moscowitz, 2002). Research has shown that journalists do not tend to incorporate mobilizing information in controversial news stories for fear of the appearance of bias (Hoffman, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 1995). However, Lemert stated that this information is not meant to achieve an end-result or direct behavior, rather it is to provide information for those who want to act, but are not aware of how to proceed (Lemert, 1984). The civic or public journalism movement in the 1990s, where traditional journalists actively participated as a member in their community, has been attributed to the increasing acceptance of this type of information within stories (Rosen, 1999; Weaver et al., 2007). Citizen journalists are expected to produce stories that promote social cohesion at a local level, and thus, are expected to include mobilizing information in more stories.

Use of Local Information. The idea of local reflects people's need to connect. This form of sharing encourages people to become more involved in public affairs for they feel as though they have some control over issues that affect them. This is why the availability of local content is considered an indicator of quality (Bogart, 1989). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the PEJ stressed the importance of covering issues that reflect their community. The more community-oriented the publication is, the more likely it will feature stories that have a direct impact on local residents. Access to content online has enabled news users to read national and international news from elite organizations such as the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Thus, more news organizations have begun to differentiate themselves from other news organization by focusing on local content (Pauly & Eckert, 2002). The more local the publication, the more likely it will reflect their community accurately for local journalists tend to speak the language of their audience (Hindman, 1998). The hope of online citizen journalists is that they will cover hyperlocal stories not featured in the traditional mass media, and thus, increase involvement in local public affairs (Federal Communications Commission, 2007; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999). Wikipedia (2007) defines hyperlocal as the reference to local news which would not normally be of interest to mainstream media.

Research on smaller publications may be reflective of content featured in online citizen journalism publications since citizen journalism publication's reader base is much smaller. This is because smaller publications have different

objectives than larger publications. Smaller publications are more invested at the local level. Research has shown that smaller newspapers tend to cover more local issues to set themselves apart from elite newspapers (Berstein, Lacy, Cassara, & Lau, 1990). State of the News Media research found that local online sites (86%) and weekly alternative newspapers (63%) in the United States were much more likely to localize their news content than national online sites (25%) or metro daily newspapers (31%). Despite the prevalence of local information contained within alternative publications, research indicates that larger print newspapers dedicate a greater proportion of their coverage to local issues when compared to state, national and international issues (Shim, 2006).

Attributes of Stories

Technology can affect how a story is constructed (Berkowitz, 1990). An online journalist can provide features that encourage understanding and easier navigation. State of the News Media authors found that news organizations rarely included video (29%), photo essays or galleries (19%) or graphics (13%) in their stories (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). Other research supports these findings indicating that most journalists do not hyperlink to video, audio, photo slideshows, infographics or photographs (Dimitrova et al., 2003; Massey, 2004). This investigation measured the inclusion of audio, video, slideshows, graphics, maps and infographics contained within textual stories.

Other story elements can gauge the opinions of a community (Gade et al., 1998). Interactivity has been touted as a key component in attracting news consumers. A Pew Center for Civic Journalism (2001) survey conducted on

newspaper editors argued that the future of news is dependant upon interactivity with consumers. Newspapers, radio news and television news are considered low in interactivity due to their primarily linear structure (Eveland, 2003). The inclusion of a poll was also examined to determine whether news outlets tried to solicit feedback from their users.

Multimedia and interactive story elements were not considered indicators of quality. News outlets should exercise control when deciding what features should be used to tell a story. Not every story is visual. Not every story deserves depth. Based on the limited-capacity theory, users can only absorb so much information (Lang, 2000). High levels of interactivity will overload ones' cognitive resources creating a sense of frustration and reduced memory (Bucy, 2004).

Summary

The literature review highlighted journalism's cyclical evolvement of its inclusive and exclusive nature. Currently, journalism is experiencing a disruption in how it produces and disseminates news due in part to sociological and technological forces. During periods of transition, uncertainty propels negative assumptions and hopeful predictions, and encourages journalists to cling to routines because they are a coping mechanism. History and theory can add some clarity in explaining how journalists behave during periods of transition, and it can also explain expected content similarities and dissimilarities. To empirically identify whether speculations of differences are valid, journalistic quality was measured in online citizen journalism and online newspaper publications.

Elements that can be classified as attributes that define *quality* journalism were 1) the use of transparent sources and journalists, 2) a greater number of sources, 3) a diversity of sources and viewpoints and 4) local information. However, not all attributes used in this study are universally agreed upon elements that characterize quality. The other attributes used to make comparisons were the use of topics, official sources, outbound hyperlinks, mobilizing information and multimedia/interactive story elements.

Research Questions

The goals of this research were threefold. First, this examination sought to identify operational measures that can be used to define story quality. Second, this research sought to learn the value of online citizen journalism content by comparing it to that of online newspaper content. Finally, this investigation aimed to begin laying the empirical groundwork to address the assumptions being made about the contributions of online citizen and online newspaper journalists.

The literature review showcased the likelihood that online citizen journalism content will differ from that of online newspaper content. Research demonstrates that many variables at varying levels affect content, and the type of publication will likely determine how journalists adhere to journalistic norms. To guide this investigation, a series of five research questions were used as opposed to forming hypotheses, because to date, little research has been conducted on online citizen journalism content.

Source Diversity

RQ1: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles contain a greater diversity of sources?

RQ1a: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles contain a greater average number of sources?

RQ1b: Will the use of official and unofficial sources differ significantly in online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles?

RQ1c: Will the average inclusion of female or male sources differ significantly in online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles?

RQ1d: Were online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles more likely to contain multiple viewpoints in controversial articles?

Content Diversity

RQ2: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper stories feature a greater diversity of content?

RQ2a: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles feature a greater diversity in topics?

RQ2b: Will online newspaper or online citizen journalism articles be more likely to average a greater number of outbound links?

Transparency

RQ3: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles be more transparent in their source use and background of journalists?

RQ3a: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles differ in their use of anonymous sources?

RQ3b: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles differ in their use of identifying background information on sources?

RQ3c: Are online citizen journalists or online newspaper journalists more open to communicating with the public?

Civic Engagement

RQ4: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles contain more attributes that encourage civic engagement?

RQ4a: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles contain more mobilizing information attributes?

RQ4b: Will online citizen journalism or online newspaper articles contain a greater proportion of local information within each publication type?

Attributes of Stories

RQ5: Will online citizen journalism and online newspaper stories differ in their use of attributes (video, audio, slideshows, polls, photographs, infographics, graphics and maps)?

Summary

Chapter two presented a literature review on journalism definitions, online citizen journalism and theories explaining why differences are expected to exist between both publication types. Chapter three breaks down the methodology used to conduct this study, and the results of the quantitative analysis are

presented in chapter four. Chapter five concludes with a discussion addressing the results, while chapter six addresses the implications of this examination.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

First, this research attempted to identify attributes that define journalism. Second, this research sought to discover the value of online citizen journalism content by comparing it to that of online newspaper content. Finally, this investigation aimed to produce empirical evidence addressing the assumptions being made about online citizen journalism and online newspaper content.

Quantitative Content Analysis

This study employed a quantitative content analysis of English-language online daily newspaper and online citizen journalism Web sites in the U.S. Specifically, this analysis was used to measure whether differences in online citizen journalism and online newspaper content existed. This investigation was restricted to newspapers that had an online presence, and did not include Web sites for radio and television outlets. Newspaper Web sites were preferred to radio and television news Web sites because online newspaper sites are in greater number and geographical diversity.

The method section provides a description of the sample including how stories were obtained for both online citizen journalism and online newspaper sites. It also presents the coding procedure used including an explanation of how reliability was obtained.

Description of Sample

In the final sample, a total of 962 articles were analyzed, 480 online newspaper and 482 online citizen journalism. Stories were extracted from 50 online newspaper sites and 72 online citizen journalism sites. In the online realm,

newspapers published the greatest number of stories on Friday (n=729) and the fewest on Sunday (n=489). It was a similar trend for online citizen journalism sites, publishing more articles on Friday (n=405) and the fewest on Sunday (n=140). Stories published on Friday more likely target people still at work who are making weekend plans.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this investigation was considered to be the individual text news story on the home page of the news Web site for one day's publication. Analysis was restricted to the homepage as the examination deeper in the Web site would be difficult due to the growing complexity of news sites. In addition, analysis of the home page is supposed to encourage uniformity in coding (Greer & Mensing, 2006; Ha & James, 1998). Stories in this sample that were located predominantly on the center of the home page were included, and excluded were wire stories or stories that were located on any upper, left or right-hand navigation panels. Wire stories were removed because many of the online publications featured the exact same stories across publications limiting the variability in content. Only textual stories were analyzed. Stories contained within a blog post were categorized as a news story because a blog is considered an online citizen journalism publication. A "blog" shortened for "web log" is defined as a frequently modified web page in which dated entries are listed and archived in reverse chronological order (Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005; Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). Blog sites typically differ from other informational sites because they are written by only one or a few authors, and they can be

considered more attractive than other sites because they take minimal technological knowledge to set up (See Appendix C for Site Examples).

In addition to the analyzed stories, hyperlinks to the complete stories were coded as well. Therefore, if only a hyperlink to the story existed on the homepage, the link to that story was followed and coded. That hyperlink, however, was not counted toward the total of hyperlinks contained within a story.

Story categories that were excluded for analysis included sports stories and weather forecasts because rarely does coverage of such topics change over time, according to The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ, 1999). In addition, other stories excluded were calendar of events, obituaries, wedding announcements, advertisements, multimedia stories (e.g., information graphic, map, video, audio, photo, graphic, slideshow) with no accompanying textual story, horoscopes, birthdays, letters to the editor, photo of the day, Dow Jones, top emailed story, most popular or top stories, magazine articles, open threads, reader feedback and corrections. Story comments were not analyzed.

Online Citizen Journalism Sample

To determine the citizen journalism Web sites to be included in this investigation, a purposive sample of online citizen journalism sites was selected as no master list exists identifying all online citizen journalism sites. To begin the selection process, Cyberjournalist.net was consulted.⁴ In early spring of 2007, Cyberjournalist.net listed 77 primarily U.S. citizen media initiatives (primarily from the U.S.) at <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/002226.php>. Cyberjournalist is a Web site that is dedicated to examining how technology affects the media. The

site also features lists of resources for people interested in learning more on online journalism.

To begin the process of selecting stories, citizen journalism sites were first selected from the Cyberjournalist list of “citizen media initiatives.” From that list of citizen sites, each site was placed into two categories based on the home city of the publication. The goal was to find two citizen journalism Web sites to represent all 50 states, one “small” community and to one “large” community from each state in the United States. To accomplish this task of selecting two sites to represent each state, one site was selected that dedicated its coverage to a city with more than a total resident population of 100,000, and the other site, a city with less than a 100,000 (Demers, 1994). For example, in Colorado, the state had the Glennwood Blog (population 8,564) and the MyMileHighNews, based in Denver (population 557,917), representing it. Previous research has indicated that population size is a strong predictor of social heterogeneity which affects content (Len-Rios et al., 2005; Tichenor et al., 1980; Wilson, 1986). Population estimates were extracted from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau total resident population estimates, most likely 2005.

However, the master Cyberjournalist.net list of 77 sites did not provide a diverse or large enough number of sites to represent all 50 states. To supplement the master sample list from Cyberjournalist.net, the Placeblogger directory <http://www.placeblogger.com/location/directory/us> was used. Placeblogs are sites devoted covering a particular neighborhood, city or region (Williams, 2006, October 25). Recently, the top ten placeblogs were ranked⁵

(Williams, 2007, January 2). Those top ten placeblogs were then used to populate the list of online citizen journalism sites representing two states. However, the 77 Cyberjournalist.net sites and 10 placeblogs still fell short of the goal of finding 100 citizen journalism sites. To complete the list, the Placeblog directory was used, which listed 1011 placeblogs in the United States in early spring of 2007.

The final list of online citizen journalism sites totaled 72 sites; 51 percent of the sites included were extracted from the Placeblogger list. Iowa was the only state that ended up having no citizen journalism site representing it, and 21 states had one citizen journalism site representing them in the sample. Some citizen journalism sites excluded were sites that were discontinued, sites not located in the United States, sites that stopped posting content before December 2006 and sites dedicated to posting predominantly photographic or video content.

