Digital Gatekeeping and Interaction on Community Media Websites: Are Outlets Selective in User-Generated Content Publication and Audience Communication?

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This dissertation titled
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Abstract

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Digital Gatekeeping and Interaction on Community Media Websites: Are Outlets Selective in User-Generated Content Publication and Audience Communication?

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The Web 2.0 era increasingly relies on submissions of content from non-professionals and interaction between the masses. Community newspapers work within a changing media market and one where the audience moves to digital consumption while economics greatly favor print. This study seeks to examine how community newspaper websites choose to engage in gatekeeping as it relates to user-generated content. It also seeks to learn the manner in which those who operate these sites interact with the public.

This dissertation uses two content analyses to separately gauge the publication of UGC and interaction on community newspaper websites. Furthermore, the researcher seeks through survey to learn the attitudes of those who operate community newspaper websites toward both the publication of UGC and where they believed it was important to interact with the public.

The study suggests there may be no easy answers in terms of technology for getting the public to contribute UGC. Simply making multiple requests for contributions, providing numerous manners for the public to submit, or even offering a special location on the web for all submitted content does not seem enough to convince the public to contribute more content. However, this dissertation indicated direct interaction does appear to increase the number of comments a site receives and the attitudes of managers UGC and interactivity also may influence public actions in terms of participation.
This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Sarah, and daughter, Abigail, who are my motivation and support. Sarah, you have kept me on track and grounded in a way that no one else could.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Interactivity and user-generated content represent two concepts long debated as part of the fabric of community journalism, yet the application of these ideas with the rapid development and change in communication online remains important in digital environments. Research in this area, therefore, could become more important as community publications, like all media companies, attempt to follow their audience online (Abernathy, 2014). This dissertation views community using the definition of Delanty (2003), which considers community as people who engage in social activity and who use community as a form of meaning and identity resulting in a civic bond. It also uses a quantifiable definition that limits community journalism to publications with less than 50,000 subscribers (Lauterer, 2006). The public might have a stronger role and a voice in the production of content within community journalism. For example, smaller publications publish user-generated content as a form of audience interaction both in print and online (Rennie, 2007; Reader, 2012a). In addition, various studies indicate community media operate in a number of manners that differ from metropolitan media outlets (Byerly, 1961; Kennedy, 1974; Kirkpatrick, 2001; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2012a). The distinctions between community media and metropolitan newspapers are why this dissertation examines UGC and interactivity through the lens of community journalism.

This dissertation necessitates going beyond the concept of community media to define community. Additionally, this project reviews community media websites and interaction therein, so virtual community must be a consideration in defining community.
Virtual communities represent online areas where people engage with each other to generate social interaction, have common interests, and assist in interpersonal issues (Rheingold, 2000). Furthermore, this dissertation looks at a type of hybrid community, one that exists in both the physical and virtual world (Gaved & Mulholland, 2005). In this study, the common interest is geographic areas, yet the interaction between individuals occurs in the digital sphere. Additionally, it is possible that many of those interacting may have offline connections as well as online interactions in these hybrid communities as they are defined within this dissertation.

Community media typically strive to develop close relationships with people in their geographic communities, a part of supporting a sense of community (Byerly, 1961; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2012a). The submitted material in community journalism could include wedding announcements, club news, sports scores, photographs, or nearly any type of material. The publication of user-generated content is one area that differentiates community media from metropolitan publications (Rennie, 2007).

Research Objectives

The intent of this dissertation is to research how community media make choices regarding the publication of UGC on their websites as a function of gatekeeping and then measures direct interaction with their audiences by reviewing online newspaper comment sections. The design of this dissertation pursues the furtherance of both academic and professional understanding of how community media make gatekeeping decisions through the publication of user-generated content and how that those decisions might influence community media outlets’ relationship with their audiences. Both gatekeeping
and interactivity theories will guide this analysis by potentially suggesting manners in which newsrooms might communicate with the audiences to create the greatest engagement. Furthermore, the intent is to extend scholarly thought about how community news outlets seek to interact with audiences digitally and could provide guidance for those working within the community news industry who might consider changes in their online business model. This project fills a need in community journalism research. There are few quantitative studies that focus on publications in the United States that examine the issues of either the publication of user-generated content and audience interaction online as it relates to community journalism, and a search using ArticlesPlus and Google Scholar databases using the combined search terms community journalism, community media, UGC, story type, article type, hard and soft news, online and digital media, found no studies of community media that divided a study of UGC and interactivity based on story type. Most studies in this area previously focused on either national or regional publications.

There are, however, issues and challenges with the public’s involvement in news production within digital media. One of these challenges is the increasing power of the consumer as a news producer, which some believe challenges the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). In community journalism, this challenge to the gatekeeping role may not be as worrisome because journalists at these smaller publications often allowed the public to have influence (Meyer & Daniels, 2011). This dissertation reviews story comments online because of their connection to feedback, where some research on interactivity begins (Wiener, 1948; Nordlund, 1978). In addition,
feedback is one of the methods that community media outlets could use to provide cohesive representation of the community (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008).

**Organization of the Study**

The study continues in chapter 2 with a more thorough examination of community and community media including its history as part of the basis for studying both the publication of UGC and interaction. Within chapter 3 the researcher reviews relevant literature relating to the publication and purposes of user-generated content and its role within the gatekeeping process. In addition to traditional ideas of gatekeeping, this section includes an examination of networked gatekeeping theory and gatewatching, two ideas that attempt to explain changes to gatekeeping related to technology. Chapter 4 reviews relevant literature in regards to interactivity. Chapter 5 appraises engagement and how all these elements come together to further the theory that surrounds community media and its differences from metropolitan publications, it also examines the economic implications for community media of these ideas. In chapter 6, the paper presents the research questions and hypotheses. Discussion of the method occurs in chapter 7 where the researcher appraises why content analysis and survey could help to answer the research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 8 includes findings from the content analysis related to UGC, while chapter 9 comprises results from the interactivity content analysis. Chapter 10 considers the empirical results connected to the survey, which questions community media website managers about their attitudes toward allowing the public to submit content to their website. It also gauges their opinions about where and how often and where community journalists interact with the public. Finally, chapter 11 will serve
as the discussion including the implications of these findings for community media research and how it relates to the community media industry. Chapter 12 concludes by assessing how this study furthers research related to community media and how they attempt to engage their audiences by publishing UGC and interacting with their communities. This final chapter will also review future research relating to this topic.
Chapter 2: The Development of Community

Early research about community primarily connected the concept to social integration and face-to-face communication involving a feeling of membership and shared emotional connection (Tonnies, 1957). In this way, communities acted similarly to extended families, and the likely result was members who remained united despite any factors that might divide them, including distance (Tonnies, 1957). The historical relationship of this initial definition of community may partially explain why people often think about community in terms of geographic proximity (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002). These early researchers understood that simply living in close proximity did not ensure community and that consistent social interaction outside of commerce was necessary (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002; Tonnies, 1957). This differs from society, which Tonnies (1957) defined as people who might have reasons to unite but remain fundamentally separated. Other research proposed that society represented an imaginary or mechanical structure and occurred due to the rational decisions made by individuals (Delanty, 2003).

There are researchers who differ from Tonnies’s views of community and society and have reevaluated the concept. Delanty stated he considered Tonnies’ ideas as they relate to community “intellectually and politically discredited,” (2003, pg. 152). Meanwhile Calhoun (1980) stated early definitions of community were idealized and simplified because Tonnies relied upon his bias toward a different and simpler way of life. The goal should be to debate a more analytical description for the term community (Calhoun, 1980).
This contrarian research helped community evolve as a concept beyond the small agrarian communities compared to growing cities that influenced Tonnies (1957). The notion of community became more elastic and can include groups of common interests based on race, interests, profession, or religious affiliation (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993; Reader, 2012a). Some researchers go beyond the idea of shared interest and communication, adding that reciprocity through the sharing of favors based on friendship is necessary for community (Putnam, 2000).

Community at its most basic level may only need two things: that those within the community have something in common, and that they somehow differentiate themselves from other groups (Cohen, 1985). Some researchers who studied the topic believe communities represent more than a group of people who are somehow different from others. Community is real, connected, and occurs naturally because people perceive these differences (Delanty, 2003). The conscious idea of community at times focused upon what makes people different and the boundaries they place between one another (Cohen, 1985). Therefore, community can serve as a construct to identify a group to which one believes he or she belongs (Cohen, 1985). Initial definitions of community are closely tied to location, and therefore, the next section discusses communities of place.

**Communities of Place**

Within communities of place, there are three elements believed necessary for community: geographic proximity, interest, and emotional attachment (Willmott, 1986). Some argue the ideal situation for the development of community occurs when both a place and attachment occur in combination, and connection is strongest when at least two
of the three elements of community, as defined by Willmott (1986), exist (Crow & Allen, 1994).

The defining traits related to communities of place may become clear when individuals from one community interact with those from another (Cohen, 1985). If communities rely upon location, then these geographic boundaries should somehow be important to the group’s selected symbolism (Cohen, 1985). This symbolism supports the traditions of communities of place, and its members understand their common interests (Cohen, 1985). The close ties of communities of place and the communication therein can help to describe how communication evolved.

**Communication Evolution**

Human communication began within the oral tradition as a safety mechanism, a way to allow humans to communicate while keeping both hands free (Schramm, 1988). Word of mouth once was the common method for passing along information (Schramm, 1988). When printing started around 700 AD, it progressed slowly; however, once print accelerated, it created a cultural explosion that not only increased literacy among all classes of people, but also changed humans’ style of communication (Schramm, 1988). The mass media developed because of increased printing and created a system with well-defined roles of senders and receivers of information (Schramm, 1988). One characteristic of mass media is it circulates the same message to its entire audience (Schramm, 1988). Even in small communities, eventually the center of home life moved from the front porch, where families entertained friends in the past, to the living room
where the radio and then television set allowed the public to easily receive mass information (Schramm, 1998).

The evolution of the media relates to the idea of community because media outlets developed based at least partially on location (Janowitz, 1951). The local weekly developed within the United States as part of an effort to educate the populace and help the public to understand developments within the area they lived (Sims, 1969). These outlets sought to connect to their communities and adopt the values of those who would become their readers (Stamm, 1985). In part, this was because editors assumed those with community ties would want to read information about that geographic area (Stamm, 1985). These early political writings were the precursors to today’s community media (Sims, 1969). In fact, the earliest use of newspapers was in community settings (Stamm, 1985 pg. 3).

Media History

It seems challenging to discuss the history of community media without first examining journalism’s history in the United States. The U.S. press began as smaller publications used by the merchant class and then by the political class as a way to promote the group’s chosen issues (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; De Toqueville, 2015; Williams, 2010). In addition, the partisan presses developed in service to factions that developed during the 17th century within American politics (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; Williams, 2010). These early publications attempted to promote local social solidarity (Janowitz, 1951), with a goal to create as many publications as possible to neutralize the potential effect of
any individual public journal (De Toqueville, 2015). The passions and opinions of publishers (i.e., printers) controlled the early efforts of the American press (De Toqueville, 2015). Over time, those who worked at newspapers grew to consider themselves the “fourth estate” and the voice of the people, with the goal of holding the powerful to account (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009; Gans, 1999; Williams, 2010).

The American press became more aware of local community news in the 1760s, although journalism did not begin to post a majority of stories about local issues for another 50 years (Avery, 1986). Following the War of 1812, newspapers in the United States transitioned from content that contained more information about national issues to a focus on local concerns (Avery, 1986). There is some reason to believe that evolution was an attempt by publishers to pander to local interests combined with a growing sense of local community developing in the U.S. (Avery, 1986). Additionally, UGC also had a role in the development of American newspapers, since early U.S. newspapers published mostly articles that came from a number of sources not employed by the publisher (Williams, 2010).

The development of the newspaper industry shifted from anonymous sheets to publications that listed their publisher and editor (Schramm, 1988). This occurred as editors began to take on a greater role in the content that appeared in print (Williams, 2010), which eventually led to the reduced importance of UGC. Other changes to newspaper content corresponded to the increased control of articles by the editors of publications; this included the idea of objectivity (Calcutt & Hammond, 2011).
Commercial newspapers of this time aimed to be both popular and universal with income generation as a goal (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). Because of the focus on profit, print media generally attempted to meet the expectations of the local population (Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, & White, 2009). The changes within the industry eventually led to changes between community newspapers and their larger brethren.

**Community News History**

As some media companies expanded for mass audiences, there remained small publications where one person served as printer, reporter, and salesperson (Schramm, 1988). The community newspaper survived as a form of popular media due to its appeal to the local community (Schramm, 1988). These community news outlets never intended, or sought, to reach the widest possible audience (Janowitz, 1951; Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002), nor did they appear to have much in common with the elite publications that attempted to influence the difference makers in society (Schramm, 1988).

Many make the incorrect assumption that community journalism is simply journalism on a smaller scale, but community media differs from regional and national publications in more ways than just size (Reader & Hatcher, 2012). Community journalism focused on messages connected to everyday life and the topics of most interest to readers (Kirkpatrick, 2001, p. 20). In addition, community journalism represents a necessary area of research because these media outlets embody by far the majority of publications. Editor and Publisher DataBook (2017) listed more than 7,184
daily or weekly newspapers in the United States with less than 50,000 circulation; this compares to only four publications in the country with a circulation of more than half a million. Yet, many within academia overlook community journalism because journalism research tends to focus on the elites within the industry (Reader, 2012a).

Part of the reason community media received less attention is the attitude of some toward the product. Community media gained a reputation as a booster press, an idea that became common in the 18th and 19th centuries (Reader, 2012a). Community media outlets typically focus on positive developments, while metropolitan publications often focus on the negative (Kirkpatrick, 2001). This booster reputation, which means focusing on the positive elements of a community, may be the reason many elites look down upon community journalism. Those at the largest publications believed they set the standards for journalism, despite the fact these mass audience publications represented only a small portion of the industry (Reader, 2012a). Those who study the issue believe community journalism is integral to all aspects of community culture, including history, economics, identity, values, policy debates, and public opinion influencing the communities they cover (Reader & Hatcher, 2012).

Even in the most unusual of cases, such as a situation where the government created a community newspaper as part of a propaganda effort, community journalism can still help accomplish the goal of supporting community among residents (Carey, 2013). While the publication that was the focus of Carey’s (2013) study had a booster spirit, it also acknowledged negative occurrences in the community and had an overall focus on the idea that everyone should work together to support development of the area.
While it took five issues before the newspaper received public submissions, citizen contributions were one way in which the publication overcame the secrecy of a publication created within a military community (Carey, 2013). The history of communication led to many traditions within community media that influence the decisions made within the industry.

The Traditions of Community Journalism

The history of community news helped differentiate it from other types of media. Research indicates community journalists may have dissimilar thoughts toward credibility, use different types of sources, and often have a distinctive relationship to those sources compared to those who work at metropolitan news outlets (Forde, 2011). Some believe the more locally focused a media outlet, the more enmeshed its staff become in their communities, which leads staff to develop interests similar to those of the community as a whole (Brigada, 2016).

Community media often cater to a smaller audience through the segmentation (Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002). In the past, it was thought of as the homogenous nature of community journalism consumers helped explain this segmentation (Byerly, 1961). Researchers now approach the topic mostly from the stance that even small communities differ considerably with community integration designed to take positive feelings concerning the community and a willingness to become involved (McLeod et. al, 1996). Community journalism can provide the marginalized an outlet to participate and make their ideas heard (Howley, 2005). One researcher found that in the past, when a new ethnic group moved to an area, the relocated community
often created their own media that allowed members of the ethnic group continue to rely on one another in a new location (Tsagarousianou, 2002). These types of community media outlets often succeeded because the group that was new to an area felt disenfranchised by mainstream publications and developed bonds with the outlet that catered to them (Tsagarousianou, 2002). However, some argued that ethnically or otherwise specifically group-based community media had a negative impact on the groups they covered by keeping them isolated and preventing them from assimilation into the mainstream population (Tsagarousianou, 2002).

**Why Is Community News Different?**

The central tenet of several community media studies is community journalists have a more intimate relationship with those they cover than those who work for metropolitan publications (Byerly, 1961; Kennedy, 1974; Lauterer, 2006; Reader, 2012a). Of course, not every small publication maintains a close relationship to its community, and this also does not mean that a reporter from a larger regional publication cannot attain a devoted rapport with his or her community (Reader, 2012a). Yet, it seems challenges exist for journalists who want to have an intimate relationship with residents in a much larger city (Reader, 2012a). In smaller communities, it is possible that the close relationship comes from frequent interaction with the public in a fashion that does not happen with the same consistency at larger publications (Lauterer, 2006). Furthermore, some research has found community journalists often feel an obligation to the communities they serve, and community members feel a sense of ownership in the outlet (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980; Richards, 2012). In addition, there is a possibility
that readers of community newspapers have different news values than from the readers of larger publications (Kirkpatrick, 2001).

Another commonly noted difference between community and metro journalism has been the business model. While both community and mainstream media base their income on selling advertising to support journalism, they diverge in their manner of conducting business (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). Business relationships, like everything else in community media, have been more intimate (Lacy, 2012). Management within community media, as opposed to their metropolitan brethren, offers a more hands-on style (Kirkpatrick, 2001). Those who operated community media outlets had a dual role working within both editorial and advertising (Kennedy, 1974; Lauterer, 2006). In addition, the overall economic factors that face community media are distinctive compared to larger publications because of the limited number of potential advertisers and reliance upon them (Lacy, 2012). Staffing also impacted the editorial operations of community journalism because community news outlets typically lack staffs large enough for specialization (Kirkpatrick, 2001). Staff members frequently move from topic to topic and interact with a comparatively larger portion of the population (Kirkpatrick, 2001).

**Alternative Descriptions of Community Media**

The descriptions of community media above are far from the only ideas used by researchers to discuss community journalism. Some attempted to define community media and alternative media nearly interchangeably (Forde, 2011). Others, such as Howley (2005; 2009) consider community media strictly noncommercial outlets that
must be produced entirely with UGC or citizen journalism. In addition, while this dissertation focuses on community media as print outlets, in the U.S. and particularly outside of the country, radio is a common form of community journalism (Howley, 2005; Day, 2009). In fact, using Howley’s (2005; 2009) ideas the only media that would qualify as community media are those that are completely community operated by volunteer members of the community without any professional staff, which would eliminate the entire population for this dissertation. Additionally, this study does not place an emphasis on several other types of community journalism recognized by some scholars, which includes minority or ethnic-focused outlets (Deuze, 2006). However, these outlets may be emerging worldwide as part of a growing trend of participatory media (Deuze, 2006).

In addition, community media often do not fit well within the structures of traditional communication theories (Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002). Howley (2005) bemoans the fact that community media do not have their own theory. However, researchers, such as Lowrey, Brozana, and Mackay (2008), would argue that there is a line of research that attempts to explain the differences and therefore, develop theory surrounding community media.

**Virtual Communities**

Changes in technology altered how some researchers think about community (Delanty, 2003). Digital technology removed challenges related to proximity, and allowed everyone to communicate with whomever they desired (Tremetzberger, 2009). Several decades ago, some research theorized that face-to-face, place-based communities would become unnecessary because of technology (Bell, 1979). In the digital era, local
and global spaces could be inconsequential because of technological tools (de Moragas Spa, Domingo & Lopez, 2002; Howley, 2009). These web-based virtual communities primarily developed around shared interests (Aufderheide, 2011; Boyd, 2011; Park, 2011). Online virtual communities engage in collective action, have social regulations, and participate in shared rituals similar to offline communities (Parks, 2011). In virtual communities people socially interact in the same manner they would in a physical environment but those actions occur in a digital location (Rheingold, 2000).

People in virtual communities use words on screens to exchange pleasantries and argue, engage in intellectual discourse, conduct commerce, exchange knowledge, share emotional support, make plans, brainstorm, gossip, feud, fall in love, find friends and lose them, play games, flirt, create a little high art and a lot of idle talk. (Rheingold, 2000, p. 6)

In addition, online communities engage in collective action, have social regulations, and participate in shared rituals similar to offline communities (Parks, 2011). However, while online content might attempt to generate civic engagement, there remains debate regarding if online networks are more or less interactive than the offline communities that came before (Walther et al, 2011). Citizen activity could be important in online communities, and these virtual communities should also include undertakings so that those who feel excluded offline can feel included online (Malina & Jankowski, 2002). Yet, virtual communities are not necessarily more open than other groups with members exhibiting skepticism at times toward those who are outside the community and toward platforms that are corporately owned (Johnson & Lowe, 2015).
Some research suggests that constructed and established forms of community can survive, and the construction of contemporary community may be more likely online (Delanty, 2003). Furthermore, some suggest that due to the interactivity possible with new technology researchers should eliminate the distinction between communities of place and virtual communities (Delanty, 2003). Yet, differences seem to exist between geographic and virtual communities. For example using Putnam’s (2000) idea of reciprocity, those who lurk, i.e. read comments within a virtual community but never post, are not part of the group. However, other researchers of virtual community consider those lurkers members of the group based on their knowledge and interest in it (Blanchard & Markus, 2004). It is possible that technology has created unique social structures within virtual community that often differ based on engagement (Saramäki et al., 2014). This leads into the third type of community, which combines elements of place-based and virtual communities.

**Hybrid Communities**

The idea of the hybrid community serves as a combination of communities of place and virtual communities. Social interaction is one of the primary terms that can help define community (Bell, 1979). Even within digital communities, shared location was one potential identification point for members (Hollander, 2002). The hybrid community combines virtual and geographic communities because people tend to engage more online with those they have offline relationships with, and hybrid communities allow bridging and potential bonding within groups in terms of social capital (Ellison et al., 2011).
Online community can serve as a place for members of a geographic community to discuss issues that are important locally (Murillo, 2009). Hybrid communities could use the web to enhance communication for those who live near one another and further the sense of community within geographic boundaries (Gaved & Mulholland, 2005). Furthermore, these hybrid communities might use the increased communication methods of the Internet paired with the trust, identity, and reputation also associated with communities of place (Gaved & Mulholland, 2005).

Hybrid communities have the potential to address a number of digital inequalities, and may represent a step forward toward “symmetrical communication between peers, rather than a centralized publishing model, with end users passively receiving content” (Gaved & Mulholland, 2005, p. 7). However, technology can be both positive and negative for community allowing interest-based communities to come together more easily, but also making it possible for local communities to become more fragmented and divided (Howley, 2005). Some believe technology only matters in terms of community journalism if it supports the furtherance of community media’s goals and unique nature (Howley, 2005).

**The Role of Community Media**

Community journalism often operates at the personal level of communication as described by Tonnies, as opposed to the societal within metropolitan publications (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004). This connects to the idea of some that community journalism often occurs in rural communities where people typically have a closer attachment to the area they live (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004). Community media use the
connection between media and place (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008) and potentially move that connection into the digital sphere. Furthermore, virtual communities relate to community media because communities of interest are not solely linked to generic interests. Those within virtual communities operate in much the same manner as those in physical communities by showing loyalty and a strong connection to their community (Rheingold, 2000). Community journalism seems to take the loyalty and connection of both placed based community and virtual community and attempts to connect those using a virtual space. Therefore, community journalism websites may represent a form of hybrid community and provide members of a community with a location where they can share the important elements of life, including births and deaths (Murillo, 2009).

**Community Media and Connection**

Community media traditionally have more social capital than larger publications (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). Many community media outlets offer the potential for public involvement in news creation and technology can provide an opportunity for all citizens to serve as their own messengers (Jankowski, 2002; Kim & Lowery, 2014; Luce, Jackson, & Thorsen, 2016). Some believe digital media has the ability to stimulate and rejuvenate citizen involvement at least as it relates to politics (Malina & Jankowski, 2002). If community journalists successfully engage and interact with their audience, it could result in the reporters and editors meeting the audiences’ needs and becoming part of the community they serve (Forde, 2011). Citizens’ participation with media offers the
potential to promote self-esteem and empowerment along with possibility strengthening public communication (Howley, 2009; Vatikiotis, 2009).

**Defining Community Journalism and Why It Matters**

Size alone is not enough to differentiate between community journalism and the mass media (Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002). The tone of community media often differs from metropolitan publications in that research has found community journalists do not typically feel as though they confront the establishment in the same manner as metro reporters (Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002). Furthermore, community journalism in some ways operates more closely akin to interpersonal communication (Hollander, Stappers, & Jankowski, 2002). Community media have the potential to demassify the traditional media and create media that is more democratic than the society in which it exists (Hochheimer, 2002).

Size is one way to measure community media, but a potentially more effective way is to look at content and how much of it is community focused (Reader, 2012a). Community media often represent themselves as agents of the community, focusing on personal news, local organizations, and social news (Janowitz, 1951; Lowrey, Brozana & Mackay, 2008). In this way, community journalism extended the personal and social relationships of its readers to help maintain connection and cohesion (Janowitz, 1951; Lowrey, Brozana & Mackay, 2008). Community journalism focused upon, and relished in, the small details of everyday life that the metropolitan newspapers ignore (Lauterer, 2006). This type of information that the media elites consider trivial is one of the main methods of differentiating, which helps to define community journalism.
In this dissertation, I use the American Society of News Editor’s definition cited by Lauterer (2006) that demarcates community journalism as publications with 50,000 circulation or less. A quantifiable definition of community journalism is necessary for content analysis. In addition, I add clarification from the Reader (2012a) definition, which includes both corporate and independently owned media companies, along with for-profit and nonprofit media outlets.

The examination of community media publication of UGC and participation of the public in commenting on online articles on community journalism websites may help further the understanding of how the public chooses to participate. Furthermore, the attitude of community journalists being tested should also provide insight into if those managing these websites are attempting to exert gatekeeping control on the public’s use of and access to information. The geographic limitation of community within this dissertation is pragmatic and based on the location-focused content of the grand majority of community news websites. Yet, community media listen to the community and offer cohesive representations, and the sharing of identity is not necessarily linked to any geographic boundaries (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). The next chapter of this paper takes a more in-depth look at the specifics surrounding the publication of UGC at community media outlets.
Chapter 3: UGC and Gatekeeping Choices

Citizen contributions can represent an important part of the content of many online news sources (Shirky, 2008). However, user-generated content also has the potential to serve as a competitor for traditional media organizations. Furthermore, news outlets appear to have underestimated the risk that citizens posed to them through the production of UGC; the only threats the media previously considered were from other media outlets (Shirky, 2008). Many media companies, although not necessarily news companies, have created technology designed to simplify public submissions of content (Gillmor, 2004). Gillmor theorizes this is necessary because the public cannot just be a part of the media, but with the growth on online distribution channels they must be the media (2004).

This section reviews UGC and its relationship to gatekeeping theory and applies the relevant literature to help understand how and why media companies make choices about the publication of user-generated content. In addition, it also attempts to determine what drives community newspapers to use UGC and what role UGC fills for their audiences. In particular, by focusing on UGC, this section seeks, when possible, to link community news, gatekeeping theory, and the publication of UGC.

An Understanding of UGC

User-generated content represents a challenging term because it has had different meanings over time, which adjust along with technological evolution. UGC at its most basic level represents published materials contributed by the audience without further definition or limitation (Thurman, 2008; Meyer & Daniels, 2011). UGC definitions have
traditionally focused on print uses, including examples such as letters to the editors or public submissions such as articles about the local garden club, junior high sports team or civic organization (Lauterer, 2006, Reader, 2012a). These measures of UGC, however, were typically heavily controlled by the publication (Gans, 2003; Reader, 2012b). One form of UGC, letters to the editor, has been one of the more popular and audience satisfying elements of community papers (Byerly, 1961; Chung & Nah, 2009), so it makes sense to attempt to allow additional discourse with the community in an online setting.

Most UGC will never see mass consumption, and the producer does not expect large audiences. The difference in potential targeted audience could challenge media outlets seeking to publish these citizen contributions. UGC typically represents common elements of life presented using the same or similar technology as professional media content (Shirky, 2008). Yet the publishing of this seemingly banal information due to technology advancement allows this material to reach small audiences, or it can extend to mass ones because of the web (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008). Producers of UGC do not necessarily mean for their contributions to be the same as material produced by journalists. Citizen submitters often contribute content about items that they are personally involved with and take a more activist position when writing about other issues (Horan, 2013).

The idea of a media culture centered on participation is not new; there have been examples throughout history that the current situation mirrors (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). While there is more participation in contemporary culture, it does not mean that
participation did not occur in the past (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). However, UGC is not simply the ability of the public to use technology to create; it also requires the creation of tools so the public can distribute the content (Shirky, 2008). UGC occurs on sites ranging from YouTube, Twitter, Flickr or, as this dissertation focuses upon, the website of the local community news outlet, which connects to why technology is relevant to discussing UGC. Media use of UGC has both a traditional basis, and influence from digital technology.

**Media Use of UGC**

The use of UGC not only occurs in print publications or community media; it has staked a sizable position in digital media. A number of web-based publications make extensive use of material submitted by the public, a notable example being the *Huffington Post*. There are a few publications that allow citizens to create their own online blog within the outlet’s website, and these posts do not necessarily contain a similar appearance or structure as traditional media (Shirky, 2008).

As UGC moved to the web, definitions changed and at least to some degree the audience received either more freedom (Bruns, 2003; 2008; 2011), or some illusion of more freedom (Barzilia-Nahon, 2005; 2006; 2008; Coddington & Holton, 2014) in participating in digital networks. Digital focused definitions of UGC include more freedom in terms of public contribution and allow citizens to publish their own comments, articles, photographs or other content (Gans, 2003; Hermida and Thurman, 2008).
This dissertation uses a simplistic approach to UGC in that it includes all content identified as being submitted by the public. The reason for this definition is mostly practical. This dissertation views UGC as part of a content analysis. The method prevents the researcher from truly understanding how much editing public contributions receive prior to publication, and therefore how much control the public has regarding their submissions. This wide definition allows for the inclusion of the largest expanse of citizen submissions ranging from the traditional letters to the editor to photo slideshows and videos not possible in print. This definition is relevant because while many believe the public has more gatekeeping influence online (Bruns, 2003; 2008; 2011; Singer, 2012), there remain questions about how much influence those who own networks place on content. An open definition of UGC seems to offer the most utility.

**Gatekeeping and UGC**

This section defines gatekeeping for this dissertation. The idea that public can contribute content is not a new one, many publications chosen as gatekeepers to allow public contributions that meet the standards for submission set by journalists. Media outlets make gatekeeping choices each time they determine whether to publish UGC regardless of platform. Media gatekeeping represents the selections made by journalists about what to publish, with or without consideration of the basis for those decisions (Bass, 1969; White, 1997; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Researchers understood, since the beginnings of gatekeeping research, that selections made by the media were subjective (White, 1997). Yet, in the days of print journalists managed to maintain this subjective power to determine what news their audience saw through the role of gatekeeping, which
represents the process of how billions of potential messages are winnowed down to the millions published (Shoemaker, 1997). In the past, space strongly influenced gatekeeping decisions; for example, local newspaper editors received two to five times more material than they had room to publish in print (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Furthermore, classic ideas of gatekeeping relate to journalists’ professional identity as gatekeepers (Boczkowski, 2004). Journalists have for years appeared to draw part of their distinctive identity from their ability to control what news their audience sees (Boczkowski, 2004).

One of the challenges with digital gatekeeping is there are billions of potential media messages and the public has limited capacity to handle those messages (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The Internet’s emergence as a disruptive technology appears to have changed how society accesses information (Ashuri, 2013) and altered the media’s role as gatekeepers (Singer, 2014). Singer (2014) argued that the Internet made gatekeeping a two-step process where both the audience and journalists participate. This two-step process involved the journalist’s initial decision about how to distribute information, and then the public followed by choosing where to share the information (Singer, 2014).

Disagreement regarding the power-sharing relationship between the public and media exists at least partially because of the supposed lack of news judgment of the masses (Goode, 2012). Community newspaper editors, in particular, experienced challenges when deciding what to publish regarding the various stakeholders in the publication, because they do not want to offend advertisers or readers (Tichenor, Donohue & Olien, 1980; Donohue & Olien, 1997). This struggle over what should be
printed in an era where numerous locations exist for people to share content seems to constrain any discussion of gatekeeping and UGC as it relates to digital media

**The Benefits of UGC**

In making gatekeeping decisions about UGC, media professionals should consider two primary beneficiaries: first those who submit content and the second the publications that receive it. Internal motivations influence someone’s attitude, which eventually results in behavior (O’Keefe, 2002). If someone has a positive attitude toward public submissions to news, those people will most likely contribute UGC (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008). In addition, publishing opinion-based UGC either in print or online is part of the submitter’s attempt at civic engagement (Leung, 2009). Furthermore, the publication of these opinion-based posts represents a potential method of sharing ideas and supporting or continuing community (Leung, 2009). Members of the public contribute to news in multiple ways through the selecting, commenting and distributing news content as well as creating their own in a manner similar to journalists (Thorson, 2013).

Publications also consider the potential benefit from publication of UGC. UGC increasingly draws a larger share of the audiences’ attention and has become increasingly important for many online news sites (Howe, 2008). Some research states that user-generated content is no longer optional for online media companies; it has become a necessity (Rennie, 2007; Briggs, 2011). Someone’s potential contribution of UGC is important to many sites because many online communities depend upon the submission of UGC to survive as peer-to-peer networks (Velasquez, Wash, Lampe & Bjornrud,
There is a clear business motive to allowing UGC for media companies as a method of staving off online competition (Bakker & Pantti, 2009). In addition, there is a certain ease in the modern era of participating in communication, and this is of interest to many businesses (Susarla, Oh & Tan, 2012). Receiving free material through UGC creates a conversation with the public and improves the relationship between the media outlet and consumers (Bakker & Pantti, 2009). This additional material can generate additional advertising revenue for media businesses if the public has interest in viewing UGC (Bakker & Pantti, 2009).

In addition, when it comes to online communication some expected UGC was part of supplementing community and could create a dialogue with the audience, while it also provided content for no cost to media organizations (McMillan, 1998). UGC can help create audience loyalty, because if someone can upload UGC to one source they become less likely to use another media outlet (Huang, 2016). Participatory journalism such as UGC can work on platforms where content from citizens and journalists coexist, and it might better serve the industry to use professionals as a way to fill in the gaps left by citizens as opposed to vice versa (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013). Companies such as The Guardian created applications designed to make submitting both written UGC and photography as simple as possible (Halliday, 2013). Interaction with the audience remains important because the media should attempt to understand an ecosystem where not just UGC, but also user-circulated content is important (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).
Community journalists in particular utilized UGC as a method of interaction with the public (Reader, 2012a). Community media use UGC to offer coverage within a geographic area (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013). UGC also potentially attracts a different audience for community media who might not consume general news but want to read citizen contributions (Holton, Coddington, & de Zuniga, 2013). Community media use UGC as a method not just of attracting audience, but also for maintaining it (Holton, Coddington, & de Zuniga, 2013). Staff size also influences how much UGC community media publish, meaning that publications with fewer employees seem to use citizen contributions to overcome their staffing limitations (Nah, Yamamoto & Chung, 2015). Yet, community journalists, as with journalists at media outlets of all sizes, have varying opinions about publishing UGC.

**The Attitude of Journalists**

Journalists’ attitudes may impact UGC publication on journalism websites. Journalists at mainstream publications are not necessarily enthusiastic about increased interaction with the audience, and this includes the publication of user-generated content (Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998; Singer, 2010). In past studies, journalists have appeared more comfortable with the traditional one-way communication model of providing information to the audience (Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998). Furthermore, journalists often see the world primarily through a lens created by others within the media and to a lesser extent by researchers (Shirky, 2008; Usher, 2017). Many editors at metro publications have a negative attitude toward reducing their gatekeeping control over content and seem resistant to adopting the
participatory potential of the web by limiting or refusing public contributions (Domingo et al., 2008; Krumsvik, 2013). One reason for this may be protecting traditional news gathering, reporting methods, and publication standards (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010). It seems editors in favor of UGC publication understand the decisions likely results in the lessening of gatekeeping control, but appear to believe the benefit of public contribution is necessary (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010).

Additionally, while the technology can allow simpler participation by the audience, most metro newspapers simply do not use those technologies (Hermida & Thurman, 2008). Overall, larger and particularly corporate-owned media companies consider the web more important and willingly take advantage of online innovations (Krumsvik, Skogerbo, & Storsul, 2013). The size of a media company, not an individual outlet, impacts the willingness of community media to adopt innovative new technology (Krumsvik, Skogerbo, & Storsul, 2013).