Online Newspaper Sample

After the online citizen journalism list was complete, a matching technique was used to populate the online newspaper list. For the online newspaper sample, an online newspaper was matched to each citizen journalism site city. For example, in Alabama, the Birmingham Blog online citizen site was matched to *The Birmingham News* online newspaper as its counterpart. If no daily online newspaper existed representing the citizen journalism home community, then the inclusion of an online newspaper counterpart was not included in the final sample. If there were two online newspaper counterparts, then the newspaper

with the highest circulation was selected because that was one that was most likely familiar to readers. The directory of online newspapers was obtained from the 2005 *Editor & Publisher International Year Book for Dailies*. A total of 50 online daily newspapers were found to match the online citizen journalism publications.

Sampling Procedure

Once the online citizen journalism and online newspaper site lists were complete, the sampling procedure was determined. Analysis of online daily newspaper Web sites is difficult because news can be updated hourly (Mensing & Greer, 2006). This creates content analysis problems because citizen journalism content is updated less often than when compared to online newspapers. Based on observational coder feedback, it was found that online citizen journalism sites updated their sites an estimated every two to three days, while online newspapers updated their content daily. Online newspapers were more likely to change the story placement on the homepage treating their homepage as a portal, rather than removing the story from the homepage each day. Some newspapers featured all the day's content on the homepage including content from past days as well.

Based on the expected variability between publications, this study utilized two different sampling techniques due to the concern that there would be an overrepresentation of online daily newspaper content because those sites produced more stories daily than online citizen journalism sites. To compensate for the expected fewer numbers of stories daily, content was captured everyday

for the one month (March 2007) for online citizen journalism sites, while stories were captured everyday for a period of one week for that same month for online newspapers. More specifically, a constructed one-week sample was collected for online newspapers in March 2007. A constructed week is a randomly selected week. According to Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (1993), one constructed week for daily newspapers is an efficient sample for a six-month period, and the constructed week is used to control for days that feature a greater number of stories within the publication. The printing of stories began each day at nine a.m., and lasted until approximately ten p.m. that night on the same day. For citizen journalism sites, content was printed daily at six p.m. for 31 days in March, and lasted until approximately ten p.m. that night.

Ideally, online citizen journalism and online newspaper stories would have been captured at different points of the day to avoid systematic bias, and to capture a more accurate picture of news online since news is updated throughout the day (PEJ, 2006). However, current programs (WebCopier, WebZIP, Website Ripper Copier) that capture a snapshot of page content with active hyperlinks could not handle capturing more than a few publications at a time. This analysis required the capturing of up to 122 sites at one time. Thus, stories were printed off at the same time each day and hyperlinks were marked on the printed version of each story.

Online Newspaper and Online Citizen Journalism Story Sample

Once the sampling procedure was determined, stories were printed off from the homepage. However, this procedure produced 6485 stories total. To

make the study more manageable while maintaining the meaningfulness of the data, stories were reduced due to the large number of online citizen journalism (n=2,221) and online newspaper (n = 4,264) stories retrieved from the homepages of the sites. Based on the sheer numbers, the prediction that online newspapers produce more stories more often when compared to online citizen journalists was accurate. Stories were randomly reduced to 500 for the online citizen journalism sites, and 500 for the online newspaper sites. From the available 1000 stories selected from the 50 online newspaper sites and 72 online newspaper sites, some stories were then discarded because they were found to feature sports, wire or other excluding factors (See Appendix D). After extracting the unusable stories from 1000 story sample, 962 stories were available for analysis (480 online newspaper articles and 482 online citizen journalism articles).

Coding Categories

The coding protocol contained 54 variables, which was created based on previous research (20 nominal-level and 34 ratio-level). The coding protocol was altered based on feedback from media scholars, and coder feedback from training sessions.

A two-page paper code sheet was used to code the data for the study. Each news story was coded for source diversity, content diversity, transparency, civic engagement attributes and multimedia/interactive features (See Appendix D).

Source Diversity

Number of Sources. The number of sources is a reflection of accuracy and diversity (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2001).

Coders coded the number of sources used within each article, including document sources. A source is defined as a provider of attributed textual information. To be considered a source, the provider must be identified with a verb of attribution, which is a statement of direct or indirect communication. Direct communication can be identified through words such as said, reported, announced, stated, noted, claimed, etc. Indirect communication included verbs related to mental states which were identified through words such as hopes, feels, believes, etc. In addition, documents and emails were included as sources. The author of an editorial, column or any other opinion piece was coded as a source. Sources given in the plural form of “s” were counted as two sources unless a specific number of sources were given (e.g., travelers; program leaders; White House aides).

Official and Unofficial Source Use. This ratio-level variable assessed the number of official and unofficial sources contained within articles. People who can speak freely on their own, and are not likely to be speaking on behalf of any organization were categorized as a unofficial source. People who spoke on behalf of organizations or other entities such as people in government, business or nonprofit positions were categorized as an official source. *Official* categories included government (e.g., prosecuting attorneys, representatives, police), business (e.g., defense attorneys, business owners), nonprofit (e.g., Red Cross), official anonymous (e.g., Pentagon official, lobbyist, White House aid) while

unofficial categories included average people, non-institutional sources (e.g., experts, scientists, academics) and unofficial anonymous (e.g., museum visitors, movie goers, witness) (Barnhurst & Mutz, 1997; Shim, 2006; Sigal, 1973). An “other/can’t tell” category was created for sources whose placement could not be determined.

Gender of Sources. Coders determined gender by first identifying whether the first name or photo appeared to be male or female. Coders also looked for pronouns such as “he” or “she” to help identify the source’s gender. A “can’t tell/other” category was created for sources whose gender could not be determined or if the source had no gender such as an organization (e.g., White House).

Multiple Viewpoints. This variable assessed the journalist’s effort to present more than one viewpoint in a story that revolves around controversy. Controversy includes physical, intellectual and ideological conflict or even a difference of opinion. Stories that were factual were excluded. Coders examined the presence of assertions addressing different viewpoints. Viewpoints were categorized as either 1) all one opinion, 2) mostly one opinion (at least 66% of all assertions), 3) two views (no one view dominated more than 65% of space), 4) more than two views or 5) not applicable or controversial.

Content Diversity

Primary Topic. Some of the topics stemming from the 2005 Project in Excellence in Journalism coding protocol were used in this study. Topics included news media, technology, Gulf War II, entertainment, business/economy,

crime/trial, science, international/foreign relations, education, disease/health, government/elections, lifestyle, environment/sprawl/transportation, accident/disasters, human interest and other/can't tell. Coders identified topics by determining the greatest percentage of text within an article devoted to the subject.

Hyperlink Use. Hyperlinks contained within the text of a story that directed users to another web page were counted. Email links and links located outside of the text were not counted (e.g., "link to the rest of the story," "printer-friendly," "email this").

Transparency

Source Anonymity. A story was considered to have anonymous sources if such anonymity was explicitly granted in the story to a source, or if sources were referred to with only unidentifiable attribution (e.g., "sources said"). The identity of the source should be impossible to establish. Coders also identified the number of anonymous sources used in a unofficial (e.g., bystanders) and official capacity (e.g., Whitehouse aide).

Source Transparency. A source was considered transparent when the full identification of the source was cited, including the identification of how the sources were connected to the story. Source transparency enables a person to seek the information from same source as the journalist. Coders determined whether a full name or a title of the source was available, and if not, identified if a source was directly connected to a story. For example, an eyewitness to an

event who has a name, but no title would be considered a nontransparent source (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006a).

Journalist Transparency. This variable involved holding the journalists accountable for their own reporting. Coders recorded if a direct web address of the journalist (e.g., rob.davis@news.com), general email address (e.g., editor@news.com) or phone number was adjacent to the story. Coders also noted whether a user profile existed.

Civic Engagement

Mobilizing Information. Coders determined this variable according to the following categories: 1) locational information such as times and places of activities (e.g., “The meeting will be at three p.m. tomorrow in Room 696 at City Hall.”), 2) identificational information including a description of the location and contact information (e.g., “The meeting will be at three p.m. tomorrow in Room 696 at City Hall. Contact Rob Davis at 517-555-5555 for more information.”) and 3) tactical information including instructions on how to act on an issue (e.g., “This is how you register to vote for the upcoming election.”) (Lemert & Ashman, 1983). These items were dummy coded with “present” as 1 and “absent” as 0.

Use of Local Information. Localization was defined based on the geographic proximity of the story to the home city of the publication. Stories localized to one's community or one's home state indicate that a community has a unique identity. Localization was categorized based on whether the story reflected metro/city, state, national or international coverage.

Coder Reliability

To establish intercoder reliability, two graduate students coded a randomly selected subsample of nine percent ($n = 91$) of the total sample. Reliability is the extent to which coders agree on the operational definitions of variables when coding content. Training of coders took approximately 25 hours, and training was not conducted on content included within the sample. Coders used a standardized codebook to determine how to proceed when coding variables. To determine intercoder reliability for variables, Pearson's correlation was utilized. Pearsonian r accounts for the most amount of variability that two measures could have in common, and the amount they truly have in common (Stempel & Westley, 1989). Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005) suggest using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient to determine ratio-level intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability for ratio-level variables ranged from .82 to 1.0.⁶

To determine intercoder reliability for nominal-level variables, Scott's Pi computation was selected for nominal-level variables as it corrects for chance agreement. In addition, Scott's Pi is a conservative index because it assumes that proportions are not true proportions, but rather the result of agreement among coders. Finally, Scott's Pi is useful for nominal-level categories when two coders are used (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The reliability of nominal-level variables ranged from .84 to 1.0.⁷

There is no established standard for what constitutes a minimal level for intercoder reliability. However, a level of .80 is generally accepted; and a level of .90 would be more widely recognized as appropriate (Lombard et al., 2002; Riffe

et al., 2005). This research set the minimum level at .80 because of the exploratory nature of this research.

The validity of measures used in this study were based upon past research, theory and principles. This research contended that online news organizations face dissimilar constraints and influences than online citizen journalists. Such variations in constraints ultimately influence content. The classifications of variables have face validity because the variables were clearly defined. Alterations to the operational definitions of variables were made based on prior coding experience with many of the variables (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005).

Data Analysis

Frequencies, proportions and cross tabulations used to describe variables were computed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (2007), version 15.0. Independent t-tests were used to evaluate if there was a significant mean difference between ratio-level variables. Although this sample cannot be generalizable to all citizen journalism sites, Chi Square tests were also used to determine whether sample findings reflect real patterns of coverage. Simpson's D was used to evaluate topic diversity, which is used to measure proportions across categories.

Chapter three presented the methodology utilized. Chapter four presents the results of the research questions. Research questions addressed the source diversity, content diversity, transparency and civic engagement attributes featured in online citizen journalism and online newspaper publications. Chapter

five features a discussion of those results, while chapter six examines the implications of this research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results section reflects the statistical findings that answer the research questions. No master list of online citizen journalism sites exist, thus, this analysis is essentially descriptive. One goal was to lay a foundation for future research, and statistical analysis is useful for identifying trends.

Results

Total articles retrieved off of the homepage were 6,485 stories. Coders examined 15 percent (n=962) of the total sample randomly extracted from 42 online newspapers and 50 online citizen journalism sites (See Appendices A & B). The final sample included 480 online newspaper and 482 online citizen journalism articles. More than half (55%) of the online citizen journalism articles were blog posts, whereas five percent of the analyzed online newspaper articles were blog posts.

The average total resident population size for the publications was 223,341 people. The smallest community selected had a population of 1361 people, and the largest had 8,143,197. Thirty-one percent of the online newspaper publications were from communities with more than 100,000 in total resident population size, while 39 percent of online citizen journalism publications were from total resident populations of 100,000 or more.

The citizen journalism sites analyzed were predominantly independent of news organizations meaning that citizen journalism content was not contributed to a traditional news organization. Citizen journalism sites analyzed were

categorized as either an independent blog (47%), independent site (49%) or as part of an online newspaper (5%).