The seemingly negative attitude toward UGC does not appear to be limited to metropolitan publications; some community media editors also restrict or disallow UGC publication, possibly as a manner of limiting its potential influence (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010). Yet, overall community media have traditionally chosen to publish UGC, at least in print (Byerly, 1961; Lauterer, 2006). Smaller companies with more limited budgets might not take many, if any, steps to simplify submission for the public (Ferrucci, 2017).

The gatekeeping choices made within digital media likely influence the news. Changes in the way that people access news results in most types of media acting more
like community media, this occurs ostensibly because digital media primarily appeal to niches and communities (Rennie, 2006). Ultimately, the distribution of UGC provides an opportunity for the public to involve themselves in news creation (Rennie, 2006).

Overall, the attitudes of journalists seem to directly influence gatekeeping choices through how they allow the public to participate in news creation. Media outlets tend to use UGC for soft news, while saving hard news topics such as crime, courts, and politics for professional journalists, meaning the media still make gatekeeping choices (Horan, 2013; Paulussen & D'heer, 2013). However, the public also seems biased to producing soft news, and content written by the audience often has its basis in things witnessed or personal experience (Horan, 2013; Paulussen & D'heer, 2013). Therefore, at least to some degree who is truly gatekeeping as it relates to UGC remains in question. Nevertheless, the increased use of UGC may result in additional promotion of soft news stories (Harrison, 2010). Horan’s (2010) content analysis found that when citizen journalists act on social media, they produce roughly twice as much as soft news as hard news. Furthermore, when citizen journalists involve themselves in the production of hard news, they tend to take a more activist position (Horan, 2013).

Quality is another potential reason that some journalists oppose publishing UGC because many in journalism question the public’s ability to create satisfactory quality content, which of course is part of the connection to gatekeeping (Krumsvik, 2013). Journalists feel a sense of responsibility for upholding standards through gatekeeping and believe most amateurs do not have the same standards as professional journalists (Singer & Ashman, 2009). Furthermore, some journalists want to allow the public to participate,
but only if journalists edit submissions to meet the professional standards of objectivity and journalistic credibility (Krumsvik, 2013), which represents a form of gatekeeping. Journalists have created a defined role for public contributions and limits upon what types of stories citizens can write and what staff should produce (Paulussen & D'heer, 2013).

Quality does not appear to be the only reason many journalists oppose the publication of UGC. Some editors simply disagree philosophically with allowing citizen contributions (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010). It appears that much of the debate regarding UGC revolves around a gatekeeping discussion about how much control and influence to cede to the public (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010; Harrison, 2010). It seems some journalists oppose the potential break from traditional gatekeeping, while others see it as a necessary part of journalism’s future (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010). Journalists remain in control of the content on some sites, but as the literature will show later, other sites reduce or eliminate journalistic control by creating new gatekeepers. Furthermore, the idea that technology provides some potential for members of the public to assume some gatekeeping role provides stress to the professional identity of some journalists (Thurman, 2011)

The Role of Gatekeeping

While it appears technology provides the public with increased ability to influence content, those media groups with less income seem to have a reduced desire for innovation that reduces journalists’ gatekeeping role (Ferrucci, 2017; Van Dijck, 2009). Yet, there remain several manners in which those in the media’s gatekeeping role has
changed. One manner in which journalists have lost gatekeeping control resides in how their material is shared. Users now help determine—through sharing, clicks, and other online functions — how prominently articles appear on some news websites, an action that further minimizes journalists’ gatekeeping role (Singer, 2014). Journalists should understand that to some degree their gatekeeping privilege, previously connected to the scarcity of publication options, is now much less of an issue (Shirky, 2008).

This is one of the reasons some researchers have speculated that to retain relevancy media outlets must alter their traditional gatekeeping role to correspond with a changing digital media paradigm (Coddington & Holton, 2014). Technology proposes some challenges for journalists in maintaining their gatekeeping role of the past, but researchers disagree on both the severity of the challenge and how journalists should respond.

**New Manners of Thinking About Gatekeeping**

Web-based communication tools have the potential to influence gatekeeping because historically, those who wished to contribute UGC had their submissions filtered through gatekeepers for publication, but the audience now has the ability to self-publish (Meyer & Carey, 2013). Digital media offer the public the opportunity to skip the gatekeepers and go directly to sources for information (Bruns, 2011). This has made many news consumers less reliant on journalists serving as gatekeepers of UGC on digital platforms (Bruns, 2003). The changing role of gatekeeping is not simply limited to public contributions. Personalized news provides the public the opportunity to serve as gatekeepers of the content they receive as well (Thurman, 2011). However, people do not
act alone in this new gatekeeping role since most individuals receive their majority of their news based on the recommendations of friends and family (Bro & Wallburg, 2014). In a similar vein, overall digital technology does not inherently simplify the gatekeeping process. It seems to make it more complex with more potential gatekeepers than existed in the past (Bro & Wallburg, 2014).

In many ways media outlets continue to have the ability to limit and focus audience choice (Thurman, 2011). One of the reasons in which journalists often seek to maintain some level of gatekeeping control in digital spaces is that many question the public’s ability to truly understand what information they want an important caveat to effectively serve as their own gatekeeper (Thurman, 2011). Structural shifts remain underway within the digital media landscape, and at this point many new ideas work best as supplements to gatekeeping and not a new theory (Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010).

There are a number of new concepts or theories designed to review the changing dynamics of gatekeeping in the digital world. In this dissertation, two are reviewed: networked gatekeeping and gatewatching. The discussion in many ways is focused on control. The debate is about how much influence the public has, and how much is maintained by those who operate digital networks such as journalists.

The theory of networked gatekeeping begins with the idea that journalists do not control gatekeeping in digital networks (Barzilia-Nahon, 2006). One of the challenges associated with networked gatekeeping is that there are various stakeholders in digital platforms with diverse levels of gatekeeping control (Barzilia-Nahon, 2006).
Networked gatekeeping posits that the concept of gatekeeping continues online, but there are more people who have the ability to gatekeep and the tools for doing so may be less obvious (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; Coddington & Holton, 2014). Potential networked gatekeeping activities include selection, addition, withholding, display, shaping, manipulation, repetition, and deletion (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005), but these activities can take multiple forms. In addition, gatekeepers within networked gatekeeping seek to do three things: prevent the entrance of the undesired information from the outside, keep certain information from getting outside the network, and finally control the information exchanged within the network (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005; 2008).

There remains a hierarchy on websites within networked gatekeeping; however, those who maintain gatekeeping control on non-news sites are more likely to allow the audience to fully control the content of their own contributions as long as they meet the standards of the site (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006; Coddington & Holton, 2014). Frequent contributors to a site often receive less gatekeeping control than new, unknown posters (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006). Yet, it is acknowledged within networked gatekeeping that some people will continue to search for networks until they find one that offers them the level of control they seek (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). However, there are a number of forms of control and pressure to communicate on certain platforms, which creates difficulty for most in circumventing digital gates (Barzilia-Nahon-2005).

There are various levels of gatekeepers in digital networks including authorities such as governments, those at the industry level which could include regulators, internal authorities such as social networks or the institution that created a virtual community, and
infrastructure providers such as Internet service providers, administrators for infrastructure providers and finally individuals who have some ability to exercise power as networked gatekeepers (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). The gatekeepers in digital networks might differ in substantial ways from traditional journalistic gatekeepers. Non-journalists who possess limited networked gatekeeping authority tend to distribute different types of content than traditional media gatekeepers (Diakopoulos & Zubiaga, 2014). Those non-journalists in a digital community seem more likely to focus on sharing articles about socially deviant behavior, while traditional journalistic gatekeepers have a preference for public affairs stories (Diakopoulos & Zubiaga, 2014) all of which show how in digital gatekeeping, UGC takes on an altered role. However, other research states that within these digital networks the new gatekeepers are loosening control over the public and that journalists should stake a fundamentally new role.

Unlike the new and subtle walls espoused within networked gatekeeping, gatewatching argues that journalists have effectively lost control and should instead take on a new role of guiding the public to content. In gatewatching, the journalists’ role transforms into one in which they no longer limit or choose (gatekeep) what information is available, but instead direct the audience toward vetted information that the journalist considers credible (Bruns, 2003). Gatewatching may be among the more generous of theories to explain changes in gatekeeping related to the increased power of the individual to select information. Furthermore, it is possible that failures within journalism are part of the reason for the industry’s loss in influence. Media companies failed to update their products in time to adjust to the convergence-driven environment on the web.
(Bruns, 2008). Journalists can still have a sizable role within a media ecosystem based on sharing content; however, to succeed journalists need to convince the public about the value of their experience and education (Bruns, 2011).

There are similarities between digital gatekeeping and gatewatching. *Digital gatekeeping* represents a method of selecting information for the audience (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), whereas *gatewatching* provides a service to the audience through helping them avoid an overwhelming amount of information (Bruns, 2011). Bruns (2003; 2008) argues that media should focus on their new role as gatewatchers in which journalists cover the news of the day but also incorporate information from other sources, including those that might contradict the position presented by the publication. One potential benefit of gatewatching is that journalists can curate content designed for a specific audience and their interests (Stanoevska-Slabeva, Sacco & Giardina, 2012).

The idea of gatewatching represents an acceptance by some academics that gatekeeping changed to the point where distributing information is a primarily collaborative effort between journalists and news users (Stanoevska-Slabeva, Sacco & Giardina, 2012; Thorson, 2013). However, while gatewatching might occur at the functional level, it appears journalists would still make considerable and weighty decisions about what information the public consumes, meaning the journalists maintain selected (or limited) gatekeeping influence (Stanoevska-Slabeva, Sacco & Giardina, 2012). Gatewatching at its most extreme, however, could fundamentally change the role of the journalists from one where media members primarily create and distribute original reporting, to one where reporters spend significant time directing consumers to sources of
information and publicizing the work of others (Bruns, 2008; Thorson, 2013). However, the journalists would theoretically engage in this role in a manner designed to provide the public with a more holistic view of events and information (Bruns, 2008; Thorson, 2013), which would appear to connect to one of the goals of gatekeeping to select content that helps the public understand society. There are multiple examples, such as *Slashdot* and *Oh My News*, where this type of gatewatching occurs (Bruns, 2008).

Journalists may have negative attitudes toward citizen contributions, but they have chosen to use the material because it helped them to reach their audience (Daugherty, Eastin & Bright, 2008; Van Dijck, 2009). The associated gatekeeping decision associated with UGC publication motivated journalists to at least somewhat alter their traditional gatekeeping role. This change has lead to the new ideas discussed in this chapter. Overall, both gatewatching and networked gatekeeping are different methods of trying to gauge the evolution of gatekeeping to determine who truly controls the content that members of the public seek to contribute. Both ideas also consider that digital news occurs on websites that are not controlled by journalists, a clear departure from the time of Mr. White. The publication of UGC is one method of interacting with the public through making the gatekeeping choice to allow more citizen involvement. The next chapter of this dissertation reviews interactivity more specifically.
Chapter 4: Interactivity

As Web 2.0 developed around the idea of interaction, it created challenges for members of the media to continue to present themselves as experts who present information to an entirely passive audience. This chapter attempts to understand the concept of interaction, how the public perceives online interaction, the influence of interaction on the media including community media, and how journalists might have the ability to influence digital interaction. Interactive media created a sort of renaissance for the field of communication, which could provide those within the industry a new perspective about the public (Jacobs & Rushkoff, 2006). While digital interactivity has few technological limits, it does include cognitive bounds; the public can only absorb and react to so much content (Shirky, 2008). Yet, interaction does not represent a panacea for media companies. Even if a medium existed that allowed for perfect interaction, communication would remain overwhelming if the scale of conservation became too large (Shirky, 2008).

Defining Interactivity

While some elements of interactivity remain under debate, at its most basic level interactivity represents “the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and especially the extent to which later messages recount the relatedness of earlier messages,” (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997, p. 3). Rafaeli’s definition of interactivity focuses on the audience instead of content, or any particular medium, despite the theory being mostly connected to online communication (Rafaeli, 1986). The concept initially explained how web-based communication occurred in online chat rooms (Rafaeli, 1986).
As technologies evolved, those digital conversations happened not only in chat rooms, but also on social media, media websites, and numerous other locations on the Web. The theory primarily explained new media functions and considered communication with varying degrees of interaction (Rafaeli, 1988). The idea of interactivity has its roots in classic communication concepts such as the feedback loop.

This connection to the feedback loop means the study of media-related interaction with the public began long before the Internet (Wiener, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1949; Kiousis, 2002). Feedback loops represent a pattern of communication where journalists produced content and then a member of the public responded. This early version of interaction included just two people (Nordlund, 1978). This was prior to the web when, for the most part, journalists could expect one-way communication — they wrote and the audience received information (Schultz, 2000). However, the Internet accelerated the feedback loop, which made it simple to both send and receive feedback (Liu & Shrum, 2002). Interactivity theory developed, at least in part, because most prior media theories assumed a passive audience; however, the Internet allowed the audience to take active roles and even potentially engage in agenda setting (Chung & Nah, 2009).

The definitions of interactivity used in this dissertation are among many used in interactivity research, and it is important to discuss those prior to focusing on the definitions used for this study. In fact, one of the trepidations about interactivity as a theory is the number of different definitions researchers use (Jensen, 1998; Downes & McMillan, 2000). Interactivity has become sort of a buzzword regarding any type of online communication used in both the academic and professional world (Jensen, 1998).
This dual usage is another element that makes interactivity a challenging concept to define (Downes & McMillan, 2000).

Some of the major markers of interactivity include degree of cooperation, mutual coorientation, perceived connection, and mutual collaboration (Ramirez & Burgoon, 2004 pg. 71). A more classic definition includes direct feedback as the basis for interaction (Newhagen, Cordes, & Levy, 1995). These feedback-based definitions relate to the idea that both the media company and the audience should respond to each other’s communication needs (Ha & James, 1998).

There are multiple researchers who defined interactivity strictly as real-time interpersonal communication between individuals regardless of if that communication occurred online or offline (DeFleur, Kearney, & Plax, 1997; Rice & Williams, 1984; Steur, 1992). Meanwhile, other interactivity characterizations included using the term to represent a way in which two or more people adapted their behavior to complement each other (Jensen, 1998). Researchers at times viewed interactivity as a function of the website and how it helped to construct and sustain communication (Sundar, Kalyanaraman, & Brown, 2003; Sundar & Kim, 2005). Interactivity descriptions even included demarcations that referred to it as a form of “mediated social interaction” (Bucy, 2004, p. 375). However, for purposes of this paper, the definitions of interactivity put forward by Rafaeli & Sudweeks (1998), Kiousis (2002), and Downes & McMillan (2000) have the most utility when examining community news websites because they are not limited by time and represent both high and low levels of interactivity. This dissertation
seeks clarity on if differences in providing various levels on the interactivity continuum result in more comments on community newspaper websites.

This dissertation examines interactivity using both the more involved definition of interactivity set forth by Rafaeli (1986, 1988), which involves back and forth conversations, and the less involved definition of Kiousis (2002) that simply requires the site offer the ability to interact with simple responses but does not require any prolonged back and forth conversation. In addition, this dissertation considers interactivity as a continuum with various levels (Downes & McMillan, 2000; Jensen, 1998; Kiousis, 2002).

The study of interaction helps us to understand the challenges and opportunities facing the media in the Web 2.0 era. Interactive features allow news audiences the ability to become more involved with their online consumption experiences (Chung & Nah, 2009). While comments are the measure of interactivity used in this dissertation, they are not the only manner of measuring interactivity on community news websites. For example, a prior study measured actions such as the inclusion of hyperlinks within a story as a type of interaction (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000).

**Digital Interaction**

As Rafaeli & Sudweeks, (1996) noted modern versions of interactivity evolved past the classic feedback loop because of the nonlinear nature of online conversation where the audience can join the discussion at any point and respond to any comment. This open and continuous form of feedback differed from the closed feedback loop of Lipstein (1965) where a member of the public could respond, but no one would hear about the response unless it impacted journalistic behavior. Social media appeared to help
change interactivity from the more traditional definition of the feedback loop (Schultz, 2000; Deuze, 2001; Thurman, 2008). Social media such as Twitter and Facebook helped create a situation where it is difficult for one person, or entity, to dominate a topic on social media because there are so many available voices (Bruns, 2011). However, interaction does not have universal, or even necessarily majority appeal because some members of the public will not use online feedback tools (Liu & Shrum, 2002). Despite limited participation there exist a number of various types of interaction available.

In the past, the common expectation was that an individual should not presume they would receive continuous or immediate feedback from journalists (Schudson, 1978). This partially explains why some researchers consider the ability to engage in interactivity one of the advantages of digital media (Morris & Ogan, 1997). Immediacy within communication has not been necessary to support common action, but the ability to communicate in real time could make a digital community feel more tangible to its users (Marathe, 1999). Therefore, a need remains to understand the differences between synchronous and asynchronous communication as it relates to digital communication. For example, synchronous communication tools because of their expectation of quicker retort can lead to additional interaction (Shirani, Tafti & Affisco, 1999). Meanwhile, with asynchronous communication tools the communication can be deeper and more detailed, yet less overall interaction apparently occurs (Shirani, Tafti & Affisco, 1999).

The ability to engage in synchronous communication may represent an important part of the maintenance of virtual communities (Porter, 2004). There are some websites where participants engage in synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid (both synchronous
and asynchronous) communication (Porter, 2004). Early studies on digital interactivity suggested the immediacy of response was only part of the potential for online interactivity; there also existed the possibility for discussions to continue indefinitely (Lieb, 1998). Even in these early efforts, interaction differed greatly from what was available prior to digital media where interaction occurred much more slowly and also had a shorter potential shelf life.

The future of comment sections as part of computer-mediated communication remains complicated because as more sites eliminate their comment sections (Renner, 2016) Waldman, 2016), other sites are using new technology to improve moderation and consider this form of interaction an important part of engaging the audience (Morrison, 2017). Sites choosing to close or move comment sections state the decision is based on what companies perceive the audience wants (Renner, 2016). Yet, there other sites that are investing in technology they believe improve comment areas.