Online citizen journalists did not demonstrate a heavy dependence on outside source material. Only four percent of the citizen journalism stories clearly identified that it was a press release, or that the article was based predominantly on a press release. The analysis also looked at whether the sites relied on outside traditional media sites (newspaper, TV, radio) for information. Other research on political blogs has shown a heavy reliance on traditional media (Reese, Rutigliano, Hyun, & Jeong, 2007). However, research on this particular sample revealed that only six percent of online newspaper articles and 14 percent of citizen stories were attributed to outside traditional media sources or were based on reports from traditional media sources.

The prevalence of journalistic opinion contained within articles was also analyzed to determine whether articles tend to be more factual or analytical. The online newspaper sample featured journalistic opinion in 13 percent stories of their stories, while 42 percent of online citizen journalism articles contained opinion.

Sources

Number of Sources

An independent t-test addressing **RQ1a** revealed that differences regarding the average number of sources cited was significant ($p = .00$). Online newspaper articles averaged 3.64 sources per article, while citizen journalism sites averaged 1.37 sources per article.

Official vs. Unofficial Source Use

RQ1b asked whether differences existed between online citizen journalism and online newspaper publications regarding the inclusion of official and unofficial sources. Utilizing a t-test (See Table 1), online newspapers averaged 2.64 official sources per article compared to the .72 official sources per article for online citizen journalism articles ($p = .00$), while online newspapers were more similar in their use of (.75) unofficial sources when compared to citizen journalism articles (.52) ($p < .003$).

Table 1: Average Number of Official and Unofficial Sources

Average Sources	Online Newspapers	Percentage	Online Citizen Journalism	Percentage
Official	2.6 sources	71.4%	.72 sources	52.6%
Unofficial	.75 sources	20.6%	.52 sources	38.0%

* $p < .003$, independent t-test for difference in means

Gender

Both citizen and newspaper publications were much more likely to cite male sources than female sources. **RQ1c** asked whether significant differences existed between the publication's use of male and female sources; there were significant differences found ($p = .00$). Online newspapers averaged .71 females, 1.84 males and 1.07 other types of sources per article – males were cited three times more than females. Citizen journalism publications had an average of .29 females, .66 males and .45 other types of sources per article – males averaged close to half as many times as females.

Multiple Viewpoints

RQ1d utilized a Chi-square to determine whether online citizen journalism stories differed in their approach regarding the inclusion of multiple viewpoints in controversial stories ($p = .00$). About one third (29.5%) of the analyzed stories were considered controversial. Citizen journalism stories presented more than two-thirds (67%) of their controversial stories from *all one viewpoint*, while 41 percent of the online newspaper's controversial stories were more likely to be framed from *mostly one viewpoint* (See Table 2).

Table 2: Use of Multiple Viewpoints in Controversial Stories

Multiple Viewpoints in Controversial Stories	Online Newspaper n=480	Online Citizen Journalism n=482
All One Viewpoint	8%	20%
Mostly One Viewpoint	12%	5%
Two Views	7%	4%
More Than Two Views	2%	1%
No Controversy Present	71%	70%

$$\chi^2 = 40.86, d.f. = 4, p = .00$$

Content Diversity

Topic Use and Diversity

The story topics distribution reveals that significant differences exist in online newspaper and online citizen journalism publications. A Chi-Square showed that there was a significant difference ($p = .00$) in how both publication type authors select story topics (See Table 3). Online newspapers tended to focus on Government (21.5%), Business/Economy (16.3%), Crime (14.2%) and Entertainment (8.8%). Citizen journalism sites concentrated more of their coverage on Government (27.2%), Entertainment (16.2%), Business (10.0%) and Lifestyle (8.5%) topics.

Table 3: Story Topic Distribution in Online Newspaper and Online Citizen Journalism Publications

Story Topics	Online Newspaper n=480	Online Citizen Journalism N=482
Government	22%	27%
Business/Economy	16%	10%
Crime/Trial	14%	4%
Entertainment	9%	16%
Accident/Disaster	7%	4%
Lifestyle	5%	9%
Human Interest	5%	4%
Education	4%	3%
Disease/Health	4%	2%
Environment/Sprawl	4%	5%
Iraq	3%	2%
International/Foreign Relations	2%	1%
Technology	1%	3%
News Media	1%	5%
Other/Off Topic	4%	4%

$$\chi^2 = 86.47, d.f.=15, p = .00$$

RQ2a addressed the diversity level of story topics within each publication.

Simpson's D was computed to measure overall and individual publication diversity (Simpson, 1949). Simpson's D is calculated by summing the squared proportions, and subtracting the sum from 1, and is considered an optimal measure for diversity due to its interpretative capability (McDonald & Dimmick, 2003). The measure for diversity ranges from 0 to 1. A higher number denotes a greater level of diversity. Online newspapers had a diversity level of .839 with 480 stories, and online citizen journalism publications had a diversity level of .869 with 482 stories. Thus, online citizen journalism publication topics were more evenly distributed than were online newspapers.

Hyperlink Use

Online citizen journalism sites (1.5) significantly averaged more hyperlinks per article when compared to online newspaper sites (.75) according to a t-test ($p < .02$). **RQ2b** addressed the willingness of information sites to link to content not created by their operation. Online newspapers (.19) were significantly less likely to link to content not created by the organization than were online citizen journalists (1.1). Instead, online newspapers were more likely to attempt to keep users at their sites with the use of within site links (.57) when compared to citizen journalism sites (.38).

This research also analyzed to what extent sites acknowledged they incorporated material from outside traditional media sources through the use of hyperlinks. Citizen journalism sites averaged .20 links per story to outside traditional media sources, and they also were more likely to link to outside blog content (.09). In the online newspaper sample, journalists did not link to any blog content and rarely linked outside media sources (See Table 4).

Table 4: Average Use of Hyperlinks in Online Newspapers and Online Citizen Journalism Articles

Average Hyperlinks Per Article	Online Newspapers	Online Citizen Journalism
Hyperlink Total	.75	1.5
Outbound Links	.19	1.06
Within Links	.57	.38
Outbound Traditional Media	.01	.20
Outbound Blog	.00	.09

$p < .02$, independent t-test for difference in means

Transparency

Anonymous Source Use

RQ3a asked how these publications differed regarding their use of anonymous sources. The average number of anonymous sources per story was .41 sources for both publications. A significant difference of .57 anonymous sources for online newspapers and .26 anonymous sources for citizen journalism articles was found ($p = .00$). Most of the anonymous sources tended to be official in nature meaning that both types of journalists tended to give anonymity to official sources (.30) rather than unofficial anonymous sources (.12) in each story. However, a closer examination reveals that nineteen percent of online citizen journalism contained sources that were anonymous, while 16 percent of all online newspaper sources were anonymous (See Table 5).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) warned against citing anonymous sources as the first quote in a story, or incorporating anonymous sources who express their opinion of another person. This sample revealed that online citizen journalists never used anonymous sources in this manner, and rarely did online newspaper journalists cite an anonymous source as a first quote (2.9%), or cite anonymous sources that were quoted as giving an opinion of another person (.6%).

Source Transparency

RQ3b addressed whether publication types differed in their use of transparency. The transparency of the sources allows the user to identify what background the source brings to the story. A t-test revealed that online newspaper journalists (.91) were significantly more likely to cite a source with no transparency than were online citizen journalists (.50) ($p = .00$). However, online

newspapers were more likely to cite more sources with 3.64 sources per article, while online citizen journalists averaged 1.37 sources. Thus, one-fourth of online newspaper sources were not transparent, while more than one-third of citizen journalism sources were not transparent (See Table 5).

Table 5: Average Use of Anonymous and Transparent Sources

Average Sources Per Article	Online Newspapers	Percentage	Online Citizen Journalism	Percentage
Total Average	3.64		1.37	
Anonymous	.57	16%	.26	19%
Official Anonymous	.49	14%	.10	7%
Unofficial Anonymous	.08	2%	.16	12%
Nontransparent Sources	.91	25%	.50	36%
Transparent Sources	2.69	74%	.89	65%

p = .00, independent t-test for difference in means

Journalist Transparency

The transparency of a journalist reflects the willingness of the journalist to stand behind his or her story by being available to answer questions regarding the veracity of content. **RQ3c** addressed this willingness on the part of the journalist or organization. The most open form of communication online is the comment opportunity. A Chi-square indicated that online citizen journalists (87.3%) were significantly more likely to provide an opportunity to publicly respond to their work than online newspaper journalists (19.4%) ($\chi^2=446.5$, $df=1$, $p = .00$). Online citizen journalists (20.5%) were significantly more likely to provide a journalist profile near the story than were newspaper journalists (.8%) ($\chi^2=97.7$, $df=1$, $p = .00$). While citizen journalists prefer the comment option, newspaper journalists (59.8%) were more apt to communicate with their readers

via a direct email address when compared to citizen journalists (29.9%) ($\chi^2=87.0$, $df=1$, $p=.00$) (See Table 6).

Table 6: The Presence of Journalist Transparency Attributes

Presence of Journalist Transparency Attributes	Online Newspapers	Online Citizen Journalism
Public Comment*	19%	87%
Direct Journalist Email*	60%	30%
General Journalist Email	3%	3%
Journalist Profile*	1%	21%
Journalist Phone*	33%	0%

* $df = 1$, $p = .00$

Civic Engagement

Mobilizing Information

RQ4a asked to what extent journalists attempted to provide details that inform people how to act on an issue, and whether journalists took advantage of these opportunities online. Despite the potential online, few stories included mobilizing information. The only significant difference ($\chi^2=6.5$, $df=1$, $p = .01$) between publications was that online citizen journalism outlets (12.4%) were more apt to provide mobilizing locational information than were online newspaper journalists (7.5%). Newspaper and citizen journalists behaved similarly regarding the minimal inclusion of identificational and tactical information (See Table 7).

Table 7: The Presence of Mobilizing Information

Presence of Mobilizing Information in Articles	Online Newspapers	Online Citizen Journalism
Locational*	8%	12%
Identificational	9%	10%
Tactical	3%	3%

* $\chi^2 = 6.5$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$

Local Information Use

RQ4b addressed to what extent the content online is local; this is a common thought expressed regarding citizen journalism publications. Table eight reflects the findings. The assumptions were accurate finding that 68.9 percent of citizen journalism articles were local, while 46.9 percent of the online newspaper stories were local – a significant portion as well ($\chi^2=49.9$, $df=4$, $p = .00$).

Table 8: The Presence of Localization in Articles

Presence of Local Stories	Online Newspapers	Online Citizen Journalism
Local/Metro	47%	69%
State	21%	13%
US	18%	11%
International	9%	5%
No Localization	6%	2%

$$\chi^2 = 49.9, df = 4, p = .00$$

Story Attributes

The literature review indicated that rarely do journalists include interactive elements in their text stories, and results for **RQ5** indicated that this research supports past research (See Table 9). Online citizen journalists were significantly more likely to use more photos (.54), graphics (.06) and polls (.02) in their stories ($p < .05$). Online newspaper journalists were more likely to include slideshows (.03), while citizen journalists did not incorporate one slideshow within the sample ($p < .01$).

Table 9: The Average Number of Story Attributes

Presence of Story Attributes	Online Newspapers	Online Citizen Journalism
Audio	.01	.02
Video	.04	.03
Slideshow*	.03	.00
Photo*	.33	.54
Graphic*	.01	.06
Map	.02	.02
Poll*	.00	.02
Information Graphic	.03	.01

*p < .05, independent t-test for difference in means

Summary

In summary, the results indicated that significant differences reflect that both publication types can be of value to news users. Data reveal that significant differences existed between online newspaper and online citizen journalism publications. Online newspaper journalists were more transparent in their use of sources, however, were less transparent as authors of content as the comment opportunity and the use of a profile are a more open form of communication than the use of a phone number and email address. Online citizen journalists were less balanced in their use of female and male sources, but were more balanced regarding their incorporation of official and unofficial sources. Citizen journalists were also more likely to include mobilizing, interactive and local information in their stories with a greater variety of topics. Thus, both types of journalists publish information that is considered to be of journalistic value as defined by scholars and traditional journalists.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The discussion section reflects an examination of the results produced from this investigation including thoughts as to why differences exist. Also, a comparison of results from previous research is included in this section.

For the most part, online citizen journalism publications are much more likely to present stories in an opinion or analytical format than online newspapers. Publication format, whether a news site or blog, is related as to whether journalists tend to incorporate opinion as well. The research found that blogs (56.7%) contained more journalistic opinion than news stories (13.9%). The blogging format may lend itself to more column-style writing, whereas a news site appears to feature more traditional style reports. Columns and editorials in newspapers act as a forum where people exchange conflicting opinions on topics of public concern. An analysis of story topics highlights the topics journalists prefer to blog. Popular blog topics included government (23%), entertainment (18%) and lifestyle (14%) topics. This may mean that blogs not only represent a forum for controversy, but gossip and advice as well.

The types of online citizen journalists analyzed for this investigation do not rely heavily upon traditional media or press release sources. They act as their own filters, and lean their reporting efforts toward issues of local concern. Online citizen journalists are likely intimately familiar with their community (Janowitz, 1952; Tichenor, Donahue, & Olien, 1980), and may not need to rely on traditional or press release sources. However, their level of independence may change as citizen journalism content gains in attractiveness for more news organizations are

likely to adopt it. This may have serious implications for the future of citizen journalism if it is under an organizational umbrella.

Diversity in Source Use

A journalist's autonomy is limited because he or she must depend upon sources. A goal is to maintain or grow readership for each publication. Large newspapers use diversity to attract a larger reader pool, while research has shown that smaller news publications want to promote their ideas to other like-minded readers (Hindman, 1998; Janowitz, 1952). This research revealed that it may not be in online citizen journalism publications best interest to include a diversity of sources for fear that diversity may counter their goal of community consensus.

Number of Sources

Online newspapers were more likely to incorporate more sources than online citizen journalism publications. Past Project for Excellence in Journalism research indicated that larger news publications tend to incorporate a greater number of sources despite time constraints (e.g., Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2005). This is likely a reflection of resources including time, money and available staff (Bernstein, Lacy, Cassara, & Lau, 1990). Future research may want to classify those who comment on articles as sources. This would likely affect who carries the greatest number of sources within articles.

Official and Unofficial Sources

Online newspapers were almost three times more likely to include official sources in their stories than when compared to online citizen journalists. Larger

publications are more likely to cover state and national issues, and sources representing that level are most likely to be official sources who can decipher issues at that level. There are several reasons behind the tendency of online newspapers to use official sources. First, online newspaper journalists cited a greater number of sources when compared to citizen journalists; they have greater access to official sources and unofficial sources require more time to locate (Gans, 1979; Sigal, 1973; Steele, 1995).

Online citizen publications were more balanced in their use of official and unofficial sources; however, they did average more official than unofficial sources. Balance may be a reflection of intimate knowledge of community residents. Traditional journalist's coverage area is much larger making it more difficult to find sources who can decipher an issue on a more personal level. Online citizen journalist's circle of potential sources is likely smaller, which increases the likelihood that they know someone in an unofficial capacity to represent an issue.

Gender

This research aligns with other research demonstrating that males are cited more often by both publication types (Len-Rios, Rodgers, Thorson, & Yoon, 2005; Potter, 1985; Rodgers & Thorson, 2000; Zoch & Turk, 1998). Both online citizen and online newspaper journalists were more likely to cite males than any other category of source. Online citizen journalists were much more likely to attribute males as sources than online newspaper journalists. More research needs to be conducted on smaller publications to pinpoint the influences behind

their prominent inclusion. Research has shown that there is a relationship between the gender of the reporter and the propensity to cite sources of the same gender (Freedman & Fico, 2005; Zeldes & Fico, 2005).

Multiple Viewpoints

Past research indicates that online provides a greater opportunity to increase the number of viewpoints (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006); however, both publication types fared poorly in featuring more than one viewpoint in stories that were considered controversial. Online newspapers did fare better by presenting less than half of their controversial stories from *mostly one viewpoint*. Newspapers were also better at providing viewpoints from *two views or more*. The purpose of each publication type may explain why online newspapers are more likely to incorporate a greater number of viewpoints. Online citizen journalists may utilize their stories during times of controversy to promote a viewpoint, or at least they provide very limited viewpoints in controversial stories (Donahue et al., 1972). Research indicates that small publications tend to push their community's agenda, and denounce outside viewpoints. The exclusion of viewpoints is one approach to promoting community consensus (Donahue, et al., 1972; Janowitz, 1952). The majority (67%) of citizen journalism controversial stories were presented *all from one viewpoint*.

Summary

Overall, online newspapers were more likely to incorporate a greater diversity of sources and viewpoints within their stories. Online newspapers should reflect a more accurate depiction of reality when compared to online

citizen journalism publications. Daily newspaper stories more accurately represent people as a collective for the size of their intended audience is much larger. Online newspapers need to appeal to a larger audience to profit, and thus the inclusion of a diversity of sources is a necessary investment to maintain a large readership (Merrill, 1974).

Citizen journalists may not need to seek out a greater diversity of sources because the potential diversity in their community is limited. Small community publications tend to promote their viewpoints by citing sources aligning with their viewpoints (Tichenor, Donahue, & Olien, 1980), and thus, small or citizen journalism publications will not likely ever compete with larger publications regarding the inclusion of a diversity of sources as they are concerned with whether their stories reflect their community, not the nation.

Diversity in Content

Source diversity does not always link to content diversity. To assess whether publications featured a diversity of content, primary story topics and the use outbound hyperlinks were analyzed.

Primary Story Topic

The diversity of each publication type was measured to determine through the analysis of topics which news outlet provided a greater balance, or diversity, of topics for news users. The results reflect that online citizen journalism content is more diverse than online newspaper content. Perhaps, online newspapers cover more state and national level issues, which may limit the type of topics that can be covered at that level (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006).

Both news publications appear to value public affairs reporting for they focused most of their efforts on covering government more than any other topic. Online citizen journalists (27%) were more likely to cover government topics than were online newspaper journalists (22%). Entertainment was the second most covered topic by online citizen journalism publications, while it was fourth for online newspapers. It should be noted that entertainment included attending movies, museums or local events. Thus, future research should create a *culture* category to determine whether entertainment coverage tends to more sensational or cultural. Based on coder feedback, it is expected that online citizen journalism publications do not tend to cover national entertainment topics for their focus is local content. Past literature has speculated that small community publications cover more human interest and social event topics (Janowitz, 1952). However, this research showed that online newspapers were slightly more likely to cover human interest topics than online citizen journalists.

Hyperlinks

Diversity of information also comes in the form of access to information not produced by the host news outlet. Granovetter's (1973) seminal piece on the strength of weak ties demonstrated the value of information from people with weak ties or no direct contact. The use of within site hyperlinks prevents news consumers from accessing information from varying viewpoints. News organizations should relinquish some control and invest in seeking information from outside sources. This inclusion would require the investment of a journalist's time to publicly authenticate another site as a source. Journalists fear that a

hyperlink to an outside source will mean that they are responsible for that content. Journalists have historically been responsible for selecting credible sources to bolster their reports. The journalist's duty of identifying credible sources is more important than ever due to the abundance of available information on the World Wide Web. Outside links are another form of attribution that offers users the opportunity to understand an issue on a deeper level. A link to an outside site lets the news user know what information was used to build their story, and provides the consumer informed access to a greater diversity of information. However, not every story may warrant the inclusion of a great number of hyperlinks. For example, the availability of information accessible via a hyperlink at the local level may be less abundant.

This research indicated that online newspaper journalists were likely to link to content produced only by their organization staff. Overall, online citizen journalists were more likely to link to outside content including to other traditional media sources and blogs. Perceived credibility of citizen journalists may occur when people look to citizen journalists not to be the expert in deciphering information, but rather experts in knowing where to find information on the reported issue or event. Outside links may encourage people to interpret the issue on their own, rather than relying on a journalist to interpret it for them. An additional note is that almost every story contained a hyperlink. All stories had an average of 1.1 hyperlinks per story.

To better understand the motivation behind the use of hyperlinks, a Chi-square was utilized to determine what topics featured more links, an indicator of

their level of comfort with linking. The analysis indicated that journalists were more likely to use links in stories that may require more background information, interaction or topics that are considered softer. News media (68%), technology (57%), international (57%), human interest (43%) and entertainment (43%) topics featured that greatest proportion of links (See Table 10). The use of hyperlinks in softer topics likely means that they are linking to information that is considered less controversial, which means that the authenticity of content is may be less likely to be challenged by outside sources. The topics featuring the fewest numbers of hyperlinks were ones that tend to lend themselves to straight reporting styles such as crime (24%) or accidents/disasters (22%) (Shim, 2006).

Table 10: The Use of Hyperlinks Associated with Topic

	Topics								
	News Media (n=14)	Technology (n=26)	International (n=24)	Human Interest (n=88)	Entertainment (n=234)	Science (n=126)	Crime/Trial (n=65)	Accident/Disaster (n=120)	Iraq (n=21)
Hyperlink Use									
Zero Hyperlinks	32%	43%	43%	57%	58%	64%	76%	78%	79%
One or More Hyperlinks	68%	57%	57%	43%	43%	36%	24%	22%	21%

$$\chi^2 = 36.676, df = 15, p < .01$$

In summary, diversity of content did differ regarding the use of topics and level of access journalists are willing to provide to information created by outside sources. Online citizen and online newspaper journalists' value government coverage, and the data also indicate that online citizen journalists, who cover a

greater proportion of news at a more local level, featured a greater diversity of topics.

Online citizen journalism sites fared better in providing access to a diversity of content via outside hyperlinks than online newspapers. Content analysis cannot reveal why online newspaper journalists prefer to link to content within their site. There may be some explanations that can shed light on why news organizations are prone to link within their site rather than linking to outside information. For instance, news organizations may fear that readers will not come back to their site, or discover a better alternative source of information. News organizations should strive to act as a portal to information so to encourage people to use their site as a primary source for online information rather than a site that people link to periodically for information. Other explanations behind within site linking include that it requires more work from the journalist to find outside sources of information making the use of internal sources less research intensive. Lastly, they may be legally responsible for the accuracy of outside content (Rubel, 2007).

Transparency

Transparency of sources and journalists encourages news users to actively question the veracity of content which promotes the adherence to quality standards by the news outlet. To determine the transparency of stories, the use of transparent sources and journalists were measured.

Anonymous Sources

Online newspaper journalists were less likely to use anonymous sources than were online citizen journalists. This may be a reflection of the operational definitions. The authors of stories that contained opinion were counted as sources. Online citizen journalists did not always fully identify themselves. For example, some journalists would call themselves “Fred” or “pinkmonkey9.” This likely affected the number of anonymous and nontransparent sources featured in a story since almost half of citizen journalism stories contained opinion.

To identify what story topics were prone to feature the inclusion of anonymous sources, a Chi-square was utilized. The ratio-level anonymous source variable was collapsed into “0” anonymous sources and “1 or more” anonymous sources due to the amount of cells containing less than five articles. The use of ANOVA was not utilized for it is not recommended for data that are skewed because results can be unreliable. The examination revealed international (50%), disease/health care (35%) and Iraq (33%) topics featured more anonymous sources, while less controversial topics such as entertainment (13%), lifestyle (11%) and technology (10%) featured fewer anonymous sources (See Table 11). As research has shown, international and government stories are more likely to feature anonymous sources than softer news stories (Martin-Kratzer & Thorson, 2007).