Some media companies use third-party technology that simplifies the moderation process through automation, and also provides some screening prior to someone being able to comment (Morrison, 2017; Renner, 2016). In addition, these media companies want their staff more involved in the comment sections, which they state serves as an additional form of moderation against incivility (Morrison, 2017). A number of outlets focus more on conversations as they relate to their comment areas (Radogna, 2017). This connects to what some have stated the public want, which is more interaction with experts and journalists in comment areas (Wang, 2017).
Interaction and the Public

Media outlets can create interactive processes or the audience can demand it. The role of the audience is essential in the development of interactivity (Rafaeli, 1988). Just as with gatekeeping, one of the challenges the media faced regarding interaction is one of control, with the debate over if the audience controls interactions, or if media outlets can effectively limit online interaction in some manner (Jensen, 1998). Expectations differ considerably from the days of the feedback loop. The audience no longer necessarily waits for media companies to be interactive online; they send messages to media companies from which they expect a response (Newhagen, Cordes, & Levy, 1995). However, not every online post necessitates a response. Some submit content motivated by posting as a form of virtual pulpit where the poster does not expect, or even desire, a response (Huang, Shen, Lin, and Chang, 2007).

Interactive websites created a situation where members of the audience could become engaged and spend considerable time, and increasingly media managers believed publications should interact with the audience (Ho, 2001). Despite the possibilities of digital media, a culture surrounding online interaction may not be as democratizing for the public as theorized (Jacobs & Rushkoff, 2006). People tend to center around those with similar interests, which prevents them from hearing contradictory opinions (Jacobs & Rushkoff, 2006). Interactive media sites, therefore, have not necessarily resulted in a forum for debate but rather might have created echo chamber where people reiterated the same ideas, without having seen any alternative opinions (Jacobs & Rushkoff, 2006).
While most everyone has the ability to interact with nearly anyone else online, it has not resulted in open availability for all to comment and access information equally (Tremetzberger, 2009). One research project indicated a significant connection between the quality of the user experience and the number of comments made on posts (Shaw, 2012). Accordingly, inclusive and open public communication could be viewed as a positive development and comment areas might allow the potential for all citizens to participate equally (Coleman, 2002). If these communities provide a worthwhile experience for their members, then the expectation is people will come repeatedly, regardless where the community exists (Marathe, 1999). People often visited web-based communities for interaction as a way to satisfy their social needs (Ramirez & Burgoon, 2004). Moreover, the interaction that occurred on web-based community networks had a primary emphasis on the discussion of social goals (Ramirez & Burgoon, 2004). These ideas connect to the limitations that exist for members of the public as it relates to online interaction.

One of the primary limitations to online communication and interaction is access. Internet access, something many overlook, could be essential for online interactivity. A number of factors may lead to a lack of access; some divides occur by choice because of age or a lack of interest. Others relate to accessibility, excessive cost, income or education (Guillen & Suarez, 2006). However, the divide has shrunk in the U.S. as Internet access improves nationally (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2013), and as technology becomes more common, fewer who opt out for age reasons (Bolton, et al., 2014). The digital divide could represent both those who will and who will not participate in any
attempts at a networked society either through choice or based upon potential circumstances (Harrison, Zappen & Prell, 2002).

Despite any factors creating a divide, it appears the motivation of the potential user remains a more significant influence than technology (Wohlers, Alves & Sousa, 2014; Speakman, 2015). Therefore, based on the dynamics of the digital divide people some people remain unwilling or unable to interact online. While the previous section focused on interaction and the public, the next section connects these ideas to how the media handles technology and interaction.

**Interaction and the Media**

Newsrooms typically demonstrate an interest in interactivity, although they appear to have been slow in adopting higher levels of interactivity, which is partially due an unwillingness of professionals to converse online with the audience (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). A study that took a technological look at interactivity found that 41% of online news publications offered at least a low level of interactivity, which that study defined to include links in articles or comment areas (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). In addition, 12% of publications offered a high level of technological options for interactivity to the audience, such as the ability to directly interact with stories or staff (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000). Nearly 40% of publications had no way for members of the audience to send an email to an article’s writer, which limited the ability for personal or full interaction (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000). When emails were available, only 10% of those emailed sent a personal response, while another 20% sent a
form letter. Additionally, 70% of sites that listed emails did not respond at all (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000).

Some media members considered interaction an important development within early online news websites (Krumsvik, 2013). In a similar vein, journalists might want to interact with a larger number of people, and in particular with those who feel marginalized within a community (Anyaegbunam & Ryan, 2003). Yet, traditional print newsrooms might ignore the opportunities afforded by UGC and online comment sections to interact with the audience based on numerous reasons including limited time and concerns about tenor and tone from the public (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Canter, 2013). However, the simple act of commenting on a newspaper story remains one of the most popular and common forms of both UGC and interaction on newspaper websites (Weber, 2014).

Many within the news media industry were slow to realize how interactivity influenced online communication and fostered of online community (Hsu, Chang, Lin & Lin, 2015; Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998). While journalistic practices such as letters to the editor might at least partially match Rafaeli’s definition of interactivity (Rafaeli, 1986; 1988), they represent a low level of interaction (Downes & McMillan, 2000; Kiousis, 2002). Furthermore, the phone conversations or interpersonal interaction classified as interaction from the Rennie (2007) and Reader (2012a) studies suggested community media traditionally engaged in the back and forth communication necessary for Rafaeli’s (1986, 1988) higher level definition of interactivity, but did so using non-digital means. Overall online, it seems as though newspapers prefer to allow
the audience mostly to interact with themselves and stay out of conversations (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000; Canter, 2013; Weber, 2014).

Some within media management clearly value interaction, because that ability is one of the skills that media companies seek when hiring (Bakker, 2014). However, companies typically list these positions under the job title of community manager as opposed to journalist (Bakker, 2014). Those in community manager positions survey the digital environment and ask for contributions, encourage the public to contribute, and also manage online comments to facilitate conversations, yet they do not typically produce content (Bakker, 2014). The important aspect of these positions is that they both engage with the community and improve journalism (Buttry, 2011; 2012).

**Positive Aspects**

There are potential benefits for a media outlet to interacting with the public online. A previous study indicated that when a website has extensive interaction, the site is more likely to continue to experience widespread interaction (Ramirez & Burgoon, 2004). In addition, media websites are far from the only type of business to engage in digital interaction. While most businesses engage in reciprocal communication with the public, only 2% of those who visit sites engage conversation (Bischoff, 2015; Ha & James, 1998). In terms of interaction, it is thought media companies should engage in transparent communication about what they are doing and why (Gillmor, 2004). If the staff is not part of interactive conversations, then the outlet is losing an opportunity, because the public can speak to themselves in a number of other locations (Gillmor, 2004). An early study about interactivity assumed frequent interaction corresponded a
high degree of dependency upon that particular media outlet (Nordlund, 1978). Furthermore, increased interaction between the audience and the media outlet could often lead to a more engaged audience connected to a certain site (Ha & James, 1998; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1998).

In terms of maximizing benefit, media outlets might attempt not only to motivate the public to access their site, but also provide them reason to remain (Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998). Numerous studies have shown the potential benefits in interacting with the audience (Ho, 2001; Meyer & Carey, 2014; Weber, 2014). Those who interact with media may benefit through a sense of belonging and the media may profit from an increased willingness to contribute content or comments (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2014). In addition, journalists who interacted with the audience benefit from increased trust based on a reciprocal relationship with the public (Molm, Takahashi & Peterson, 2000), an idea that is common within community media. The more equal the exchange between journalists and the public, the more likely both sides experience positive feelings toward the interaction (Molm, Takahashi & Peterson, 2000; Molm, Collett & Schaefer, 2007). However, people could determine that reciprocity is important because much of human behavior centers on people engaging in behavior of mutual benefit (Molm, 2010).

Much research looks at interaction only positively; however as technology has aged, more researchers and professionals are deliberating its potential downfalls (Bucy, 2004). While comment areas are one manner in which media websites have sought to engage the audience and build a loyal community communication platform (Davis, 2012;
Santa, 2011), these comment sections can decrease the credibility of a news outlet based on the relative cynicism of commenters (Conlin & Roberts, 2016). Therefore, online news outlets may face the choice of deciding between comment areas, which foster potentially beneficial interaction with some, but also might harm the publication’s relationship with others (Conlin & Roberts, 2016). Furthermore, journalists might not react positively to interaction within the structure of a newsroom, which can leave little time for potential interaction (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008).

The public does not appear to consider journalists who interact online professional, which might be because of the unusual nature of the public seeing journalists simply chatting with the audience (Lee, 2015). While interaction with the audience makes the public feel positively about a journalist as a person, it creates a negative reaction to them as a professional (Lee, 2015). However, this may change as the public becomes more accustomed seeing online interaction between journalists and the audience. Furthermore, there are concerns about who the media might reach with interaction. The thought is that interaction strengthens bonds with those where a strong connection already exists, but weakens communication with those with a weaker bond (Kobayashi, Boase, Suzuki & Suzuki, 2015).

Another issue that relates to interactivity is the tone of some commenters in their communication, which has a negative influence on the attitude of journalists toward interaction. There are numerous sites that eliminated comment sections because website managers became overwhelmed by the number of commenters whose entire goal seemed to be to simply abuse or harass others (Waldman, 2016). Moreover, this perceived
ugliness on websites grew as moderation by media outlets within comment areas became less frequent (Waldman, 2016). While a number of sites have requirements about the permitted type and tone of comments, few enforced them and those that did were able to have what the writer classified as vibrant comment areas (Waldman, 2016). However in reality, it appears few journalists respond to comments with much frequency (Santana, 2011), which may relate to interaction in comment areas only appealing to a small minority of readers (Karlsson, Bergström, Clerwall & Fast, 2015).

**Methods Journalists Use to Influence Interaction**

While these potential downfalls of interaction exist, researchers have shown some tools journalists may use to affect how people interact online. The expectation exists that journalists have some role in the commenting process. Zydney & Seo (2012) posited that when a central force, such as a journalist, shape communication the interaction between users, the conversation is more focused and people better hear participating views. Conversely, the study suggested in cases where there was no guiding influence to interaction, those involved in the conversation tended to talk past, instead of to, each other (Zydney & Seo, 2012).

The first method of influencing interaction discussed in this dissertation in moderation, which may be among the most direct methods of influencing commenters. Moderation represents the act of acknowledging that someone oversees comments and has the ability to remove comments that violate certain guidelines. However, moderation can take many forms: a single moderator, volunteers, or the ability for the audience to moderate itself (Wise, Hamman & Thorson, 2006). This dissertation does not
differentiate between active moderation, where comments require prior approval to post; passive, where the media outlet looks at posts if someone complains; or other forms of moderation, where the audience might rate or flag comments as inappropriate. This is partially a practical matter; many community news websites do not clearly acknowledge how active a role the publication takes in moderating comments.

Tools such as moderation seek to make the audience feel more comfortable commenting online because it conceivably eliminates some of the more negative aspects that exist in web-based discourse (Meyer & Daniels, 2011). In addition, technology has made moderation easier and faster as companies stated they could moderate and publish 10 times more comments than they could in the past (Hermida & Thurman, 2007).

The presence of moderation may decrease the likelihood of uncivil comments (Ksiazek, 2015). When media companies do not actively moderate comments the potential exists for commenters to get out of hand (Canter, 2013). However, in the Canter study the journalists were the ones who determined what represented out of hand, and participants in comment areas may not necessarily echo that view. Journalist-involved moderation connects to the traditional gatekeeping role by allowing journalists to filter information submitted by the public (Hermida & Thurman, 2007).

Not all aspects of moderation are construed as positive. While interaction is more on task when someone moderates comments, there was more interaction in the group with no moderation (Zydney & Seo, 2012). A survey study by Wise, Hamman and Thorson (2006) found that those within moderated comment areas stated they were more likely to comment than those who were in comment areas that were not. The study did
not follow up to see if those more likely to comment actually did comment more frequently or at all.

The second type of influence is a technological one, which might make it easier to comment while dissuading some from doing so. One of the many efforts employed by media companies to moderate comments is the use of Facebook, which requires that someone signs on to the social media site prior to leaving a comment (Givskov & Trenz, 2014). In fact, there appears to be a growing number of publications that use Facebook as both a tool to moderate and as a location to interact with the public (Larsson, 2016; Givskov & Trenz, 2014). Intrinsically, it makes sense that some media outlets would rely on Facebook because of its success as a social media site in terms of driving traffic to media websites (Hong, 2012). However, one of the main reasons some publications use Facebook as a third-party to manage commenting on their website appears simple: Facebook makes anonymous commenting more challenging (Larsson, 2016).

Publishers believed Facebook’s policy of requiring a real name reduced trolling and other bad behavior some associate with public commenting (Ingram, 2011). The behavior of online trolls is one reason that media outlets sought moderation tools that required real names; the individuals who managed the comment areas found that when they banned an anonymous troll the person would simply come back with a new username and act more obnoxiously (Waldman, 2016).

There are potential negatives toward the use of Facebook. Media companies that use the tool for moderation appear to experience less interaction between members of the audience and those who work for the media organizations (Larsson, 2016). Additionally,
some researchers support allowing anonymity as a way to encourage those with views outside of the mainstream to participate and interact.

Many journalists have a negative perception of anonymity in online commenting and those same media members often ignore reader input (Nielsen, 2013). Journalists appear willing to allow comments, but want those comments to be transparent and accurate, or more plainly not anonymous (Nielsen, 2013). Some research suggests anonymous comments are more likely to be uncivil (Santana, 2014). However, journalists use their own definition of civility, which may not always match the views of the audience (Reader, 2012b). Furthermore, journalists seem territorial when they make statements against anonymous online comments, which suggest that gatekeeping functionality remains more important than interaction (Nielsen, 2013).

There is certain value in anonymous comments (Ingram, 2011), in fact, anonymity sometimes serves as a precursor to a person’s willingness to comment on online news stories (Borton, 2013). More than 80% of engagement-themed comments posted on media websites are anonymous, and when sites force people to register and use real names, it appears to reduce the number of commenters (Borton, 2013). In a similar vein, anonymity could allow the presentation of more potential viewpoints, because those with marginalized views are less likely to comment without the protection of anonymity (Ingram, 2011; Reader, 2012b; Yun & Park, 2011). However, anonymity potentially represents a double-edged sword for media outlets, because not allowing anonymity makes some people feel more isolated from a news website (Meyer & Speakman, 2016). The hope of this study is to quantify the influence of anonymity on the quantity of
comments, and also to learn what occurs with the acceptance of anonymity and moderation as it relates to the number of comments. These issues are all methods that occur across media outlets, yet the next section deals more specifically with how community media interact with the public.

**Interaction and Community**

Employees at community newspapers at one time could write a story and then wait for a phone call or letter to the editor that might either praise, or more likely criticize their work. Even then feedback has a unique role in community journalism due to the relationship those who work for these publications have to their communities (Reader, 2012a). Some community journalists used digital interaction as a way for the marginalized within their communities to take part in community dialogue, and therefore gained access to new information and sources (Hughes, 2003). Moreover, the benefit of providing individuals direct access to communication tools is the exchange of information between groups who would otherwise have no reason to interact (Hughes, 2003). The simple act of engaging in techniques associated with community journalists seemed to have a positive influence on interaction with the public (Anyaegebunam & Ryan, 2003). For example, students who engaged in community journalism techniques that focused on interacting with the audience believe that reporters should take a more active role within the community (Anyaegebunam & Ryan, 2003). Furthermore, the reciprocity of back and forth conversation between journalists and the public may result in a sense of closeness that community journalism seeks (Lewis, Holton & Coddington,
2014). Interaction is also one of the tools, like publishing UGC, that aids in supporting
digital communities by providing the public a voice.

Questions remain about the diffusion and use of interactive media tools in
community journalism. Some consider the maintenance and construction of meaningful
relationships between individuals and the existing social order to be one of the most
important elements of community (Rothenbuhler, 1991). By the same token, community
relationships could include both commonality and communication; and both staying
informed and congregating is part of what makes a community (Rothenbuhler, 1991).
Simply stated, interaction is important to any type of community (Lauterer, 2006; Meyer
& Daniels, 2011) regardless of whether it occurs offline or online, which is something
media outlets must consider to connect with existing communities.

Interaction helps to support community on news websites through creating a
greater intent among people to use the site (Wise, Hamman & Thorson, 2006). However,
interaction does not actually support community development if it does not successfully
engage other users (Wise, Hamman & Thorson, 2006). This is why journalists’ attitudes
toward interaction could matter. This is especially true if the goal of the media outlet is
public engagement.

Does Interactivity Lead to Engagement?

One of the proposed results of interactivity is engagement, a contention supported
by some research (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997). Furthermore, digital interactivity could
have a positive effect on a person’s attitude toward information being presented on a
website (Sundar, Xu, & Bellur, 2010). Overall, the engagement that community media
seek from their audience may connect to interactivity (Roussou, 2004). Listening and interacting with the public is considered by some one of the cornerstones of journalism; therefore it should not simply be the job of a few people in the newsroom (Dooling, 2016). Moreover, news could be more of a conversation and less about journalists telling readings what to think about (Dooling, 2016). Meanwhile, journalists can take note that there are people outside the newsroom with infinitely more knowledge than any reporter and journalists might seek and listen to them (Dooling, 2016).
Chapter 5: Engagement and Economics

Interactivity and publishing UGC are tools media companies attempt to use in their efforts to generate public engagement. As people spend more time online, they are increasingly interactive, and conversely, there is a greater chance they might become engaged with content from a particular site (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Engagement results from someone feeling involved, such as if they believe they are supporting a community online (Meyer & Speakman, 2016). Part of connecting engagement to both interactivity and publishing UGC requires defining engagement. Additionally, there are some characterizations of engagement similar to those used for interactivity. This dissertation defines engagement using the ideas of Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham (2016) who consider engagement a form of prolonged attention coupled with motivation about a topic that results in some type of action and involvement within a public forum. The researcher must further note that at this point in the dissertation inactivity is being used to describe any contact between the public and a media outlet, which encompasses both the technological, i.e. a simple comment area, to direct contact through digital conversation or the publication of UGC.

Can technology support the creation of a space for thorough public communication that results in engaged participants, or does it merely help people to interact with those who think the way they do? Attention alone does not create a public, but it is a necessary part of an online-based community (Lindtner, Chen, Hayes & Dourish, 2011). More specifically social media (one type of site that generates considerable engagement) cannot create a community. They are simply tools that the
public can use to connect to pre-existing communities (Lindtner, Chen, Hayes & Dourish, 2011). However, digital tools may create a situation where communication, civic engagement, and how the media relate to the process have become dysfunctional (Rosenberry, 2005). Yet, there are many digital media sites that seek to connect to or provide an outlet for an already engaged public.