Table 11: The Presence of Anonymous Sources Dependant Upon Topic

Anonymous Source Use	Topics								
	International (n=14)	Disease/Health Care (n=26)	Iraq (n=24)	Crime/Trial (n=88)	Government (n=234)	Business/Economy (n=126)	Lifestyle (n=65)	Entertainment (n=120)	Technology (n=21)
Zero Anonymous Sources	50%	65%	68%	72%	77%	85%	89%	87%	91%
One or More Anonymous Sources	50%	35%	33%	28%	23%	15%	11%	13%	10%

$$\chi^2 = 39.986, df = 15, p = .00$$

Transparent Sources

Transparency of a source requires identifying the background information of a source. Citizen and newspaper journalists differed in their use of identifiable sources. Online newspaper journalists were more likely to include the background information of a source. This may be a reflection of either newspaper journalist training to include background information, or it could be that online citizen journalists may not feel that they need to include the source's background information because they perceive that their targeted audience is already familiar with the source's identity. A greater amount of information is necessary for larger audiences to understand the source's relationship to a story. In smaller communities, the journalist may not feel that they do need to be as transparent for local readers may already know the person featured in the article making the title an unnecessary inclusion.

Journalist Transparency

Traditional journalists push other people and organizations to be transparent; however, journalists themselves tend not to be transparent (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Online newspapers were unlikely to provide a publicly available forum for news consumers to express their views on stories. On the other hand, online citizen journalists provided the opportunity to comment on close to all of their stories. This research indicated that the newspaper journalist's email address was the preferred way of organizations to communicate with the public. The appearance of an email address does not necessarily mean that communication will occur between the sender and the receiver. An email address is more of a secretive approach to engaging in dialogue with the news audience, and many traditional journalists do not respond to the person who sent the email (Randle, Davenport, & Lunt, 2006; Ye & Li, 2006).

Online citizen journalists provided access to a user profile on more than one-fifth of their stories. The availability of a user profile does not necessarily mean that online citizen journalists are behaving in more transparent way. This research did not assess whether the user profile contained an accurate or a full name. In fact, blogging survey research reveals that more than half of bloggers use a pseudonym, but that figure encompasses all types of blogs including personal (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Thus, future research should identify different levels of anonymity to determine the transparency level of journalists. A news user may or may not be able determine the identity of the journalist who uses a pseudonym. However, the masking of identity of a journalist may be arguably necessary to encourage the contribution of extreme viewpoints, especially when

the public availability of the author's identity could cause him or her harm. The news media has been said to manufacture consent (Herman & Chomsky, 1988); this norm may affect contributions of perceived radical content. An anonymous source who posts sensitive information can still have a good reputation online because users may put a high value on the sharing of information contributed. However, in most cases, it is likely that anonymous sources are not worried about bodily harm, but instead, they are concerned with harm to their reputation in the physical world.

In summary, online newspaper journalists were more likely to include transparent sources, but were less likely to be as transparent themselves when compared to online citizen journalists. Traditional journalists face numerous pressures that affect the time they have to respond to comments from a much larger audience than when compared to citizen journalism publications (Shoemaker & Reese, 1995). Online citizen journalists may be more accountable to their community, and the credibility of their reports is associated with their willingness to answer questions of the public (Gilmor, 2006; Lowrey & Anderson, 2005).

Civic Engagement

Mobilizing Information

Based on the literature review, the purpose of smaller and alternative publications is to engage (Tichenor, Donahue, & Olien, 1980; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a). However, both publication types performed minimally regarding the inclusion of content used to connect community

members. The only significant difference was that the online citizen journalists were more likely to use locational information than online newspaper journalists. Locational information provides the time and location of activities. The minimal inclusion of mobilizing information is in align with past research; however, it is unexpected that online citizen journalism publications did not include this type of information for their goal as a publication is to connect the community (Hoffman, 2006; The Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a).

Local Information

Newspaper organizations continually attempt to bundle diverse information in hopes of increasing or maintaining their readership. Online newspaper organizations feature a large proportion of content on statewide or national issues to accomplish this goal. Online citizen journalism publications can provide a natural balance in the marketplace for they tend concentrate their efforts on hyperlocal community issues. Localism is an important factor in determining quality of content because local information acts as an adhesive necessary for community members to behave as one unit. This research indicated that both publication types devote the majority of their coverage to local issues; online citizen publications just tend to be more proportionately local within the publication. However, a different sampling method that compared numbers may have produced different results because online citizen journalism publications publish a fewer number of stories daily when compared online newspapers, and thus, online newspapers *may* produce more local stories because they produce *more* stories.

In summary, this portion of the analysis investigated whether online citizen journalism or online newspaper publications featured more stories that were meant to engage news users in community issues. The results indicate that that both publications types do little to provide information that assists readers in personally connecting with the story in their community. Journalists who are concerned with the level of civic involvement in their community could potentially increase participation through the use of mobilizing information.

As expected, online citizen journalism stories were more proportionately local in nature; however, online newspapers are local as well. This may mean that news organizations are dedicating more coverage to local issues to compete with alternative forms of media (Bogart, 1989).

Story Attributes

The potential of the internet is immense as far as creating depth. People can select layers that aid in their understanding, rather than consuming it in a more restricted fashion (Pavlik, 2001). Despite the possibilities the web presents, news outlets treat their text stories not as a package featuring an array of text, multimedia and interactive features, but rather as a separate stories, or they rarely include these elements. This research did not assess the quality of isolated multimedia stories, but rather addressed whether news organizations were trying to create depth of understanding through the use of many elements in textually-based stories. These elements are considered indicators of quality, yet most news outlets did not include these elements (Gladney et al., 2007). Online citizen journalists included more photographs, graphics and polls, while online

newspapers used more slideshows in their stories. But the average use of such features, with the exception of photographs, was less than an average .06 attributes per story for both publication types. This may change as Nielsen/NetRatings, a company that monitors internet audiences, has begun to measure the length of time visitors stay at the site as well (Associated Press, 2007). This may encourage the use of social networking, multimedia and interactive features by organizations so they can keep users at their site for a longer period.

Summary

Elements that were classified as attributes that define *quality* journalism were 1) the use of transparent sources and journalists, 2) a large number of sources, 3) a diversity of sources and viewpoints and 4) local information. Based on the measures of story quality, online newspaper journalists performed better at incorporating a greater diversity of sources and viewpoints and using a greater average of transparent sources. Online citizen journalism stories featured a greater proportion of local content and transparent journalists. Thus, neither online publication can be considered of higher quality, just different, and of higher quality in different areas.

As for the other attributes (topics, outbound links and multimedia/interactive elements) measured that were considered important by journalism scholars and traditional journalists, little differences existed in the use of multimedia/interactive features. However, online citizen journalists did feature a greater diversity of topics and did incorporate more outbound links as expected

for they are small in size and more apt to connect to outside content due to their blogging background (See Table 12).

Table 12: A Comparison of Results from Online Newspapers and Online Citizen Journalism Sites

Journalism Attribute Comparisons	Online Newspaper	Online Citizen Journalism
<i>Source Diversity</i>	X	
Number of Sources	X	
Official and Nonofficial Sources	X	X
Gender	X	
Multiple Viewpoints	X	
<i>Content Diversity</i>		X
Topics		X
Outside Hyperlinks		X
<i>Transparency</i>	X	
Fewer Anonymous Sources	X	
Transparent Source Use	X	
Journalist Transparency		X
<i>Civic Engagement</i>		X
Mobilizing Information		X
Local Information		X
<i>Textual Story Attributes</i>		X

X denotes which publication fared better in comparison tests based on the operational definition of each variable. The two x's located in the "official and unofficial" category signifies that no standard exists as to whether journalists should balance their inclusion, or include a greater number of one or the other.

The discussion section highlighted how both online citizen publications and online newspapers can be of value to consumers due to their differences in content. The next section, the conclusion section, addresses the implications of this research, directions for future research and the limitations, which are fruitful areas for future work as well.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This section focuses on how the goals of this research were addressed, and the potential opportunities for future work. This research sought to discover the value of online citizen journalism content by comparing it to that of online newspaper content. A second goal of this research was to identify objective indicators of story quality. Finally, this investigation aimed to begin laying the empirical groundwork to address the assumptions being made about the contributions of online citizen journalists and online newspaper journalists.

Differences demonstrate that there is value in each publication type. Shoemaker and Reese's Hierarchy of Influences demonstrates that differing influences produce differences in content. Differences do not indicate that one type of publication is better, just that online citizen journalism and online newspapers differ in their source use, content diversity, transparency and civic propensity in online news articles. This research defined quality based primarily upon Project for Excellence in Journalism research, which was based on input from scholars and traditional journalists. This research assessed it at the story level by using objective traditional journalistic definitions of quality to answer critics' claims regarding the validity of online citizen journalism and online newspaper content. Based on the indicators of quality utilized, online citizen journalists were better at including local information and being more open about their own background, while online newspaper journalism stories featured more identifiable and diverse sources, a higher quantity of sources and sources with more viewpoints. Based on these indicators of quality, one could make an

argument that either is more accurate. The online citizen journalism sites featured more stories that directly reflect their community, whereas online newspaper sites featured stories that are backed up by a greater number and variety of sources. Thus, arguments supporting or against either type of site can be valid, but valid in different ways. Critics' arguments should be more specific to the publication type, and thus, more constructive in demonstrating to news outlets how to improve their quality.

There are several opportunities for news outlets to begin improving the quality of their product. Ideally, publications should display a mission statement or a set of specific goals online that guide the journalist or the organization as they gather information. The abstract nature of the concept should not keep a news outlet from abiding by some standard of quality. This approach reduces uncertainty during transition periods as decisions can be based on their mission statement or statement of goals. A textual or visual display of their value system online can also inform the public as to what guides them when creating content helping users judge whether journalists are adhering to their own standards of quality. A public display of standards can also assist researchers in identifying standards of journalistic quality as well.

There are core elements that can define journalism, no matter how they are packaged. Many news organizations produce quality journalism everyday, however, distrust can still occur (Harris Interactive Poll, 2007). Distrust formulates when there is a lack of communication (Insko, Schopler, Drigotas, & Graetz, 1993). News outlets should provide opportunities for users and

journalists to communicate openly about their work (ASNE, 2006; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Associated Press, 2006; SND, 2006; SPJ, 1996).

The news media is an establishment built on the idea that the content that exists within each publication reflects who we are as a society. To effectively accomplish this task, the material found inside each publication should strive to accurately reflect the truth. Dissatisfaction with the news media occurs when news users feel that the current established media are not accurately reflecting their community (Harris Poll, 2007). Online citizen journalism and online newspaper publications should encourage people to connect virtually, which can encourage people to behave as a collective in the physical world (Nichols, et al., 2006). To profit, news outlets should invest in producing content that reflects the idea of community because trust occurs when people perceive that the content reflects them (Meyer, 2004). Some traits of community include geography, involvement, sharing and awareness (Chyi & Sylvie, 2001; Christensen & Levinson, 2003; Kurpuis, 2000; Lacy & Simon, 1993). For example, a news outlet could encourage young people to submit ideas for a new graphic logo for the publication. Is this journalism? Probably not, but it is a reflection of community.

Traditional news organizations can either work with, against or disregard citizen journalists. Each publication type unites the public at varying levels. Online citizen journalists can serve a rural community, or a subsection of a metropolitan area. News organizations are not likely to alter the diversity of their content when a new competitor enters the marketplace (Lee, 2007). However, they can utilize citizen content to reach an even larger audience. The duty of

small news outlets has been to be involved in their community (Rattray, 1966). Citizen content is ideal because it is difficult for online newspaper journalists to be as involved because they serve larger audiences, and their resources are limited. Traditional online newspapers still play a local role; however, they also strive to identify with populations at state, national and global levels as well – an important role as well in society (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2006a; Shim, 2006).

Traditional news organizations can also decide to compete with citizen journalists. Based on historical research, online newspapers would do best to capitalize on their strengths, rather than compete at the hyperlocal level. Shaw (1991) said that once a disruptive technology has infiltrated the marketplace, other existing media publications never reclaim their position at the top. On the other hand, it would be best for the public if multiple news outlets did compete. Levin's research (1971) found that the fewer the news publications available within a market; the more likely news organizations featured duplicate stories within that market.

There is controversy as to whether online citizen journalists should be called journalists. Currently, there is a discussion as to whether to call people with no journalism training a citizen journalist, and instead call their sites “civic or citizen media” because some site operators may not consider themselves to be citizen journalists (Institute for Interactive Journalism, 2007a; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Witt, 2007). A study by the J-Lab Institute for Interactive Journalism (2007a) found that the majority (79%) of citizen journalists surveyed felt that they

were producing “journalism.” The term citizen journalism was used in this study because it is familiar term. The goal of this research was to evaluate whether citizen journalists were producing “quality” journalistic content as defined by traditional journalists and scholars. After reviewing the data, the present research indicates that they deserve the right to be called a journalist. The premise of the First Amendment is that everyone deserves that right. This does not necessarily that everyone who publishes content is creating “journalism.” Most recently proposed definitions of “journalism” focus on whether the intention of the individual’s content was meant to benefit the public. The public is a loose concept. Is the public one’s family, or one’s Facebook group? This research sought to detour the conversation toward identifying what is “journalism,” or the very least, to begin identifying traits that define “quality journalism” so to improve news user’s literacy when assessing the credibility of online information.

Research in the area of online journalism is challenging, especially at the story-level. Difficulties in capturing data occur due to continual changes in content. Not as much research may be conducted on this area at the story level due to content capturing problems, and because libraries do not hold collections of stories from online citizen journalism publications as they do for online newspapers, which can deter research in this area as well. The original intent was to capture snapshots of active homepages three times a day; however; software limitations affected the ability to capture a more accurate snapshot of content online. As a result, it took more than 12 hours per day to print off stories for the present research. For researchers conducting future work in this area who

do not have the adequate resources (e.g., money, time, research assistants) to take on this much work, researchers may want to focus on a particular topic area or issue such as government, entertainment or education to reduce the number of stories printed. There are so many stories because many traditional news organizations treat their homepage as if it was the entire print publication, and they also include other elements such as blogs, forums, photo galleries, multimedia stories and hyperlinks to other sources of information. Future researchers will likely limit their analysis to more efficiently research online news publications until technology can more adequately handle saving online content.

However, it is still critical to capture this snapshot in time because current theory on change needs improvement. Schramm argued that as researchers it is our duty to monitor change. "We have been talking for a long about the future, and it is frustrating – especially for those of us who are used to demanding facts, aseptic experiments, and significance tests. But let us not disdain talk of the future for that reason. That evidence we have seen here today adds up to at least one conclusion we can hold at a high level of confidence: some very important changes are taking place in human communication, and important changes in human behavior are likely to follow" (Schramm, 1979, p.12).

Limitations

As with all research investigations, this study is not without limitations. Quantitative content analysis limits the extent to which one can measure whether publications are adhering to certain journalistic standards. There are some interpretative limitations related to this approach to research. This method relies

predominantly on manifest content, and thus cannot make claims beyond the content researched. It is not clear as to why differences exist between publications, only that they likely exist.

A second limitation of this study is that this research does not contain a sample of all online citizen journalism publications because no complete list exists, and thus, the results cannot be generalized to all online citizen journalism publications. It is difficult to obtain a random sample via the Web because many sites shut down and begin in a short amount of time.

A third limitation is that content is reflective of one time period (March 2007). Content would likely differ during different times of the year, or during different events.

Future Work

The limitations reflect opportunities for future work, but there is much more work that remains. This research provides an empirical foundation for future studies to test whether results reflect different time periods or different publications. But future research needs to more precisely determine what causes differences in content. As such, future studies could examine the impact that online citizen journalism content has on online traditional news content. Competition from citizen journalists may affect traditional news content. Specifically, future work could examine how traditional news media are being affected by citizen created content by examining the news construction process (e.g., selection of story topics or sources; work roles). Specifically, it would of

interest to examine how news organizations select stories contributed from citizen journalists for inclusion on their site.

This analysis was limited to online newspapers and online citizen journalism sites focused on geographic areas. It would be useful to examine how broadcast organizations differ when compared to online citizen journalists to more fully understand their value to society, or to make comparisons utilizing content produced by online citizen journalists who produced content on specific issues. This analysis is also limited to sites in the United States, and thus, more research needs to be conducted to reflect differences beyond the American borders.

Other methodological approaches would likely highlight online citizen journalism with a different lens. Survey research of online citizen journalists could use this research to inform a survey to better understand the reasons behind their motivations to produce content in the manner that they do. Experimental research could reveal whether author (citizen journalist or newspaper journalist) has an impact on perceived credibility, liking or representativeness of content. Qualitative analysis is also necessary to lay a foundation so that future research can more precisely measure this phenomenon. Since this is a snapshot in time, further content analysis research should be conducted to evaluate whether content changes over time. Research should also be conducted using other benchmarks of journalism. For example, other possible quality indicators include reliance on wire content, the use of interpretative pieces versus spot news or the

amount of non-advertising content. Future examinations should also look at quality at varying levels such as the publication level as well.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ONLINE CITIZEN JOURNALISM PUBLICATIONS

Online Citizen Journalism Publications	Number n = 482	Percent
The Forum	2	.2%
Greater Falls	4	.4%
Kansas City Live Journal	8	.8%
Jackson Free Press	6	.6%
Chi Town Daily News	2	.2%
MN Speak	31	3.2%
Honolulu Advertiser Blog	4	.4%
New West Boise	8	.8%
Idaho Fallz	2	.2%
Muncie Free Press	22	2.3%
Hackbend	3	.3%
Bluffton Today	7	.7%
Backfence Arlington	1	.1%
Blount County Voice	2	.2%
OlyBlog	22	2.3%
Portland Metroblog	15	1.6%
My Mile High News	8	.8%
Voice of San Diego	49	5.1%
EdHat	15	1.6%
Duke City Fix	11	1.1%
Baristanet	29	3.0%
Paulding	1	.1%
Glenwood Blog	1	.1%
YourHub Brevard	1	.1%
YourHub Jupiter	2	.2%
Westport Now	27	2.8%
Fort Wayne Observed	16	1.7%
Pratt	4	.4%
H2O Town	12	.12%
New Haven Independent	17	1.8%
Daily Gotham	33	3.4%
Capital Hill Seattle	7	.7%
Holabird Advocate	9	.9%
Madison Commons	5	.5%
iBrambleboro	14	1.5%
New West Salt Lake	3	.3%
Reno Discontent	7	.7%
Grand Forks Life	4	.4%
Backfence Arlington	2	.2%
Charleston W. Virginia Economic Development	3	.3%

Backfence Chantilly	1	.1%
Kauai Happy Camper	1	.1%
Hamtramck Star	4	.4%
Metroblogging Boston	2	.2%
Arbor Update	2	.2%
Backfence Bethesda	1	.1%
Northfield	12	1.2%
Little Rock Blog	9	.9%
Ithaca Blog	8	.8%
Around Carson	13	1.4%
Toledo Talk	5	.5%
Life in Wisconsin	6	.6%

APPENDIX B: ONLINE NEWSPAPER PUBLICATIONS

Online Newspaper Publications	Number n = 480	Percent
Fairbanks Daily News-Miner	6	.6%
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	3	.3%
Northwest Arkansas Times	5	.5%
The Arizona Republic	13	1.4%
Santa Barbara News-Press	5	.5%
The Post Independent	6	.6%
Denver Post	9	.9%
New Haven Register	5	.5%
The Garden Island	6	.6%
Honolulu Advertiser	17	1.8%
Idaho Statesman	15	1.6%
Chicago Tribune	23	2.5%
The Star Press	14	1.5%
The Journal Gazette	19	2.0%
The Courier-Journal	26	2.7%
The Times-Picayune	7	.7%
The Boston Globe	3	.3%
Ann Arbor News	10	1.0%
Star Tribune	11	1.1%
The Hattiesburg American	13	1.4%
Kansas City Star	17	1.8%
Great Falls Tribune	8	.8%
Lincoln Journal Star	8	.8%
Santa Fe New Mexican	6	.6%
Albuquerque Journal	9	.9%
The Ithaca Journal	10	1.0%
The Daily Times	2	.2%
The Brattleboro Reformer	4	.4%
The Olympian	13	1.4%
The Seattle Times	27	2.8%
Nevada Appeal	9	.9%
Grand Forks Herald	6	.6%
The Blade	7	.7%
The Tribune Chronicle	8	.8%
Bend Bulletin	2	.2%
The Capital Times	1	.1%
Charleston Gazette	6	.6%
Salt Lake Tribune	9	.9%
Philadelphia Daily News	17	1.8%
The New York Times	27	1.7%
The Dallas Morning News	51	5.3%

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF SITES ANALYZED

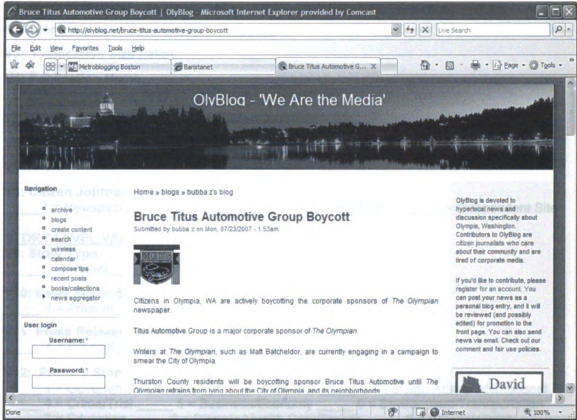
Example 1: Online Newspaper Web site



Example 2: Independent Online Citizen Journalism News Site



Example 3: Independent Online Citizen Journalism Blog



APPENDIX D: DISSERTATION CODE SHEET AND PROTOCOL

V1: Story Id Number _____

V2: Story Day (Just Write Day) _____

V3: Publication Size (ratio) _____

V4: Publication Name _____

V5: Newspaper

_____ 1 = Newspaper _____ 2 = Citizen Journalism Site

V6: Blogs _____

V7: News Articles _____

V8: Citizen Journalism Affiliation

_____ 1 = Newspaper Organization _____ 2 = Independent Blog _____ 3 = Independent Site

STORY-LEVEL VARIABLES

V9: Story Type

_____ 1 = News _____ 2 = Commentary/Opinion/Editorial

V10: News Media Source

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V11: Press Release Source

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V12: Primary Story Topic

_____ 1 = Government/Elections _____ 2 = Iraq War _____ 3 = Foreign Affairs/International
_____ 4 = Crime/Trial _____ 5 = Business/Economy _____ 6 = Environment/Transportation
_____ 7 = Education _____ 8 = Disease/Health Care/Trends _____ 9 = Entertainment
_____ 10 = Technology _____ 11 = Science _____ 12 = Accident/Disasters/WX
_____ 13 = Lifestyle _____ 14 = News Media _____ 15 = Human Interest _____ 0 = Other

Mobilizing Information:

V13: Locational

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V14: Identificational

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V15: Tactical

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V16: Localization

_____ 1 = Local/Metro _____ 2 = State _____ 3 = U.S. _____ 4 = International _____ 5 = No
localization

Hyperlinks (ratio)

V17: Total _____

V18: Outbound links _____

V19: Within links _____

V20: Outbound Media _____

V21: Outbound Blog _____

V22: Multiple Viewpoints (Controversy):

_____ 1 = All one opinion _____ 2 = Mostly one opinion _____ 3 = Two views
_____ 4 = More than two views _____ 9 = Not applicable/controversial/fact

Sourcing (All Ratio Level)

V23: Total Number of Sources _____

Source Diversity:

Unofficial Sources

V24: Non-institutional _____

V25: Average Citizens _____

Official Sources

V26: Government _____

V27: Business _____

V28: Public and Private Organizations _____

Anonymous Source Type:

V29: Official Anonymous _____

V30: Nonofficial Anonymous _____

V31: Total Official _____

V32: Total Unofficial _____

V33: Other/Can't Tell Sources _____

Anonymous Sources (code only if anonymous sources are present):

V34: Opinion of another person

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V35: Used as first quote in story

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

Source Gender (ratio):

V36: Female _____

V37: Male _____

V38: Can't Tell/Other _____

Source Transparency (ratio):

V39: Transparent _____

V40: No transparency _____

V41: Public Comment Opportunity

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V42: Direct Reporter Email

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V43: General Reporter Email

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V44: Profile Name Link

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

V45: Reporter Phone Number

_____ 1 = Present _____ 0 = Absent

Story Attributes (All Ratio Level)

V46: Audio or Audio Link _____

V47: Video or Video Link _____

V48: Slideshow or Link _____

V49: Photo or Link _____

V50: Graphic or Link _____

V51: Map or Link _____

V52: Poll or Link _____

V53: Infographic or Link _____

Definitions

News Story

News story is defined as a text story without promotional material located on the home page. A news story from the sampled date on the home page is the unit of analysis. A blog post is considered a news story. Even if stories are present from the previous month on the home page, they will not be coded. In the case of hyperlinks with no text following the hyperlink, the coder will click on the link and code that story. Stories on the upper and side navigation panels are excluded. Stories also excluded are sports, calendar of events, obituaries, wedding announcements, weather for the day/week, advertisements, Associated Press/Reuters/Bloomberg/Gannett news wire stories as sole authors, solely video/audio/photo/graphic/slideshow stories, horoscopes, birthdays, letters to the editor, images in the news, photo of the day, Dow Jones, top emailed story, most popular/top stories, magazine, open threads, reader feedback and corrections. Story comments were not be analyzed.