One goal of publishing UGC and interacting with the public would seem to be supporting engagement. Many advertisers consider publishing UGC on a site part of their efforts to engage the public, and those labors may lead to more time spent on websites and higher satisfaction with the site itself (Interactive Advertising Bureau, 2008). One challenge is media companies, unlike technology companies, operate under business models developed prior to the web (Bruns, 2008). New business models placed media companies at a disadvantage with their continued legacy costs hindering them in competition against new competitors that included citizen journalism-focused businesses with little production or staffing expense (Bruns, 2008). This lead to a situation where media companies had to determine how to contend with these options and differentiate themselves from online competitors (Bruns, 2008). One potential method for media companies to compete is a focus on engagement, which might be a positive development for newspapers because the industry historically had a good record of creating engaged consumers (Sampson, 2016).

Engagement is not a new concept for journalism; interacting with the audience may represent a return to a core media value by empowering the public with the information they need to make informed decisions (Loechner, 2013). One potential
source of engagement is recruiting community writers to produce UGC with the hope those participants might then become involved with the outlet both online and in person (Buttry, 2012). Furthermore, media companies could also consider areas where the public could assist in coverage to overcome smaller staffs (Buttry, 2012). However, journalists should remember the overall goal of engagement is not increasing advertising for the publication (although that could be a side effect), but instead to potentially improve the quality of journalism (Buttry, 2012). In addition, publications with small staffs should not use their size as an excuse to avoid engaging the community (Buttry, 2011). While media managers cannot always fully empower the public, they should respect citizen contributions, which might allow community members to feel a sense of ownership and a more engaged community (Barnes & Schmitz, 2016). This type of interaction through content submission and audience participation is one manner of engaging the public.

Some research suggests media outlets have not taken advantage of the opportunities to use interactive tools to engage their community (Rosenberry, 2005). Some business leaders within the media seem to view any public interaction through a cost-benefit analysis. These leaders understand that any new type of interactivity customarily means more work for publishers, but the potential exists that the additional work might be of benefit in terms of getting to know their audience (Lieb, 1998). Nevertheless, journalists could take on the role of interacting and engaging with the community, possibly creating a space for public conversations (Rosenberry, 2005).

There are media outlets that through their actions have shown they see some value in engagement. Some of these businesses have made a concerted effort to interact with
the public through the creation of teams geared towards engaging the audience and potential audience (Sampson, 2016). Additionally, frequent interaction and engagement with online websites could create value because loyal readers are assets to the outlet (Conlin & Roberts, 2016). Online comment sections can potentially help create, generate, and retain revenue for companies (Santana, 2011). In addition, some research indicates there is a weak correlation between interactivity and circulation (Graham & Greenhill, 2013), and increased circulation could mean additional income for the publication.

In the modern world, the ability to share information is absolute for many businesses in both social and economic development (Hughes, 2003). In addition, numerous companies of all types believe that audience engagement provides a sizable return on investment (Marsh, 2015). Similarly, businesses have the potential to boost their revenues through engaging their audience, which could require targeted information, constant effort, and frequent updates (Marsh, 2015). Creating an engaged audience can convince advertisers that the storytelling advantage of media companies exists and is of value (Sampson, 2016).

**Engagement’s Effect on Journalism as a Business**

Overall, journalism seems averse to efforts to engage the audience, which may lead to some of the fiscal problems facing the industry. In a similar vein, part of the concern facing the journalism industry is that too many leading media companies do not realize they are part of the problem (Waite, 2016). Media companies not only provide journalism in the traditional sense, but also have become technology companies (Waite, 2016), which is where digital interaction comes into the equation. Some speculate that
part of the difficulty with the media is they have forgotten their mission, which is providing information as a community service (Monson, 2016). The community needs to trust and furthermore, act upon the information the press provides (Monson, 2016). Therefore, the primary role of journalists could include building trust and engaged audiences who are more trusting of the media outlets they use (Monson, 2016). However, as with nearly all parts of this section there is a fiscal argument against more direct interaction and therefore engagement with the public. Some of that argument stems from concerns related to the legal system and associated expenses.

Legal issues are one of the reasons many media outlets initially struggled with the implementation of UGC (Hermida & Thurman, 2007). There have been examples of media outlets being successfully sued for defamation for publishing submitted content online (Radcliffe, 2014). Additionally, companies in the early years of the web had concerns about potential copyright infringement (Latham, Butzer, Coleman, & West, 2014). One potential defense was for media companies to be as explicit as possible when using UGC to distinguish it from staff-produced material (Jones, 2015). Community journalism sites might have more reason for concern due to their small size, because the expenses from one lawsuit could bankrupt a company or its newsroom (Neill, 2015).

In the past, some considered comment sections part of a legal grey area, and companies seemed to consider them a risk to the brand (Hermida & Thurman, 2007). While court cases have now provided precedent that people cannot sue newspapers directly for the comments posted on their sites, newspapers maintain the responsibility in legal cases for providing information about the identity of posters who make false or
misleading claims (Weiss, 2009). There would of course be costs associated with identifying who made individual comments for sites that allow anonymous comments. Not allowing anonymity and requiring registration prior to commenting or moving comments to a third-party such as Facebook, could potentially eliminate those identification costs from newspapers.

There are techniques that companies can use to minimize the potential legal risks of interacting or publishing UGC (Latham, Butzer, Coleman, & West, 2014). Media outlets can receive explicit consent from the submitter, or implied consent, which represents similar efforts required for comments by Facebook and Twitter (Jones, 2015). Legal concerns also may be less of a potential concern after a 2014 court ruling that stated that media websites were not liable for illegal content posted online even if the outlet may have solicited submissions (Powell, 2014). “The core issue has been whether or not the editor should be held accountable for what users publish, and when editorial control should be applied” (Krumsvik, 2013, p. 659). Even this legal concern relates to finances, as media companies’ main priority seems to be limiting negative financial exposure.

**Engagement and Community**

This dissertation seeks to investigate the relationship between the publication of UGC on community newspaper websites and those publications’ interaction with the online audience. No amount of communication can result in audience interaction or engagement unless the public pays attention at least part of the time (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2016). Technology is not the only method that media outlets
use for engagement and interaction. Some media outlets continue to take a classic approach to interaction, by physically going into their geographic community to speak to their audiences in person with the goal of crowdsourcing information to improve journalism (Tenore, 2017). Attracting the attention of the public appears necessary for anyone who seeks to create public discussion (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2016). Yet, despite the open appearance of virtual communities, there remain boundaries that impact those inside digital communities including both insiders and outsiders (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006).

Varying ideas exist about how much success journalists might have in creating engagement through online interaction. One study indicated that public connection strongly associates with someone’s media consumption (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). Yet, the public must take some action for this engagement to occur (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). In addition, age is another challenge for media with engagement because interactive audiences tend to be younger and already more engaged online, (Yang & Coffey, 2014). However, the primary audience for media is older and typically less interactive online (Pew, 2016; Yang & Coffey, 2014). Even engaged users may still interact selectively and not in a manner that might benefit the public good (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). This interaction in some ways is a negative for the media outlets, because some of the most engaged members of the public may challenge the discourse presented by the media (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). Those who are more active and news literate tend to be skeptical of the information presented by a single outlet and tend to look for multiple sources for
collaboration (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). Those with more positive views of engagement might argue that interaction and engagement can lead to habitual use of a media source.

Habits result in consumers who spend more time on a page; however, the creation of habit is likely the result of social motivation, which could help explain why sites that do not offer a high level of interaction typically do not create the same level of habit formation (Kilian et. al, 2012). Those who feel a need to stay informed, and therefore have a strong news habit are typically more willing to pay for news (Meyer, Speakman & Garud, 2016). Habits tend to last and stratify based on age with older individuals using more traditional forms of media (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2016). However, these authors question if the routine of checking news while at lunch on a cell phone could ever lead to consistent engagement. As part of interaction, the publication of UGC is one of the methods where media could possibly seek to connect to an engaged online community.

Supporting community potentially benefits media fiscally. Supporting community by offering online forums for interaction is not merely something that potentially benefits newspapers as a business; it is something Marathe believed media must have for a sustainable business model (1999). Online communities can generate value by allowing companies to understand what their potential customers are thinking, and could allow users to engage with journalists on a website, which allows for more advertising revenue and greater e-commerce possibilities (Marathe, 1999). Online communities in some ways strike an emotional cord, and those who participate typically believe the thread is
important (Marathe, 1999). Within community journalism, this means the public probably considers it important for information to be available that is specifically about a geographic area that receives little coverage from other sources. Furthermore, supporting a community and learning to serve this community allows media to deliver business value; and they should use the expertise of journalists to create new revenue opportunities (Monson, 2016). The media is a business and as such nearly always considers the economic impact of any action.

**UGC as Part of Engagement**

If UGC is part of engagement, it may then be important to review how the websites function and how community journalists might interact with the audience. Community media, furthermore, may help to create a “sense of us-ness” despite any separation of distance and reinforces the similarities of the group (Carey, 2016). A 2016 Pew study also indicated that those with those who feel highly attached to their local community demonstrate stronger ties to local news outlets (Barthel, Holcomb, Mahone and Mitchell, 2016). Research remains unclear as to whether the engagement from submitting comments goes beyond the submitter to the potential engagement of the larger group who might feel characterized by the ideas presented (Luce, Jackson & Thorson, 2016).

There is however, a symbiotic relationship between media sites and members of the public who seek to contribute content because submitters typically need the media to amplify their message and media outlets might need these submissions to help engage the public (Usher, 2016). In addition, some community media use UGC to cover events staff
could not attend (Rennie, 2007). Therefore, citizen journalism at community newspapers helps publications control staffing costs by providing more content at what is almost certainly a lower cost. Despite the intention of the media company, UGC publication, therefore, develops an economic motivation.

The amount of information available due to UGC and digital technology likely makes traditional journalism more valuable, as it relates to digital media (Singer, 2006). As a matter of fact, journalists’ role as gatekeepers might help identify some digital news content as trustworthy (Singer, 2006), and credibility could engage the public and create fiscal value. However, looking at digital media’s past, few journalists have been effective in engaging the public (Singer, 2006).

A Changing Relationship

The web has seemingly altered the manner in which all businesses relate to the public, not simply the media. While this dissertation focuses upon community journalism, it is important to understand the adjustments that might affect any businesses’ attempts at digital engagement. Businesses that operate online understand that in some ways they have less direct control within this new relationship (Graham & Greenhill, 2013). The public’s relationship with a brand can include an extended evaluation phase and the public might continue to interact with the company through online channels; the public also then has the ability to talk about products on various social media sites in a manner that is beyond the influence of any company (Graham & Greenhill, 2013). Therefore, it seems businesses should strive to help the public to evaluate their product and then spread positive word of mouth about it (Graham & Greenhill, 2013). As it relates to the
media, this might include convincing the public why their outlet is reliable and then providing them with formats to spread that information to others.

In addition, the web appears to have altered how the public interrelates with brands including media companies. It is possible the relationship may be much less dominated by the brand (Edelman, 2010). For example, the public can use social media to complain about coverage as opposed to submitting a letter to the editor to the offending publication. Additionally, the more engaged someone is with a website the more effective advertising appears to be on the site, including news websites (Mersey, Malthouse & Calder, 2010). Furthermore, websites that are able to attract highly engaged users might have the potential to charge higher prices for advertisements (Mersey, Malthouse & Calder, 2010). This changing relationship connects directly to how media outlets attempt to finance their operation within a new paradigm where consumers are transitioning from high profit print, to the low profit web (Abernathy, 2014).

**Media Finances**

Much research contains some acknowledgement of the business role of journalism, yet academics tend to focus on more high-minded goals related to the media. For example, research might acknowledge that individual decisions by media companies are self-interested, but there is some expectation those choices will advance the cause of civilization (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963). However, many newspapers, at all sizes, operate as business enterprises that could be unrelated to any sense of social responsibility and are often unyielding to any level of public opinion (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993). The media are increasingly corporate owned (PBS, 2006) and therefore
might be beholden to Wall Street interests more than when publications were privately owned (Blethen, 2002).

There are those who are critical of this change. Gillmor (2010) stated media companies are a shell of what they once were and newspapers have lost touch with their communities as they chased profits. Yet, others believe print journalism struggles mostly because of the continued decline in print advertising, combined with digital revenue not growing enough to make up the difference (Vernon, 2016). There are also disagreements about if the revenue model for funding journalism should change. Quiggin (2006) stated that for online information, advertising is the only source of revenue likely to be significant in the long term, because donation and referral service models seem unsustainable. Yet others propose donation models, branded journalism, and even robot reporting as revenue sources that can help preserve journalism (Snow, 2012). Similarly, media companies are installing multiple types of paywalls, experimenting with micropayments, trying native advertising, and attempting to strengthen their relationship with the public through advertisers (Vernon, 2016). These efforts may be the beginning of media attempts to overcome a significant downward slide in revenue for media companies.

Finances of Community Media

There is research that indicates editors from some community media outlets make decisions about what to publish with some influence from their advertisers’ expectations and the fear of alienating the publication’s subscribers (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). Community media cannot exist in their current form without advertisers or
subscribers (Kennedy, 1974); therefore, it would seem counterintuitive to anger and alienate these constituencies.

The small staff size of community media outlets combined with limited resources influenced the development of websites for community news outlets. Weekly newspapers, at least initially, experienced disappointment with the economic results of operating a news website with a small staff (Adams, 2008). This may stem, however, from insufficient planning because nearly half of weekly newspapers did not develop a business plan for their website prior to establishing it (Adams, 2008). Yet, ignoring the Internet is unlikely to be a successful long-term business plan for community newspapers because their audience is moving online (Abernathy, 2014). However, this transition is proving difficult because of the added costs of creating and maintaining websites come at a time community media typically need to shed legacy costs and attempt to find new revenue streams to remain profitable (Abernathy, 2014).

**Gatekeeping and Economics**

Gatekeeping as part of the basis for this dissertation has its own unique economic elements. Past research indicated there are multiple reasons why outlets make gatekeeping choices (Soroka, 2012). The idea of gatekeeping choices made for economic reasons is not new. The public through their contribution and journalists who receive and publish appear to provide mutual benefit to each other, despite any irritation between the two (Singer, 2006). There is a potential argument that gatekeeping decisions traditionally relate, at least partially, upon financial considerations (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980; Soroka, 2012). Advertisers and subscribers have always had at least some influence
on editors, because a media outlet cannot publish without their support (Holt, 1909). Therefore, certain editors have been afraid to offend both groups, which might result in an influence over gatekeeping choices (Holt, 1909). Furthermore, there is often a clear financial motivation for using the work of citizens, since it provides additional content and, therefore, the potential for additional advertising revenue (Deuze, Bruns & Neuberger, 2007).

The business role of American media has an influence on how journalists act toward both comments and UGC. The audience provides the media with power and their income by consuming the content they produce (Gans, 2003). This relationship means the media typically accept the limits of what the public will embrace and what their advertisers will fiscally support (Gans, 2003). Yet, citizens have at least some sway over what appears in the news media, although the public, at times, is not willing to exercise that power (Rivers, Schramm, & Christians, 1969). Although citizens do not necessarily seek to grasp that control at the larger societal level, they are much more willing to do so at the local level, such as at community media, regarding issues that are important to them (Gans, 2003) and journalists at smaller publications seem more influenced by the public.

Journalists remain unsure if reducing their gatekeeping role is the proper method of coping with the financial difficulties facing journalism (Vu, 2014). However, some argue that journalists already ceded some gatekeeping control as part of an increasing reliance on web analytics to help select what stories feature prominently on many news websites (Tandoc, 2014). These studies point toward a concept of economic gatekeeping
that has occurred in the past, and potentially will continue in the future as it relates to digital media. Companies will likely allow or block content based on what they believe is within their financial interests.

There is speculation that media companies were engaging in economic gatekeeping when they allowed public involvement because they feared the potential for audiences to replace them with cheaper online options (Hermida & Thurman, 2007). At the same time, burdens often increased on media companies when participation from the public increased (Hermida & Thurman, 2007). Graham and Greenhill (2013) argued there existed a need for mobile products to differentiate themselves from the content media companies published in print. One business method newspaper companies might use to differentiate the print and online products is through additional publication user-generated content (Graham & Greenhill, 2013).

As absurd as such exploitative arrangements seem in the context of a barn raising, they are taken for granted in the Web 2.0 model, as companies generate revenue through monetizing the attention created by user-generated content. Web 2.0 business practices inevitably involve the exchange of labor. However, this labor may or may not be freely given, (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013 pg. 64).

Many media companies seek to publish content that mitigates reductions in the size of the audience or advertisers (Picard, 2004). Submitted content represented in the past one of the more popular elements of online communication sites (Thurman, 2008; Bulkley, 2012). Therefore, it might make sense for journalists to encourage and promote
UGC online as a rational decision that might advance their interests (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963).

While the use of UGC might ease the financial burdens on a publication, this does not inherently mean that the media outlet has taken advantage of its audience. Those who submit content may feel they benefit from the arrangement, because media outlets could struggle to survive if they ignored the desires of its consumers (Altschull, 1997). There have been a number of web-based companies that have attempted to monetize UGC and turn it into a commodity (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

But with the full implementation of Web 2.0 technologies, and particularly with the emergence of many UGC sites, business interest has apparently shifted away from consuming activities and gravitated towards producing activities, giving users more power over content because they add business value, (Van Dijck, 2009 pg. 46).

The more successful digital media companies seemed to promote rhetoric that focused on empowering the individual (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

Not everyone agrees with the concept of taking content from the public without compensation. There are those who question if it is ethical for media companies to monetize user-generated content (Colhoun, 2016). Others philosophically disagree with profiting from content that the media outlet did not pay to receive (Colhoun, 2016). There are also direct economic implications of interactions to discuss.

As it relates to interaction, the expectation existed that available funding would determine, or at least constrain the journalist’s level of interactivity (Massey & Levy,
Media companies likely need to determine how to best generate profits from their websites or at least minimize costs (Schultz, 2000; Abernathy, 2014). In a similar vein, social media has indicated there is economic value in interaction (Chui, et al., 2012).