Online Newspaper

An online daily newspaper is defined as a general circulation, mass-market publication that publishes a full range of regularly updated general news content online. Newspapers that required a payment for a long-term (e.g., 6 months, one year) subscription for access to stories are excluded.

Online Citizen Journalism Site

A citizen journalism news site is defined as an online publication that publishes regularly updated content for an intended to benefit a community. These sites focused on sites that published content focused on a geographical area (e.g., Hamtramck, MI), rather than centering on one or few issues (e.g., education, politics). Sites that had not published content since December 2006 were excluded as well. The content analysis was conducted in March 2007.

Blog

A 'blog' shortened for 'web log' is defined as a frequently modified web page in which dated entries are listed and archived in reverse chronological order. A blog can be classified as an online citizen journalism publication. Typically, a blog is short and is written by only one or a few authors, and citizens are asked to comment on their stories. Blogs that had not published content since December 2006 were excluded.

Publication Size

Online citizen journalism and online newspaper size was based on the estimated 2005 total resident population of the publication's home city from the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site, or the most recent estimate. Sizes were categorized as small (less than 100,000) or large (more than 100,000). Online newspaper content is also broken down based on total resident population size and circulation size of less than 100,000 and more than 100,000. This variable is recorded at the ratio-level.

Source

A source is defined as a provider of attributed textual information. To be considered a source, the provider must be identified with a verb of attribution, which is a statement of direct or indirect communication. Direct communication can be regarded as said, reported, announced, stated, noted, claims, etc. Indirect communication includes verbs related to mental states such as hopes, feels, believes, etc. Documents/emails are included as sources; however, polls with no author as a source of the poll are not considered sources. Coders coded an author of an editorial, column or any other opinion piece as a source.

Hyperlink

A hyperlink contained within the text story that directs the user to another web page. Hyperlinks excluded are category, permalinks, RSS, email link to post, return to top of page, report inappropriate content, comment, headline, link to the rest of the story, tags, printer-friendly, email this, del.icio.us, trackback, facebook this, single page, text size and digg this links. Email links are not counted as hyperlinks. Links are not counted in content written by outside media sources as well (e.g., a *LA Times* story featured on the Santa Barbara blog).

Operationalization of variables

V1: Id number: The id number is assigned at a later date by research.

V2: Story Day: The story's 'post' date takes precedent over the story date.

V3: Publication Size: Look up the most recent estimated total resident population size for the home city of the publication on the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site. Typically it is the year 2005.

V4: Write or abbreviate the publication name. A number code is assigned at a later date by the person who entered the data.

V5: Publication Type: Online newspaper and online newspaper publications are already marked on a list of hyperlinks to those publications.

V6-V7: Blogs and News Articles

The story will need to be categorized as either a news story or as a blog post. Refer to definitions in the definitions section on what is considered a blog and a news article.

V8: Citizen Journalist Affiliation

1 = Newspapers: a Web site that is connected with a traditional news organization. This was marked on the dissertation sample list.

2 = Independent: a Web site that is not connected with a traditional news organization.

STORY-LEVEL VARIABLES

V9: Story Type

1 = News: The story is mostly fact-based centered on informing the public.

2 = Commentary/Opinion/Editorial: The story is predominantly opinion or speculation. It typically focuses on one person commenting on a particular issue, event or person (e.g., editorial, column, question posed for the public, analysis of an issue). Opinion tends to focus on an issue or person, rather than an event. An opinion tends to include little to no reporting. In many of the citizen media articles, authors use the word "I," this does not always mean that the article is an opinion piece (e.g., "I talked to so and so about the issue" or "I am listing some places to visit"). When in doubt, code as opinion.

V10: News Media Source

The story predominantly focuses on a story reported by an outside traditional media source or it is an outside media story reposted by the sample organization (e.g., a story posted in *The Chicago Tribune* written by *The L.A. Times*). Outside, meaning that the story focuses on an article created by an organization other than from the creator of the analyzed story. If the citizen media site is part of a traditional news organization, a story focused on a report from that news

organization can not be counted as a story focused on an outside media source (e.g., The Honolulu Advertiser Blog author reposts a story created by The Honolulu Advertiser news staff). Traditional media does not include blogs, online communities, forums, etc. It does include mainstream newspaper, radio and television news organizations (e.g., *Star Tribune*, WXYZ-TV, NPR).

V11: Press Release Source

The story explicitly indicates that it is a press release, or from an organization such as Department of Natural Resources (e.g., Louis Rockhill is the Executive Director of Second Harvest Food Bank of E-Central Indiana, and the story is about the food bank).

V12: Story Topic

Coders must select the topic of story that the story is focused on.

DEFINITION: This variable addresses the type of story topics that are addressed. Before classifying the content, please read the assignment rules listed below the procedure.

The “SIMPLE PLURALITY RULE”

This requires that coders determine the topic that receives the greatest percentage of coverage in the story; and then code the story as such.

The “RESEARCH REPORT RULE”

When the story is based on release of research results/reports, then the angle taken in covering the subject of that research is what determines the TOPIC of said story. However, coders will code the research or report as the secondary topic.

The “DEFAULT TO THE TOP RULE”

It is possible; even likely, that there will be elements of multiple topics interwoven in an individual news story, and it will not be possible for the coder to determine which topic receives a simple plurality of the coverage. In those cases, coders should always default to the top of the article and code based on that segment of the news story. The first default is to the three lead paragraphs (print) or lead. Follow this process, as needed, throughout the remaining paragraphs, and code for the first appearance.

1 = Government/Elections: refers to departments of government excluding the activities of foreign governments, except in the cases where they are engaging politically with the U.S. This applies to official meetings of government units at all levels of government (e.g., county commission, city council meetings, fire department decisions). Any story directed at those *elected* and *running* for political office as well. It also includes military and Department of Defense

activities with exception as it relates to the Iraq War. If the government is acting on an issue (e.g., Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved today to provide \$10-millions to higher education...), count "government" as the topic, rather than the issue they are taking action on (education).

2 = Iraq War: Any story tied to Gulf war II, Iraqi people or 'terrorism' in Iraq.

3 = Foreign Affairs/International: Any story dedicated to the relationship between the United States and another country, or any story that is focused on an international issue that is not directly related to the U.S.

4 = Crime/Trial: This involves crime incidents, law enforcement, trials and crime trends. It refers ONLY to individual crimes, such as a serial killer or an assassination, but EXCLUDES war. It also refers to individual court trials and civil lawsuits excluding celebrity trials. Celebrity trials are categorized under entertainment.

5 = Business/Economy: All non-legislative activities related to businesses and the economy including taxes and social security. Immigration should be categorized under this category unless it focuses on the relationship between the U.S. and another country, then classify it under Foreign Relations. Also include jobs, housing, and agriculture business.

6 = Environment/Sprawl/Transportation: Refers to stories focused on ecological and human-environment topics, or refers to the impact of development and the expansion of urban areas (e.g., recycling, endangered animals). Transportation refers stories tied to traffic or travel (e.g., parking, new road system, construction that affects travel).

7 = Education: Refers to ALL primary, secondary and post-secondary education, universities, whether public or private. This includes non-sports extracurricular activities (e.g., debate, drama, and service clubs) that are explicitly connected with schools (e.g., school board meeting).

8 = Disease/Health Care System/Health: Stories that focus on Medicare, health insurance, abortion, AIDS, any disease, or health-related trends such as exercise, diet, obesity or public health.

9 = Entertainment: refers to people involved in motion picture, television, stage, music or local entertainment. A celebrity who breaks a law would fall in this category. Also, community activities should be categorized under this category (e.g., museums). Please see Lifestyle as well.

10 = Technology: Any story dedicated to technology including blogging unless comparisons are being made between bloggers and the traditional news media, then count as news media (e.g., video games, podcasts, trends, advice).

11 = Science: Refers to scientific research or reports

12 = Accident/Disasters/Weather: weather refers to non-intentional events that injure, kill or cause damage. Also refers to natural events as well. Please include pet food recall under this category.

13 = Lifestyle: refers to the activities and concerns of ordinary people NOT applicable to topics above. Such topics may include values, pets, religion, volunteering, charity, cooking classes, fishing, fundraising, suggested restaurants to eat at, recipes, parenting, philosophy, hobbies outside of work and spiritual beliefs (other than sports, entertainment, etc.).

14 = News Media: Stories that concentrate on what news media companies or journalists are doing or have done with their coverage.

15 = Human Interest: Human interest stories tend to focus on a person or a few people, where an individual is the focus. If the story cites an average person to humanize the story, it can be considered a human interest story.

99 = Other/Off Topic: Any story that is not dedicated to the previously mentioned topics. Try to use sparingly.

Mobilizing Information:

Coders will code the presence or absence of these variables. This information is typically incorporated to let people know that they can act on an issue if they so choose. A story can contain more than one of these mobilizing variables.

V13: Locational: Times and place of activity. It must provide both the time and the place for it to be locational (e.g., "The committee meeting will be at 3 p.m. tomorrow in Room 696 at City Hall."). Online the contact information can be counted when if this information can be accessed via a hyperlink. Information must be available on the first page when users click on the hyperlink. Excluded are listings for television or radio programs.

V14: Identificational: Names and contact information of people or groups that the story is focused on so the reader could contact them if they so choose. This can include a hyperlink to an email address or Web site of the person, group or organization (e.g., "The committee meeting will be at 3 p.m. tomorrow in Room 696 at City Hall. Please contact Rob Davis at 517-555-5555"). This does not include reporter or any author's email addresses, but does include source emails.

V15: Tactical: Explicit tactical instructions on how to accomplish an activity. This information tells a reader *how* to do something such as how to affect legislative process or how to encourage citizens to contact leaders to create some sort of change. This does not mean that a time, place, or location has to be present within the article (e.g., This is how you register to vote for the upcoming election.; recipes).

V16: Localization:

A coder can look to the dateline to help ascertain the geographical focus of the story. If no dateline is present, the coder must determine the locale by reading the story. The purpose of this variable is to assess the hyperlocalness of the content. If no dateline or focus can be determined, use Local/Metro as the default.

1 = Local/Metro: The story focuses on the home city of the publication or the immediate area located outside of the home city. This includes cities located next to the home city.

2 = State: The story focuses on the publication's home state.

3 = U.S: The story focuses on a national issue.

4 = International: The story is centered on an international issue. If the issue involves the relationship between US and some other country; code it as international.

5 = No localization: The story is not focused on a particular location (e.g., Saran Wrap is a useful product.).

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks will already be coded on the printed out sheets of paper. If not marked by the coder, the coder can double-check the Web site to determine whether it is a link. An “o” will denote an outbound link, an “w” will denote a within site link, an “om” will denote an outside traditional media link and an “ob” will denote a link to an “outside blog”. Reporters’ email addresses will not be counted. See the definitions section for further details on what is considered a hyperlink. This variable will be measured at a ratio level; please count the total number of links for each category.

V17: Total: Count the total number of hyperlinks.

V18: Outbound links: Links to content not connected with publication.

V19: Within links: Links to content produced by the news outlet.

V20: Outbound Traditional Media links: Links that are connected to content produced by traditional print or broadcast news media sources.