Moreover, as community media outlets might seek to maintain market position and operate as solid businesses (Abernathy, 2014), they are likely to take measures that help create value (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1963). There is the potential for economic value connected to the idea of an interactive audience; therefore, some advertisers attempt to reach the engaged and influential people who interact online (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Furthermore, advertisers may see a greater effect from content targeted at interactive and engaged audiences (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Within one study, if someone interacted with a website, it appeared to improve their attitude toward the site and correspondingly with any company that advertised on the site (Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005).

Likewise, some research suggested interactivity on newspaper websites increased both the frequency of visits and time spent on the site (Gerpott & Wanke, 2004). In a similar vein, increased exposure should create value for advertisers due to a more engaged audience (Teixeira, 2014). To further consider this idea, it is possible that the need exists for improved audience metrics that takes into account audience response and engagement (Ha, Leconte & Savidge, 2012; Napoli, 2003; 2012).

**Business and the Media**

It is possible that in digital media there is simply a disconnect between the content journalists provide and the material that advertisers seek to promote their goods (Turow,
The tradition of American media includes a symbiotic relationship between media outlets and advertisers, which results in consumers who traditionally received media content at a lower cost because advertisers fiscally supported the creation of journalistic content (Turow, 2005). There are some who consider Web 2.0 to be part of the participatory culture. In reality Web 2.0 may represent a business model where websites try to use public participation for their own ends (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013).

Web 2.0 also seems to have altered how advertisers operate, the audience has the ability to skip advertisements and companies can be much more specific in targeting a designated audience (Turow, 2005). Media websites seem to need elements other than breaking news because while breaking news might attract an audience to a website, it seems to be other type of features, which include UGC, that keep people on the site longer (Krumsvik, 2013). Therefore, with the tradition of interactivity including UGC publication, the expectation is that community media outlets would continue this behavior in cyberspace.
Chapter 6: Hypotheses and Research Questions

This dissertation uses content analysis to quantify the number of UGC articles being published on community news websites along with the content produced by the publications’ own staffs. Stories are categorized either hard news, soft news, sports, opinion and social, while photographs are also coded into the categories of hard, soft, opinion and social pictures. The categories will be defined more specifically later in this dissertation within the Methods section. This content analysis looks only at full articles written by the public and the publication’s staff, and does not include content from the Associated Press, or any other professional outlet. Therefore, items that include aggregated content or special features such as the Tweet or Instagram post of the day were not counted.

Within the social science tradition, it is important to review why research is conducted using the convention of listing research questions and hypotheses. Hypotheses are used to make a prediction based on what the researcher believes will occur within the study based upon the results of prior research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). There is some inherent challenge in attempting to use findings from studies that focus on metro newspapers and extrapolate those results to make educated progastication regarding community media. However, in this dissertation each hypothesis has been determined based upon research related to metro newspapers as opposed to community publications, which points toward the researcher’s initial goal with this dissertation which is to learn about the differences in how community media interact with their audience online and determine if difference exist in what UGC is published online versus in print. The
research questions are listed as such because the literature is either underdeveloped or contradictory in relation to the problem being examined (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

The research questions follow the traditions of quantitative research. In addition, much of this dissertation seeks to quantify the significant qualitative and theoretical research conducted regarding interactivity and digital gatekeeping. The goal is to learn if this quantitative studies either verifies or contradicts previous research. It also attempts to look at areas that continue beyond those prior studies. Therefore, research questions are used when predication is not possible based on prior research.

**User-Generated Content**

Metro media companies seemingly have made gatekeeping choices that privilege certain types of UGC over others as it relates to publication (Jonsson & Ornebring, 2011). Jonsson and Ornebring (2011) found media outlets empower their audiences to create content related to soft news including popular culture items or everyday life as opposed to hard news or informational content.

The research questions and hypotheses that relate to the UGC content analysis are as follows:

H1. Community media websites will exhibit a preference for publishing UGC in areas other than hard news.

Photographers have experienced the brunt of layoffs within the media industry as a number of newspapers have cut their entire photo staffs (Anderson, 2013). This would seem to indicate that publications have a need for additional sources of photography, but
it is unclear if that need is being met through additional UGC photographs, by reporters
taking photographs, or through hiring photographers as independent contractors.

RQ1. Will community media websites exhibit the same preferences regarding the
publication of UGC for photography that were found for printed articles?

It seems methods for submitting content should be simple if the goal is to encourage participation (i-Scoop, 2015). However, the relationship between the citizen journalists and those operating the site may be of more importance than ease of submission (Wilson, Saunders, & Bruns, 2008). Networking, community outreach, and content placement could also impact how much UGC a publication might receive (Wilson, Saunders, & Bruns, 2008).

RQ2. How will the frequency of requesting submissions from the audience influence how much UGC is published on community newspaper websites?

RQ3. How does separating UGC from staff produced content influence the amount of UGC published on a community news websites?

RQ4: How does the method in which the public can submit content to a community news outlet influence how much UGC content is published on the publication’s website?

RQ5: Does circulation size or how much content that people can access influence how many UGC submissions a community newspaper website publishes?

**Interactivity**

The second content analysis portion focuses on the comments made on news stories. The idea is to quantify the number of comments which were coded based on the story types. The story types are the same: hard news, soft news, social, opinion and
sports. Photographs are not included in this content analysis because only publications that used Facebook for commenting seemed to allow comments specifically on photographs. In this case the same limitations apply; the researcher has no way of determining if the community simply has an overarching unwillingness to comment regardless of story or issue. In fact, it is to be expected that some communities might be much more willing to comment on the stories published on community media websites. While this is a limitation, the focus on differentiating between story types will help account for these differences and will achieve the intended result of being able to compare comments based on story type effectively based on the number of websites included the study. This should offer a reasonable sample regarding website functionality and if community media staff involvement will impact the number of comments.

Researchers suggest online media should consider adding features that will encourage more users to participate (Chung & Nah, 2009). Two ways that previous research has suggested this could be done is through allowing anonymity and moderating comment areas. A number of audience feedback forums in the newspaper industry were heavily moderated and did not permit anonymity (Reader, 2012b). Anonymity encourages comments because people have the ability to say what they want without the fear of repercussion (Reader, 2012b). Furthermore, research suggests journalists should to be involved in online comment forums to support and aid in the development of virtual community (Meyer & Carey, 2014). The supremacy of some voices might silence others, and moderation could help to reduce the odds of a few voices dominating comments.
(Thompson, 2014). Effective moderation can keep conversation focused and thereby may encourage more people to participate (Tenore, 2012).

H2. Community news websites that allow anonymous comments and/or moderate comments will receive a higher number of comments than sites that do not moderate, do not allow anonymity, or do neither.

Social media is an increasingly common manner for community newspapers to allow story comments, and the use of social media been built into the design of a number of websites. There have been examples where moving comments to Facebook reduced the number of people who commented (Healy, 2014). However, news organizations that use Facebook for comments have stated anecdotally that the change resulted in a higher quality of comments and more comments overall, but did not provide quantitative figures to support those assessments (Sonderman, 2014).

RQ6. How will the use of Facebook as a moderating technology for online story comments affect the number of comments on stories at community media websites?

Historically journalists found it necessary to encourage and empower the public to attain contributions (Jonnson & Ornebring, 2011). In addition, commenters within virtual communities tend to know each other and participate in conversations frequently (Bruns & Highfield, 2015). Finally, the cognitive social capital and community appear to have a positive influence on a person’s willingness to contribute UGC online (Li & Yang, 2014).

H3. Community media websites that respond to comments on their websites will receive a larger number of comments.
Finally this dissertation makes use of a survey as an instrument to measure the attitudes of community media managers. These survey questions are designed to test both how important the community media managers consider interaction with the audience and to help determine where they believe the best location to interact with the audience is. The survey sought information about interaction in both online and offline forums. In addition, it sought to gauge what other concerns might have replaced space-based ones as it relates gatekeeping regarding online content. The survey also attempted to provide these community media managers with some ability to inform the researcher about their audience and if the percentage of UGC published online is greater, less, or equal to the amount of UGC they publish in print.

Many journalists believe that participating in interactive measures increases communication with the audience (Schultz, 2000). Interaction can create a cognitive reaction among those who see the message and add value to the interaction (Fischer & Reuber, 2011). Responding to reader comments continues because U.S. newspapers seek approaches to increase interaction between journalists and the audience (Paskin, 2010). One might expect that community media will interact with their audience, based on tradition and the unique mission of community media (Lauterer, 2006; Carey, 2016). However, as stated earlier, it is unclear how much community media, or media outlets in general, interact on their websites. Most newsrooms have been slow in engaging in high levels of interactivity with their audience (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008). This leads to questions about how much interaction occurs. Additionally, all the above studies that
sought to measure interactivity examined larger metropolitan media outlets as opposed to community media.

RQ7. Does the attitude of community media website managers influence how much UGC and what type of article these managers state is published on their site?

RQ8. How does the public’s preference for where to interact with community journalists influence the attitudes of community media website managers?

Because community media outlets are a business, it makes sense that economics issues impact into gatekeeping decisions regarding the publication of UGC. Community media outlets could publish additional UGC online because it typically is of no cost to the publication, yet submitted articles or photos provide additional content (Silver, 2011). Community journalist might avoid UGC due to its perceived lower quality (Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010) and therefore the material might offend advertisers or subscribers (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980).

RQ9. How do economic concerns influence the interactions that community journalists have with the public?

There are a number of reasons why community newspaper editors are either in favor of, or against the publication of UGC. Some editors are concerned about libel and other legal issues associated with publishing material by authors who have not underwent professional journalism training (Lee, 2008; Lewis, Kaufhold, & Lasorsa, 2010). There is also apprehension related to potential legal costs associated with complying with subpoenas to identify commenters who might make false or misleading statements in comment areas, especially if the comment is made anonymously (Weiss, 2009).
remains a lack of clarity about how considerable those concerns are among community media editors.

RQ10. How do legal concerns influence the interactions that community journalists have with the public?
Chapter 7: Method

This study engages in a mixed method approach to examine how community media exercise their gatekeeping function as it relates to the publication of UGC and interaction with audiences on community newspaper websites. The researcher adopted content analysis for two sections and a survey for the third. The two content analyses used the 2015 Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media to create a population of community newspaper websites. The researcher included publications from the list with stated circulations of 50,000 or less, which mirrors the definition of community news used by Lauterer (2006). In addition, Lauterer’s definition does not differentiate between publications with paid or unpaid circulation, nor does this dissertation.

From an initial Gale Directory list of 4,880 potential community news publications, 361 sites listed no website and therefore, are not part of the population. The researcher removed an additional 784 potential community newspaper websites due to a lack of listed circulation figures. This left a total population of 3,735 from which the researcher randomly selected two samples for content analysis. However, even after completing the analysis the researcher conducted a second check of the websites to ensure the sites remained in operation. These additional reviews resulted in discarding an additional 11 sites that functioned during the initial coding, but were defunct by the second review, for a total population of 3,724 potential websites.

In both instances, the researcher sampled the website content of 400 community newspaper websites, which constituted 10.7% of the total population. Both the UGC and
interactivity content analyses included a review of the website to determine content accessibility on the site. Potential access options were all content available, a limited number of articles as part of a metered paywall, or sites with a hard paywall where no access to content occurred without signing into the site.

Creating two separate samples for the content analysis sought to provide a more vibrant potential sample that examined a larger number of websites. Furthermore, practical concerns led to the creation of two samples. Due to the sizable amount of information sought in each content analysis, it was impractical for coders to tackle both at once. In addition, the number of sites that used metered paywalls made a single sample impractical because the first sample would eliminate a coder’s ability to view the site for a month, which would prevent a second examination of the site within an acceptable timeframe.

There are limitations to the use of content analysis. The first is there is no way to gauge the attitudes of the community members who would potentially comment or submit UGC. The researcher cannot determine if the public declined to either submit UGC or comment on articles because of something related to the actions of journalists, functionality of the website, or simply due to the prevailing attitude of the community. In addition, researchers cannot presume interaction simply because a community newspaper website builds an effective structure for interactivity. The only way to measure the attitudes of the public covered by these community media outlets is to ask them directly.

The two coders were a 20-year-old white woman with some college education, and a 35-year-old white man with a master’s degree. The coders started with the home
page, and then looked at each of the specific sections listed on the website. If a paywall notice immediately appeared on the site, the coder would attempt to review at least one article from each section if the paywall allowed. The coder also attempted, if possible due to paywalls, to view a roughly equal number of articles within each of the sections on the site.

To determine intercoder reliability for these content analyses a third coder, a 34-year-old white woman with a master’s degree received training to assist. All three coders reviewed 40 of the sites, which represented 10% of the total sample. Krippendorff’s alpha scores included total agreement for more basic questions related to website functionality such as if the public could submit material using a digital form, email address, or by mail. There were differences in story type however. The Krippendorff’s alpha scores ranged from 1 for social news in both UGC and staff produced, probably at least partially due to lower numbers of examples, to a low of .92 in the category of staff produced soft news articles, which also had among the largest number of responses. There was also a small amount of disagreement about how many times the site might have solicited comments with a score of .974. These scores for Krippendorff’s alpha fell well above the minimums suggested by Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2013) for intercoder reliability.

**UGC Content Analysis**

The unit of analysis for the content analysis of user-generated content was the full website, which represented all actual content, a maximum of 100 articles, or the amount of content that coders could review before being stopped by a paywall. Coding included only locally produced news stories. Coders ignored content from the Associated Press or
other wire services. The limit of 100 total articles per website attempted to reduce the chance for coding duplication on websites that contained a large amount of content. On each site the coder was responsible for reviewing each story and determining if the material represented hard, soft, sports, opinion, a letter to the editor or social news. Coders further determined if the content was staff produced or UGC. The coders skipped content if the site did not clearly identify its producer.

The research of Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante (2011) and Scott & Gobetz (1992) influenced the definitions the researcher used for hard and soft news. These researchers identified soft news as types of human-interest stories and feature articles of non-policy issues (Scott & Gobetz, 1992). Meanwhile, hard news represented stories with a timely basis and some urgency in publication (Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2011). This dissertation defines sports articles as anything related to athletics; social news included wedding, birth and other announcements, and club news. Opinion stories presented a clear editorial opinion.

The research of Paulussen and D’Heer (2013) was also an influence on the organization of the content analysis. Their study examined hard news, soft news, and photography in relation to the publication of UGC and what type of stories news media more frequently published. The different types of stories measure where community newspaper websites permitted the public to participate in content creation, or alternatively where the public submitted content.

Coders examined UGC submission methods; the potential options comprised a digital form on the website, an email address listed on the website, a mailing address
listed on the website, some combination or all three. The concept came from the i-Scoop (2015) article which postulated that media outlets that make it simple for UGC submissions may receive more content than those that make it more challenging for potential submitters.

The ideas behind the content analysis were influenced by two additional studies. Cassidy’s (2006) study influenced the gatekeeping portion of the content analysis. Cassidy’s study attempted to learn what had the stronger influence on gatekeeping choices of journalists; professional or other concerns. In addition, Lee (2012) showed that gatekeeping choices are similar in both online and offline situations. Furthermore, this study used content analysis to determine the reduced gatekeeping role related to online publications.

**Interactivity Content Analysis**

The interactivity content analysis also used the entire website as the unit of analysis, which represented all actual content on a site, a maximum of 100 articles, or the amount of content that coders could review prior to reaching a paywall limit. The same two coders within a few weeks of the first analysis looked at the home page for this sample and each of the section areas listed on the website. Coders limited content for the study to local news stories, skipping content from the Associated Press or other wire services, and the limit of 100 articles per website was an attempt to prevent any articles being counted twice. This content analysis used the same news categories and definitions as the previous one. Coders in this instance again determined if the content was staff-produced or UGC; however, in this study UGC was a separate category. Within this
content analysis, coders skipped content if it was unclear who produced it. On each article included in the study, the coder further counted the number of comments made regarding the article and if any of these comments received a response from someone representing the publication.

The study measured interactivity using the following categories: hard news, soft news, sports, letters to the editor, social news and opinion using the definitions previously mentioned. The limitations in the number of stories examined for each website were the same. One limitation to this portion of this study is that it is possible that a person representing the publication might have commented using their name, but did not identify himself or herself as part of the staff. However, coders checked the articles to determine if the author of the article commented under his or her own name. The idea was to learn if community media went beyond providing a space for comments to learn if they engaged with the audience.

Coders also examined the comment area to determine if there was a clear notification the site moderated comments, if users could either comment anonymously without registering, or could register but post comments anonymously using a screen name. Further, the coders reviewed if the site used Facebook to manage comments on stories. Finally, the coders were responsible for reviewing the site to determine if the publication actively sought audience engagement by directly requesting story comments. This request for comment could take the form of a statement above the comments areas such as, “We want to hear from you.”
There is an expectation that interaction occurs between two or more people; however, a limitation of this study is the inability for a conclusive determination if comments were automatically generated using computer software or were written by someone from the news organization. It is possible to create software that can mimic the personality of a human (Nass, Moon, Fogg, Reeves, & Dryer, 1995).

**Survey**

To complement the findings of the two content analyses, a survey was sent to the entire available population of community media outlet editors and publishers created for the content analysis section. The only publications that did not receive a survey, yet were part of the content analyses were those that offered no method to contact the staff or only provided an online comment form. There were 101 sites with no contact information and 605 that provided only an online contact form.

The reason for excluding publications with only a contact form was the lack of certainty of who might receive, and potentially respond to, the survey. The survey’s goal was to contact and receive responses from management responsible for journalistic decisions at community media outlets. The email contacts list resulted from web searches conducted of the sites during the content analyses. The directory used to create the content analyses population does not list specific email contacts and many times had no email contact listed. Therefore, the decrease within the total population was inevitable because some websites have no contact information, or the information on the website was outdated.
The goal of the survey was to contact the person responsible for overseeing the publication’s website be it an editor, publisher, or another title. The person running the website would be in a position to understand how and why the publication makes gatekeeping and interactivity choices.

While online surveys often have low response rates, a few actions can boost responses. Potential participants received three reminders, and responses did increase after each one. In addition, for every 100 respondents the researcher provided a $20 Amazon gift card to a randomly selected participant. Distribution of the survey went to a total of 2,692 different email addresses. These email addresses came from the main contact listed on the website for the editor, publisher, or the researcher sometimes used the only email address listed on the site. The number of potential survey respondents is lower because there were 256 email addresses that appeared multiple times between the various websites. This left a potential population of 2,762. Invitations send to 70 email addresses were returned resulting in a final population of 2,692 potential survey respondents. A total of 391 individuals started the survey. A total of 269 respondents, roughly 10%, answered every question on the survey and 312 completed their responses through the beginning of the demographic data, providing relevant data for the study.