V21: Outbound Blog links: Links that connect to outside blogs. ‘Outside’ meaning a blog not produced by the news outlet.

Sourcing

V22: Multiple Viewpoints:

DEFINITION: This variable measures the effort of the news organization to present a balanced story by presenting multiple viewpoints in a conflict.

This applies to stories about events or issues that involve controversy. Controversy includes physical, intellectual and ideological conflict or even a difference of opinion. Stories that are strictly factual should be excluded.

Stories should be included if they explicitly involve controversy or even if there is the implication that they could involve controversy, when in doubt code for conflict.

A story topic/issue is not the same as a viewpoint. A viewpoint involves taking a position about a topic/issue. A story could have multiple topics but not conflict. It could have multiple topics and only one of the topics have conflict.

Journalists cannot constitute a side of a conflict. The asking of contrary questions does not represent another side of a controversy.

Procedure:

1. Examine the story to see if it has explicit disagreement or conflict over an event or issue. Disagreement involves representatives from at least one position explicitly (not implied) stating that representatives of other

positions are incorrect/wrong, acted improperly/inappropriately, or acted immorally. If not, code it 9 below.

2. If there is disagreement or conflict, identify the number of assertions (sentences) for various sides. Then apply the proportions in the subcategories below.
3. Many of the paragraphs or assertions stories may not take sides. When measuring % of opinions, only consider those portions of the story where **opinions** are being expressed; do not automatically credit the **reporting** to one side or the other.
4. Some stories may include more than one example of conflict or disagreement (e.g., a story summarizing multiple events in Iraq). In such stories, a particular side of one of the conflicts must reach 66% to be coded "mostly one opinion."

"Refused to Comment Rule" in effect.

This rule requires that if, in a given news story, the "other side" refused to be quoted, that is, the reporter explicitly states that the other side refused to be quoted, then that attempt should be quantified/coded as a source at the appropriate level.

The operational definition of multiple viewpoints emphasized the effort of the news organization to present a balanced story by presenting multiple viewpoints. A story topic/issue is not the same as a viewpoint. A viewpoint involves taking a position about a topic/issue.

- 1 = All one opinion
- 2 = Mostly one opinion (at least 66% of all assertions)
- 3 = Two views (two views present, no one view has more than 65%)
- 4 = More than two views
- 9 = Not applicable/controversial

V23: Total Number of Sources:

Coders will count the total number of sources. All sources must be accompanied directly with an assertion. If a source is given in the plural form with an "s", count as two sources unless a specific number of sources are given by the reporter. Organizations are to be categorized as one source (e.g., White House, NATO and United Nations). Documents are considered sources; count the author of the document as the source. People who decline to comment are to be acknowledged as a source.

Source Diversity: Unofficial

V24: Non-institutionalized Sources: Experts, academics, specialists, scientists, professionals fall under this category. People who can speak on their own; and they are not likely to be speaking on behalf of any organization. Exclude people working in leadership positions on behalf of an organization (University President, University Public Relations).

V25: Average Citizens: refers to ordinary citizens who are quoted based on their opinion or experience with an issue, person or event. If you mark the story type variable as "opinion," then you must count the author as a source. Categorize transparent sources (e.g., newspaper editorialists or columnists) under this category. However, coders must categorize citizen media authors or bloggers differently: 1) Sarah Lewis (average/transparent) 2) Sarah (average/nontransparent), 3) Cool Dude (nonofficial anonymous/nontransparent). If the source is tied to a specific business categorize under business (Sam Davis/Tru Value employee), however, if the source's occupation is not listed, categorize under average citizen (Sam Davis/store employee).

Official

V26: Government: These refer to official agencies or personnel who belong to the federal, state and local governments, Congress, the judicial, the executive, or the legislature. The category contains the broad meaning of officials including bureaucrats, administrators, representatives, prosecuting attorneys, executives, and so on, who participate in governmental activities. In general, the sources are considered officials if they come through routine channels such as official proceedings, press releases, press conferences, and non-spontaneous events. Categorize candidates running for office here unless the journalist notes their profession.

V27: Business: This refers to the source which comes from a profit-based business enterprise, corporation or its legitimized employees. In a broad sense, business refers to every capitalistic industry along with manufacturing sectors. Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who belong to bureaucratic organizations are classified in this sector.

V28: Public and Private Organizations: This refers to people working for non-profit public or private institutions. A private institution is controlled by an individual or agency other than government. Classify public elementary or high school teachers/administrators in this category. Also count clergy under this category when a specific church is listed (Father Sam Davis of the Louis Congregational Church), however, categorize clergy under average citizen if no specific church is tied to them (Father Sam Davis).

V29-V30: Official and Unofficial Anonymous Sources:

The operational definition for the use of anonymous sources emphasized the presence or absence of sources that are not named by name. A source is any person or organization (through a spokesperson or published report) that has

been quoted directly or indirectly (paraphrased) in the story. Anonymous applies even if a description is applied, such as “a source close to the president” or “an Iraqi citizen.”

Official Anonymous

Any person or an organization with a title who is referred by their official capacity (e.g., Pentagon official, lobbyists, aides, etc), unless well-known such as White House, NATO, U.S. military, Red Cross, the mayor, of the Secretary of Defense. Lansing police will not be counted as anonymous, but Lansing police officials will be categorized under anonymous. Any organization followed by “officials” will be categorized under anonymous.

Unofficial Anonymous

Any person who is not identified by name (e.g., an Iraqi citizen, a witness, movie goers, museum visitors, travelers etc.) excluding people who are well-known by their title (e.g., the President)

V31-V32: Total Official and Unofficial Source

Count the total number of official and nonofficial sources excluding sources from the “other/can’t tell” category.

V33: Other/Can’t Tell

This refers to any source that does not fit in the above categories (e.g., everyone, readers, speakers).

V34-V35:

Opinion of another person: Code for the presence of an anonymous source offering an opinion of another person.

Used as the first quote in a story: Code for the presence of an anonymous source used as the first person attributed or quoted in a story.

V36-38: Gender

Coders are to determine gender based upon the person’s name or references to the person as a male or a female within the text. The coder is to “can’t tell or other” when the gender can not be determined, it is a document source, or if the author is an organization.

V39-V40: Source Transparency:

The operational definition for source transparency emphasized whether the journalist has provided information so the audience can decide for themselves whether to believe the information in the story. A source is any person or organization (through a spokesperson or published report) that has been quoted directly or indirectly (paraphrase) in the story. If poll or survey data is given in a story, the data are not counted as a source but are dealt with under data transparency (a CBS/NYT poll would be counted as one source).

To be transparent, a source must be named and have one or more of the following: (1) Title of source given; (2) degree to which the source has at least one of below: (a) direct level of knowledge, such as being an eyewitness, (b) identified professional qualification other than title, such as participating in an event. However, the Phoenix police would be considered transparent, but Phoenix police officials would not be considered transparent.

For an organization to be transparent, statements representing it must be attributed to a person who meets the criteria listed above for an individual source to be transparent. For a report to be transparent, it must reveal who did the research, who paid for it, when it was conducted and why it was conducted. A story must include all of these to count.

V41: Public Comment Opportunity

The coder is to determine whether there is an opportunity to publicly comment on the story. A text box or a link must be located adjacent the story. This excludes reporter's email addresses.

V42: Direct Reporter Email

The coder should note whether there is a direct email address to the reporter adjacent to the story. This will be marked as an "e".

V43: General Reporter Email

The coder should note whether a generic email address exists adjacent to the story (e.g., email the editor at editor@wykx.com). This will be already marked by a "ge".

V44: Profile Reporter Link

The coder is to mark whether the author's name directs the user to a profile of the author. The profile does not mean that the person's full identity is revealed. Profiles that are excluded are profiles that just list previous stories produced by the author. This will be marked as a "profile".

V45: Reporter Phone Number

The coder should note whether a journalist's phone number is adjacent to the story.

V46-V53: Story Attributes

The author will count the number of hyperlinks contained within the story. Some of these elements may be already marked on the copy if the content was accessible via a hyperlink. The letter marks are indicated next the attribute. Attributes must be directly connected with a text story.

Audio or Audio Link: audio of interview or audio story (A)

Broadcast Video or Video Link: video story with reporter narration, video, or video interview (V)

Slideshow or Link: photographs with or without narration created by the news outlet (S)

Photo or Link: a photograph or link to photo (P)

Graphic or Link: a visual representation that is more artistic than informational (G)

Map or Link: an informational graphic that is a simplified depiction of a space which highlights the relationships between components (M)

Poll or Link: a survey that a user can physically interact with online (Poll)

Infographic: a visual representation of information, data or knowledge related to the story. This variable excludes maps. (IG)

FOOTNOTES

¹ Research used to for other important elements of journalism: (e.g., Lemert, J. B., & Ashman, M. G. (1983). Extent of mobilizing information in opinion and news magazines. *Journalism Quarterly*, 60(4), 657-662; Lemert, J. B., Mitzman, B. N., Seither, M. A., Cook, R. H., & O'Neil, R. M. (1977). Journalists and mobilizing information. *Journalism Quarterly*, 54(4), 721-726; Rosen, J. (2006, March 1). The best blogging in the U.S., *BluePlateSpecial.net*; Moscovitz, L. (2002). Civic approach not so different than traditional model. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 23(4), 62-74; Dimitrova, D. V., Connolly-Ahern, C., Williams, A. P., Kaid, L. L., & Reid, A. (2003). Hyperlinking as gatekeeping: Online newspaper coverage of the execution of an American terrorist, *Journalism Studies*, 4(3), 401-414.

² Gladney classified these indicators to define content quality: 1) credibility, 2) utility, 3) immediacy, 4) relevancy, 5) fact-opinion separation, 6) exclusivity, 7) good writing, 8) good illustration, 9) depth, 10) breadth, 11) outside commentary and 12) editorial vigor.

³ News hole refers to the available content space that is required by journalists to fill. For example, newspaper journalists must fill all pages of the newspaper with content.

⁴ The Institute for Interactive Journalism has the largest list of citizen media sites. However, at the time the study was conducted the list was not available http://www.kcnn.org/citmedia_sites/.

⁵ Baristanet (Montclair, NJ), Edhat (Santa Barabara, CA), Fresno Famous (Fresno, CA), Westport Now (Westport, CT), ChiTown Daily News (Chicago, IL), New Haven Independent (New Haven, CT); Gotham Gazette (New York, NY); Philly Future (Philadelphia, PA), MNSpeak (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN) and Duke City Fix (Albuquerque, NM).

⁶ *Ratio-Level Variables (Pearson's Correlation)*: 1) Hyperlink Total: .990, 2) Outbound Link Total .959, 3) Within Link Total .995, 4) Outbound Media Link Total 1.0, 5) Outbound Blog Link Total .911, 6) Total Sources .889, 7) Non-Institutional Source Total .903, 8) Average Citizen Source Total .889, 9) Government Source Total .922, 10) Business Source Total .828, 11) Public/Private Organizations Source Total, 12) Official Anonymous Source Total .856, 13) Unofficial Anonymous Source Total .826, 14) Total Official Sources .841, 15) Total Unofficial Sources .819, 17) Other/Can't Tell Sources .823, 18) Female Source Total .877, 19) Male Source Total .967, 20) Can't Tell/Other Source Total .824, 21) Transparent Source Total .850, 22) Nontransparent Source Total .835, 23) Audio Elements 1.0, 24) Video Elements 1.0, 25) Slideshow Elements 1.0, 26) Photo Elements 1.0, 27) Graphic Elements 1.0, 28) Maps 1.0, 29) Polls 1.0 and 30) Infographics 1.0

⁷ *Nominal-level variables (Scott's Pi):* 1) Story Type .91, 2) Use of News Media Source 1.0, 3) Use of Press Release 1.0, 4) Story Topic .9, 5) Locational Information 1.0, 6) Identificational Information .845, 7) Tactical Information 1.0, 8) Localization of Story .836, 9) Multiple Viewpoints .848, 10) Opinion of Another Person by Anonymous Source 1.0, 11) Anonymous Source Used as First Quote 1.0, 12) Reporter Email .848, 13) General Email .978, 14) Author Profile and 15) Author Phone Number 1.0.

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