The survey in this instance was a cross sectional survey, and one of the challenges in online surveys is generating a random sample of a population; however, one possible way of avoiding that challenge is by accessing a population (Lefever, Dal & Matthiasdottir, 2007), which was done in this dissertation. In addition, online surveys as a type of data collection generally represent volunteer sampling as opposed to probability
sampling (Lefever, Dal & Matthiasdottir, 2007). Because the responses to this survey were voluntary, it leads to the possibility of increased risk of nonsampling errors from issues such as nonresponse bias, which in this case could mean a significant difference between members of the population who refused to complete the survey as compared to those who did (Poindexter and McCombs, 1989). While these limitations are acknowledged, the survey does reach the threshold considered acceptable for generalizability (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

The survey questions sought to measure how important community news editors and publishers believe it is to publish UGC both online and in print. The intent was to determine why community media might be making different gatekeeping choices with regards to their website as opposed to the print product. Linder’s (2016) study was particularly important in helping guide the survey questions used in this dissertation. Linder considered whether paid editorial staff served as a source of legitimizing citizen journalism.

Along that vein, the questions sought to learn more specifically if legal or economic reasons were the primary contributing factors to the gatekeeping choices made by those managing community newspaper websites. The publication of UGC is one way to measure how important these community news publications might consider providing the community a voice on their website.

A number of studies use interviews and qualitative surveys to measure the attitudes of journalists and media managers toward interactivity and UGC (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Larsson, 2011; Singer, 2010). This dissertation’s goal was to review those
interview findings through use of a survey to gain a larger, quantitative scale, further differentiated by its focus on community media. Interactivity research typically is qualitative in nature, and focused upon the attitudes of journalists at elite publication. In this manner, this dissertation differentiates itself from the studies that came before. In addition, studies such as Chung and Nah (2009) and Hunt, Atkin, and Kowal (2013) used survey data to effectively measure the audience’s attitude toward interactivity and the use of UGC. These studies support the idea of using survey data to study the attitudes of community media managers toward both through responding to comments and the publication of UGC online.

The survey also attempted to measure the importance of basic forms of interactivity such as providing a location for the audience to comment, and offering links to additional information on a topic. In addition, the survey respondents answered where they believed the audience is most likely to comment, how often someone from the publication responds to online comments, and what type of news story generates the most comments. Survey articles from Chung and Nah (2009) and Meyer and Carey (2014) influenced the questions related to moderation. In both these studies results suggest that moderation makes people more likely to comment, but they do not provide insight on how the media managers feel about the importance of moderation.

The survey further asked what location these community news editors and publishers prefer to interact with their audience, be it in person, on social media, through email, or some other source. The survey questioned if interaction with the audience swayed their coverage; the study of Hsu, Chang, Lin, and Lin (2015) influenced this idea.
The respondents provided information about their attitude to the importance of moderation, such as allowing the audience the ability to moderate themselves through flagging inappropriate comments, with the questions persuaded by the work of Meyer and Carey (2014). The survey also sought to learn if the editors and publishers of community newspaper websites believe it is important to allow anonymity in the comment sections and if the editor and publishers worry about the tone or language in comments made on their websites, with these questions designed as a way to quantify the questions brought about through the work of Reader (2012).

The work of Liu (2003) and McMillan and Hwang (2002) influenced the interactivity survey questions. Their research created a scale for interactivity on websites. These scales considered if the site allowed for active control by the audience, if there existed the possibility for two-way communication, and if that communication took place in a synchronous manner (Liu, 2003; McMillan & Hwang, 2002). The goal with the Liu study, as with this one, was to determine if media companies attempt to exert a level of gatekeeping control over audience interaction that creates a reaction from the audience. While both of these studies relate to advertising, the functionality of the site could be similar for community news websites because they are competing with websites from other businesses to garner audience attention. It is also important to understand some of the information about the community media website managers who participated in this study.
Demographic Information

There are a number of similarities and differences between respondents that may influence the results of the survey. Of the survey respondents 36.4% were between 55-64 years old, 23.6% were between 45-54, 10.3% of respondents were over the age of 65, 13.6% between 35-44, 12.9% between 25 and 34 and 3.2% of respondents were between 18-24 years old. In terms of education, 66.3% of respondents had a bachelor’s degree, 15.1% had a masters or doctoral degree, 4.5% possessed a two-year degree, 11.5% had attended some college and .6% had only a high school degree. There was little diversity among respondents willing to identify their ethnicity with 97.1% describing themselves as white, .3% African American, and .98% Hispanic. There were 64.3% of respondents who were men and 36.6% who were women.

The respondents also reported circulation figures for the publication website they direct. Of those who responded, 40% managed websites for newspapers with 4,999 circulation or less, 30.97% were from publications with between 5,000 and 9,999 circulation, 17.4% were between 10,000 and 19,999, 5.2% had circulation between 20,000 to 29,999, 3.2% from 30,000 and 39,999 circulation, and finally 3.2% represent publications between 40,000 and 50,000 circulation. Respondents were nearly evenly divided between corporately owned publications at 52.7%, and those that are not at 47.3%. The economic breakdown of respondent’s salaries was 20.8%, $100,000 or more; 9.3%, $90,000 to $99,999; 10%, $80,000 to $89,999; 11.5%, $70,000 to $79,999; 8.9%, $60,000 to $69,999; 8.9%, $50,000 to $59,999; 7.4%, $40,000 to $49,999; 13.4%,
$30,000 to $39,999; 7.4%, $20,000 to $29,999; 1.9%, $10,000 to $19,999; and .4% less than $10,000.
Chapter 8: UGC Content Analysis Findings

One of the two content analyses used in this dissertation focused on user-generated content published on community newspaper websites. The researcher compared news produced by staff to the amount of UGC published on the community journalism website. This content analysis further sought information about if there were technical measures used by community newspapers that resulted in more UGC submissions. A total of 400 community newspaper websites were examined in this content analysis. However, seven of the 400 publications included in the sample failed to differentiate between UGC and staff-produced content by offering no information on the author and therefore offered no findings. These publications remained in the study because the goal was to offer an overview of the various manners in which community media operate their website.

The circulation of the publications included in the sample ranged from 500 to 50,000. Of those sites, 211 allowed the public full access to all content on the site, 129 used various types of metered paywalls that limited the amount of material available for viewing without subscribing, and 60 websites did not allow the public to consume any content. These sites also remained part of the analysis. The metered paywalls included both publications that were explicit about the limited number of articles freely accessible and others that did not mention the limit until readers had reached their maximum number of articles. Some publications allowed readers to view as few as three articles without subscribing and others allowed much more but did not say explicitly how many articles a reader could access without subscribing. In addition, while publications with a
hard paywall typically allowed readers to view headlines and sometimes part or all of the first paragraph, there were sites that simply told those who came to the site how to subscribe and/or a method of submitting content or otherwise contacting the newspaper’s staff. There were also two newspapers whose entire website consisted of a PDF of a recent print edition of the publication.

**UGC Article Preferences (H1)**

This section seeks to answer H1, which predicted that community newspaper websites would publish more UGC in softer news areas. The descriptive statistics show that community newspaper websites publish 15 percent more soft news UGC as opposed to hard news UGC (see table 8.1). The mean of staff postings were similar between hard news and soft news articles; in fact there were only 19 more soft news articles published by staff as opposed to hard news in the sample. The difference in UGC was much higher with 249 more soft news UGC articles published. Sports articles were the category with the second lowest percentage of UGC stories behind hard news. Social news (20.4%) and opinion articles (37.5%) were the two highest percentages in terms of community newspaper websites publication of UGC.
Table 1: Frequencies of how many staff produced and UGC articles community newspaper websites in the study published.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Articles written by staff (percent)</th>
<th>Mean staff postings</th>
<th>Total UGC articles (percent)</th>
<th>Mean UGC postings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Articles</td>
<td>1933 (94.6%)</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>111 (5.4%)</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Photographs</td>
<td>688 (80.5%)</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>167 (19.5%)</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>1952 (84.4%)</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>360 (15.6%)</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Photographs</td>
<td>1952 (53%)</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1733 (47%)</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports articles</td>
<td>1476 (90.1%)</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>145 (8.9%)</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Photographs</td>
<td>1878 (85.2%)</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>325 (14.8%)</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the editor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1035 (100%)</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social News Articles</td>
<td>735 (79.6%)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>188 (20.4%)</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles</td>
<td>889 (62.5%)</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>534 (37.5%)</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total sites examined = 400

These results indicate a preference exists at community news outlets to publishing less UGC in hard news as compared to any other category. Social news, as a form of soft news, also related well to a previous study by Paulussen and D'heer (2013) that showed a journalistic bias toward the production of hard news as it compared to soft news topics. One of the more interesting findings, however, related to the publication of social news. Social news, more than any other category, left no way to tell who produced the content. Many publications did not include bylines on social news stories altogether. It was the one category that was overwhelmingly done in this fashion. Despite support for H1, the rationale behind why community newspaper websites publish more UGC in softer news areas remains unanswered. One of the limits of content analysis is there is no way to measure intent. The content analysis simply shows what occurred, not why. Therefore, the
researcher cannot suggest at this point if the decision is made by community journalists, or simply that the public might prefer to submit soft news items. However, the results support H1, which hypothesized that community newspaper websites would publish more UGC in categories other than hard news.

**UGC Photograph Preferences (RQ1)**

The second area looks at UGC photography. Soft news UGC photographs were more than twice as likely to be published on community journalism websites as opposed to hard news photographs. In this instance, hard news did not represent the lowest percentage of UGC photography. Public submissions represented 14.8% of sports photographs within the sample, as opposed to 19.5% of hard news photographs, and 47% of soft news photographs. As it pertains to photography, the researcher again cannot attempt to forecast why community newspaper websites publish less sports photos submitted by the public, nor why the public takes nearly half of soft news photographs. However, to answer RQ1, there are two important elements to note. First this dissertation suggests that overall community newspaper websites are much more willing to publish photography as opposed to articles for hard, soft or sports news. The second is the high percentage of UGC photos in soft news, which was the highest level of public participation in the creation of any type of content. Overall, however this research suggests preferences for photography at community newspaper websites does not match those for articles with publications using more UGC photography.
Asking the Audience (RQ2)

RQ2 asked if the number of times that a community newspaper website requested contributions would impact how much UGC the site publishes? Looking for relationships between variables was the first step taken to answer RQ2. Pearson Correlation tested if a relationship existed between how often a community newspaper website solicited for submissions and how much UGC the sites published online. There was no significant relationship found between the amount of UGC published in relation to hard news articles, soft news photographs, sports articles, letters to the editor, and social news. However, there were significant relationships between the number of requests for submissions and UGC in the categories of hard news photographs, \( r = .195, N = 399, p < .001 \); soft news articles \( r = .143, N = 399, p < .005 \); sports photographs \( r = .148, N = 399, p < .005 \), and opinion articles \( r = .158, N = 399, p < .005 \). These findings provide a mixed message on if a relationship exists between requests for submission and the actual publication of materials submitted by the audience.

The inconclusive result of the Pearson Correlations led to further testing to attempt to answer RQ2. The researcher used a linear regression to test a model that included all UGC news categories included in the content analysis. The number of times community newspaper websites solicited for comments was the dependent variable. The model included the independent variables of articles and photographs for hard news, soft news, sports, letters to the editor, social news, and opinion articles. Preliminary analyses determined there was no multicollinearity. The regression was statistically significant. The nine variables predicted 6.8% of the variance in the number of times that community
newspaper websites solicited contributions (see table 2). Only two individual variables reached statistical significance; hard news photographs ($\beta = .174, p < .005$) and opinion articles ($\beta = .132, p < .05$).

Table 2: Linear regression predicting the amount of UGC published based on how many times a community newspaper website solicits comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Articles</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Photos**</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td>.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Photos</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Articles</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td>-.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Photos</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the Editor</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social News</td>
<td>-.253</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>-.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles *</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R = .298, Adjusted R Square = .068, F = 4.216, d.f. 9, p < .05*, p < .01**

After testing all forms of UGC as independent variables the researcher examined only the written categories of UGC as a group including hard news, soft news, sports, letters to the editor, opinion and social UGC articles. While the setup of the regression is backward, conducting the model in this way represented the clearest, most efficient manner of determining and showing the relationship between these variables. In this instance, the model was again statistically significant. The six variables explained 3.4% of the variance, meaning the number of times a community newspaper website asked for
comments does slightly influence how much UGC the site publishes. In this case there were two variables soft news ($\beta = .116, p < .05$) and opinion articles ($\beta = .141, p < .01$) that reached statistical significance.

Another linear regression tested the publication of UGC photographs separately. The number of solicitations for UGC remained the dependent variable and this model used UGC photographs in hard, soft, and sports as the independent variables. The test in the case was also statistically significant. The number of solicitations predicted 4.4% of the variance in UGC photographs. In this model both hard news ($\beta = .175, p < .001$) and sports photographs ($\beta = .113, p < .05$) were statistically significant. These findings help provide some answer to RQ2, showing that the frequency in which a community newspaper website solicits content influences how much UGC the publications ultimately publishes. In addition, the number of requests for contributions seems to matter slightly more with photography than articles. Yet, the findings also suggest that the impact of the number of solicitations is minimal because of the small percentage of variance explained in the regression analyses.

**Separating UGC (RQ3)**

The next goal of this dissertation was to answer RQ3, which asked what influence might exist on the number of citizen submissions published when community media websites maintain a separate area for them. An independent samples t-test compared whether the news website separated submissions from the public completely from content generated by journalists had any effect in the categories of hard, soft, sports, letters to the editor, social news, and opinion, along with photographs for the categories of hard, soft,
and sports. There were statistically significant differences between sports stories when outlets separated content (M = 0, SD = 0) and content intermingled (M = .639, SD = 1.682, t (193) = -5.71, p = .01). The difference between the means was -.629 at a 95% CI (-.869 to -.389). The results of this t-test need further explanation because of the unusual mean for articles when sites separate UGC from staff-produced articles. In this test none of the 21 websites that separated content published any publically submitted sports articles.

Significant differences exist between the means for sports photographs when UGC remains separate from (M = .191, SD = .512) professional content as opposed to when UGC submissions intermix with those from community contributions M = 1.557, SD = 4.931, t (212.97) = -3.68, p < .01 at a 95% CI (-2.098 to -.634). The last statistically significant difference between means occurred when sites separate content in the submission of social news. The separation of content resulted in the following M = .286, SD .902 as opposed to when the content is not M = .778, SD = 1.41, t (31.731) = -2.225, p = .033 at a 95% CI (-.944 to -.042). All other tested variations of UGC from the content analysis did not produce significant results.

Following the t-tests, a logistic regression tested the influence of separating UGC from staff-produced content on the amount of UGC published. The dependent variable was the separation of content, while the independent variables were the various types of UGC hard, soft, sports, opinion, letters to the editor, and social news articles along with hard, soft and sports photographs (see table 3). The model was statistically significant χ² (9, N = 215) = 41.571, p < .001. The model explained between 17.6% (Cox and Snell R
Square) and 37.2% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance based on the separation of UGC from staff-produced content, and correctly classified 90.2% of cases. The strongest predictor of the influence of separation occurred in soft news at -.321, which means that the separation of UGC from staff-produced content means that sites that separate content are less likely to publish UGC. The results answer RQ3 that separation of content influences how many submissions from the public that a community newspapers websites publish.

Table 3: Logistic Regression predicting the influence of if a community newspaper website separated staff produced content from UGC (DV) and how much UGC the publication publishes online in hard news, soft news, sports, letters to the editor, social news, and opinion, and in hard, soft and sports UGC photography.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>odds for Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Article</td>
<td>1.833</td>
<td>1.246</td>
<td>2.165</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.141</td>
<td>6.255</td>
<td>.544</td>
<td>1.934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Photos</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>.987</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td>1.426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>-.321</td>
<td>.101</td>
<td>10.138</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>.595</td>
<td>.884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Photos</td>
<td>.302</td>
<td>.167</td>
<td>3.276</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>1.353</td>
<td>.975</td>
<td>1.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Articles</td>
<td>16.233</td>
<td>2366.57</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>11221819.1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Photos</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.450</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>1.378</td>
<td>.570</td>
<td>3.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the Editor</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>4.201</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.941</td>
<td>.889</td>
<td>.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Articles*</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>1.533</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td>1.432</td>
<td>.811</td>
<td>2.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.349</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>1.271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .176, Nagelkerke R Square .372, p < .01
Influence of Submission Method (RQ4)

The next step of this dissertation involved the review of the choices available to the public for submitting UGC on community news websites and if these options influenced how much UGC was published. This is part of the attempt to answer RQ4, which questions if the method that contributors can submit content influences the amount of UGC published on community newspaper websites. The researcher conducted independent sample t-tests to learn more about if the submission method influenced the number of UGC contributions eventually published. The first test compared the difference between if public could submit only by mail using an address listed on a community newspaper website. The test of mail submission as a variable used the same categories of hard, soft, sports, letters to the editor, social news, and opinion; along with hard, soft and sports photographs. In this case, only one category had a statistically significant difference between means. Social news UGC occurred more often when the public did not have to submit content using mail (M = .506, SD = 1.467) as opposed to when they did M = .129, SD = .562, t (57.219) = -3.166, p = .002 at a 95% CI (-.615 to -.139).

The researcher also tested the grouping variable of email against the same categories of hard, soft, sports, letters to the editor, social news and opinion in terms of articles; along with photographs from hard, soft and sports news. As it relates to email submissions, there were no cases where there was a statistically significant difference between the means.
The last grouping variable tested if the public could submit content using an electronic form on the website. Again, the researcher included all news types from the content analysis in the test. In this instance, several variables were statistically significant. The first was sports stories where those who could submit using an online form (M = .497, SD = 1.506) resulted in more published UGC than those who could not (M = .159, SD = .61), t (356.87) = 2.9, p = .004 at a 95% CI (.104 to .54). Similarly, those sites where people could submit sports photographs using a digital form on the site (M = 1.069, SD = 4.305) published more UGC than those who could not M = .436, SD = 1.621, t (350.378) = 2.029, p = .043 at a 95% CI (.02 to 1.246). Social news article publications were more likely to appear on sites where people can submit news using an electronic form (M = .609, SD = 1.29) as opposed to when the form was not an option (M = .239, SD = .703, t (355.739) = 3.534, p < .001 at a 95% CI (.164 to .575).

The researcher used logistic regression to further measure how the submission option influenced the publication of UGC. In each case, preliminary analyses determined there was no occurrence of multicollinearity. The first test considered sites that sought submissions by mail. The model contained nine dependent variables in each of the UGC categories: hard, soft, social, sports, letters to the editor and opinion articles represented, and photography from hard, soft, and sports. The model attained statistical significance \( \chi^2 (9, N = 361) = 35.014, p < .001 \). The model explained between 9.2% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 20.9% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in publication based the option to submit content via the mail and correctly classified 92.5% of cases (see table 4). The strongest predictor of mail as a submission method and UGC publication was social
articles with a $\beta$ of 2.17. This indicates that community newspaper websites are more likely to publish social news articles online if they accept submissions by mail.

Table 4: Logistic Regression predicting influence of mail option for submission of UGC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% CI Lower</th>
<th>95% CI Upper</th>
<th>odds for Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Article</td>
<td>-.324</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>7.342</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td>.914</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Photos</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.942</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>.703</td>
<td>1.461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.331</td>
<td>1.100</td>
<td>.907</td>
<td>1.334</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Photos</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>3.591</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>.924</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Articles</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>.626</td>
<td>1.534</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Photos</td>
<td>.591</td>
<td>.317</td>
<td>3.466</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>1.805</td>
<td>.969</td>
<td>3.362</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the Editor</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.384</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.239</td>
<td>.971</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>1.020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Articles</td>
<td>.775</td>
<td>.375</td>
<td>4.282</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>2.171</td>
<td>1.042</td>
<td>4.522</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles</td>
<td>-.145</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>6.376</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.865</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>.968</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .092, Nagelkerke R Square .209, p < .01

A second logistic regression tested the influence of email as a submission option. This model contained the same nine variables as the previous model. In this instance, the results were not significant. Email as an option to submit content did not have an influence on the number of UGC articles or photographs published by community journalism websites.
Next, a third logistic regression tested the potential influence of the community media outlet providing an online form for members of the public and how much UGC was published. In this instance, the model was statistically significant (see table 5) at $\chi^2 (9, N = 365) = 20.407$, $p < .05$. The model explained between 5.4% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 7.6% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance of how much UGC a community newspaper website published, and correctly classified 68.2% of cases. Hard news UGC was the strongest predictor of electronic submission forms influencing how much UGC a community newspaper websites publishes at a $\beta$ of 1.069. This means providing a digital form for submission influences how many articles a community newspaper website publishes. Therefore, to answer RQ4, the method of submission can influence how much UGC community newspaper websites publish.
Table 5: Logistic Regression predicting influence of a digital form on a website as an option for the submission of UGC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% C.I.</th>
<th>Odds for Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Article</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.596</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>1.069</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>1.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Photos</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.084</td>
<td>.293</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td>1.047</td>
<td>.888</td>
<td>1.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.876</td>
<td>1.005</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Photos</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.353</td>
<td>1.003</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Articles</td>
<td>-.253</td>
<td>.169</td>
<td>2.246</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>1.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Photos</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>1.476</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.921</td>
<td>.807</td>
<td>1.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to the Editor</td>
<td>-.025</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>1.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Articles*</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.140</td>
<td>4.953</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.733</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>.964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>1.051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .054, Nagelkerke R Square .076, p < .05

To further test the influence of how a news website asked for UGC, the researcher combined the three methods for soliciting UGC. Only 12 sites provided the public with all three potential methods to contribute UGC. Sites that allowed all three methods of submission received a score of 0, sites that allowed two methods received a 1, and so forth. A one-way ANOVA tested the mean differences between the methods of solicitation and how much UGC the site published (see table 6). The differences between the means were not significant during tests of UGC hard news, soft news sports news, and social news, along with tests of photographs for hard news, soft news, and sports.
Table 6: Analysis of variance between how many UGC soft news photography a community news website publishes and the potential method to submit content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within Subjects</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Method Allowed</th>
<th>Method Not Allowed</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mail**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>8.728</td>
<td>11059.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.692</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1.613</td>
<td>2043.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.687</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.807</td>
<td>2289.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail &amp; Email*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>5.082</td>
<td>6440.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail and Digital form*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.71</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>5.424</td>
<td>6873.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email and Digital Form*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>16.630</td>
<td>21072.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail, Email, and digital form* **</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31.67</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>9.099</td>
<td>11530.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; **p < .01

The results were significant for UGC soft news photographs solicitation by mail (F = 8.728, p < .01), mail and email (F = 5.082, p < .05), mail and digital website form (F = 5.424, p < .05), email and digital website form (F = 16.630, p < .001), and mail, email, and digital web form combined (F = 9.099, p < .01) were all statistically significant. Solicitation for soft news UGC through email, digital website form were not significant. In terms of opinion UGC sites that allow content submissions through email was statistically significant (F = 4.28, p < .5). All other categories within this classification did not reach statistical significance. In several cases, while there are sizable differences between means they do not reach statistical significance, however this result is likely because the N for many of the categories is small ranging from 2 to 26.

The results of this ANOVA point toward better results for community newspaper websites if they offer the public more options to submit content. While there may not be any easy or single technological fix that community journalist can use online to
encourage more contributions, those who manage these websites can encourage more UGC submissions by allowing as many options as possible to submit because personal preferences vary and what works for one type of community, or one type of news website may not work for another. These results answer RQ4 by pointing toward the possibility of a positive benefit of providing the public with as many methods as possible to contribute content.

Circulation Size (RQ5)

Finally, to answer RQ5, which asks if circulation size would influence the amount of UGC published on a community newspaper website, a logistic regression tested the differences between the variables of hard, soft, social, sports, letters to the editor and opinion articles represented, and photography from hard, soft, and sports. The model was not statistically significant, indicating that circulation size does not influence the amount of UGC published.
Chapter 9: Interactivity Findings

A second content analysis examined interactivity on community journalism newspaper websites. Descriptive statistics are an important part of providing clarity to the study. Out of 400 community media websites examined within this analysis, 203 (50.8%) gave the public full access to content, 144 sites (36%) contained some type of limited access, and 53 (13.3%) blocked all content or provided no content. The breakdown of access within this content analysis was similar to that found within the other content analysis sample. In addition, 254 publications (63.5%) allowed comments on all stories, 143 (35.8%) did not allow comments, and 3 (.8%) allowed comments on some stories, but not others. Finally, 148 community news websites (37%) used Facebook as a commenting mechanism. Of the 347 community news websites that allowed comments, 42.7% of them use Facebook, at least partially, for public commenting.

From these sites, a total of 798 comments were made on hard news articles out of a total of 2,036 hard news articles published on the 400 community newspaper websites examined. The number of hard news articles ranged from a low of 0 posted on 107 sites to a high of 64. Sites that contained none of a certain type of news remained in the content analysis because the goal was to show the content of a typical community news sites, and excluding them could skew results (see table 7). Comments on hard news stories ranged from 343 websites that received no comments to one website that received 140 comments.

The 400 sites published a total of 2,393 soft news articles. The number of soft news article ranged from zero to a high of 88. In addition, there were 476 comments
posted on soft news articles and 343 sites had no comments while the highest received 154.

There were 1,939 sports articles posted which received comments ranging from a low of 0 to a high of 61. Sports articles received a total of 193 comments with 367 sites receiving no comments and the most commented site receiving 61.

The 400 community journalism websites published 1,110 opinion articles and 201 sites posted opinion articles while the website with that site that published the most opinion having 60 stories. From those opinion articles, there were a total of 3,753 comments made with no comments on 343 sites, but one site receiving the most with 140 comments.

Finally, there were 1,645 UGC articles published on the sites, with 107 sites publishing no UGC articles and the highest site publishing 64 articles. On those UGC articles there were 1,744 comments ranging from 348 sites with no comments to 517 comments on one site.

Table 7: Frequency Table with media number of articles of a certain type compared to how many comments that type of article typically receives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total posts</th>
<th>Mean postings</th>
<th>Total Comments</th>
<th>Mean Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News Articles</td>
<td>2036</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News Articles</td>
<td>2393</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports articles</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion Articles</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3753</td>
<td>9.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC Articles</td>
<td>1645</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total sites reviewed 400
Percentages suggest certain types of articles generate a stronger willingness to comment. This sample indicates the public is most willing to comment on opinion and UGC stories. Hard news was the next most likely category to have comments, followed by soft news, and finally sports.

Coders checked each website for additional factors that might influence a person’s willingness to comment. The potential impact of anonymity, moderation, seeking comments directly from minority groups, and responding to comments are considered factors that could influence the number of comments received. There were three community media websites where it was directly stated that the publication seeks comments from minority or underrepresented groups within the community. In addition, seven publications responded to comments made by members of the public. Among the 400 publications that were part of this sample, 229 did not appear to have comments on any articles; this includes the 53 websites that did not accept comments. This means that there were 176 publications that allowed comments, but did not receive any, at least in the timeframe that the researchers reviewed. Of course, the inability to find comments could relate to paywalls, which limited how many stories a coder could check.

Additionally, 97 websites allowed anonymity, compared to 141 that did not. The remaining 162 sites were either unclear regarding if someone could post anonymously or did not allow comments. Finally, as it relates to moderation, 75 sites clearly noted that someone from the publication moderated the comment areas; there were 152 sites that expressed plainly that the publication did not moderate comments. The remaining 173 sites did not provide a clear notion if anyone from the publication moderated comments.
**Anonymity and Commenting (H2)**

To test H2, which stated that allowing anonymity would have a positive influence on the number of comments published by community newspaper websites, independent sample t-tests gauged if differences existed in the number of comments published by sites that allowed anonymity versus those that did not. The test used the same variables - hard, soft, sport, opinion, and UGC. None of the categories were statistically significant when comparing the independent variables to the grouping variable of if the community news website allowed anonymity or not.

A logistic regression further tested if there was a relationship between anonymity and the independent variables of hard news, soft news, sports, opinion, and UGC articles. The model was statistically significant \( \chi^2 (5, N = 238) = 11.909, p < .01 \) (see table 8) and explained between 4.9% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 6.6% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance. As with moderation, none of the independent variables were statistically significant on their own. This result supports H2, which suggested a relationship between allowing anonymity and the number of comments on the website. However, this result suggests a minimal impact on allowing anonymity toward the frequency that comments appear with articles on community newspaper websites.
Table 8: Logistic Regression predicting the number of comments received on articles on community newspaper websites with the ability to comment on anonymously.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% for odds Lower</th>
<th>95% for odds Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.879</td>
<td>1.002</td>
<td>.972</td>
<td>1.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.593</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td>.965</td>
<td>1.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports News</td>
<td>.333</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td>2.792</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>1.395</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>2.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>-.027</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>1.845</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.973</td>
<td>.935</td>
<td>1.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>1.394</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.238</td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>.986</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .049, Nagelkerke R Square .066, p < .05

The Influence of Moderation (H2)

To answer H2 in part, the researcher performed independent sample t-tests to compare if moderating comments on a community news website led to more comments on hard, soft, opinion, sports or UGC articles. None of these variables reached statistical significance when compared to the grouping variable of moderation. The researcher further tested using a logistic regression with the dependent variable of moderation and the independent variables of comments made on hard news, soft news, sports, opinion, and UGC articles. The model did not attain statistical significance. Therefore, the results suggest moderation did not influence how many comments community newspaper websites received. Therefore, at least in part H2 would suggest there is no significant relationship between moderation and how many comments a community newspaper websites will receive.

Combining Anonymity and Moderation (H2)

This study further seeks to clarify how the frequency of comments is impacted if a community newspaper website both moderates and allows anonymous comments. H2 theorized that if a site allowed anonymity and moderated comments then more people...
would comment. Therefore, a need exists to test the two variables together. The assessment used was a univariate test of between-subjects effects using anonymity and moderation as the fixed factors. The researcher performed a total of five multivariate tests. In each of the five tests, preliminary assumption testing checked for normality, linearity, and outliers, along with multicollinearity and in each of the five cases there were no serious violations noted.

A one-way ANOVA tested the mean differences between anonymity, moderation and the two variables in relation to how many comments appeared on the site. Using the dependent variables of comments on articles classified as hard news, soft news, sports, opinion and UGC, the differences between the means were not statistically significant. This indicates that combining anonymity and moderation does not result in a significant difference in the number of comments received by community newspaper websites. In this test, H2 was not supported with the combined test of anonymity and moderation. This result combined with the individual tests of anonymity and moderation suggest mixed support at best for H2.

**Facebook as Moderation (RQ7)**

The use of Facebook as a moderating tool was also tested. RQ7 specifically questioned the possible influence of Facebook as a type of moderation on community journalism websites. Again, independent sample t-tests compared if news stories received more comments if readers had to use Facebook to comment on articles. This test used hard news, soft news, sports, opinion, and UGC articles as independent variables. The use of Facebook did not produce any statistically significant results in the t-tests.
The researcher then performed a logistic regression to measure any potential impact of a model combining all five independent variables of hard news, soft news, sports, opinion, and UGC articles. The model was statistically significant $X^2 (5, N = 395) = 23.074, p < .001$ and (see table 9) explained between 5.7% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 7.7% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance. The strongest predictor is sports commenting at -.553, which would indicate that Facebook slightly reduces the chance that someone will comment on a sports story on a community newspaper website. The result provides some clarity to RQ7. Facebook as a form of moderation appears to have a slight negative influence on the number of comments that appear on articles on community newspaper websites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% for odds</th>
<th>C.I Ratio</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.617</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>.987</td>
<td>.957</td>
<td>1.019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>1.068</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>-.553</td>
<td>.221</td>
<td>6.277</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>.373</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>6.114</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>1.033</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.366</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>1.909</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>1.009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .057, Nagelkerke R Square .077, p < .001

**The Influence of Direct Interaction**

The section includes the results of tests designed to potentially answer H3, which suggests that direct interaction with the public will result in more comments appearing on community newspaper websites. The researcher used logistic regression to test for a
potential influence of the dependent variable if someone from the community newspaper website responded to comments. The independent variables were total number of comments made on hard news, soft news, sports, opinion, and UGC articles. The model was statistically significant $X^2 (5, N = 171) = 29.087, p < .01$ (see Table 10) and explained between 15.6% (Cox and Snell R Square) and 54% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance relating how many comments community journalism websites received if community journalists directly interacted with the public in comment areas. In this instance, two variables were statistically significant. The strongest predictor was hard news comments at $-0.069$, followed by soft new comments with at $B = -0.037$. Overall, the results indicate support for H3. Community newspaper websites that respond to comments on articles appear to receive a larger number of comments.

Table 10: Logistic Regression predicting the influence of direct interaction based on responding to comments on how many comments a site receives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% for odds Lower</th>
<th>C.I Ratio</th>
<th>95% for odds Upper</th>
<th>C.I Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard News</td>
<td>-0.069</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>9.082</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.933</td>
<td>.892</td>
<td>.976</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>3.965</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.964</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>-0.280</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>2.942</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.756</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>1.041</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>1.641</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.200</td>
<td>1.007</td>
<td>.996</td>
<td>1.017</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>1.009</td>
<td>.987</td>
<td>1.030</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.833</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>33.241</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>125.620</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .156, Nagelkerke R Square .540, $p < .001$
Chapter 10: Survey Finding

The survey portion of the findings of this dissertation begins by reviewing the attitudes of those who manage community newspaper websites toward publishing UGC in print. There were 340 community newspaper website managers who answered the question about the importance generally of publishing UGC. More than 90% of respondents had a positive attitude toward the importance of publishing UGC in print (table 1). Respondents also overwhelmingly stated they believed it was at least somewhat important to publish UGC photography and news articles in print. Respondents were slightly less positive to publishing opinion UGC in print. Just more than half of those who responded believed it was somewhat or more important to publish personal experiences articles which include blogs posts in print. This was the least positive reaction to any form of UGC in print.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Photos</th>
<th>News Articles</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Personal Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>340</td>
<td></td>
<td>343</td>
<td></td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Original responses were condensed into two categories to better show the differences between those managing websites and simplify responses.

In every comparable category, those who manage community newspaper websites had a less positive attitude toward the importance of publishing UGC online (see table
Those who manage community newspaper websites indicated were more than 20% less likely to consider it at least somewhat important to publish UGC online. This is more than three times the percentage of respondents who had something that could be constituted as a negative attitude toward the overall importance of publishing of UGC in print. The trend toward a less favorable attitude toward UGC online as opposed to print continued with photography where respondents stated they were nearly three times more likely to consider it important to publish UGC photography in print as opposed to on the web. With news articles, more than two-thirds had a positive response to publishing UGC news articles online. Overall, there were 13.9 percent more community newspaper website managers who considered it less important to publish UGC news articles online than publishing the same material in print. Additionally, 17.5% more respondents considered it at least somewhat important to publish opinion UGC in print as opposed to online. The closest result to print was in the category of personal experiences/blogs UGC. There were 57.3% of respondents who considered it somewhat unimportant or less to publish this content in print, and only an additional 5.1% of respondents considered it somewhat important or less to publish the same content online.

Table 12: The importance of allowing the audience to submit UGC online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Photos</th>
<th>News Articles</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Personal Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it pertains to the web, four additional information categories were added. These included videos, web links, and announcements such as weddings, births and engagements, and sports scores (see table 13). Just more than half, 53.6%, of the 323 respondents believed it is somewhat unimportant or less to publish UGC videos online. In addition, the majority of community newspaper website managers did not believe it is important to publish web links with 68.1%, 220 respondents, stating it was somewhat unimportant or less to publish them. However, there are some categories where editors seemed to place a high value on publishing UGC online. These areas were sports scores where 174 respondents, 70.4%, stated it was at least somewhat important to more important to publish these items, and announcements such as births, weddings, or engagements, where the 73.4% of respondents, 160 total, considered it somewhat or more important to publish UGC announcements online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Videos</th>
<th></th>
<th>Sports</th>
<th>Announcements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>31.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings help offer a possible answer to RQ7 in part because it indicates that while community newspaper website managers overall have a positive attitude toward publishing UGC both in print and online, they believe it considerably more important to publish UGC in print.
In the content analysis sections, one of the limitations was that while results suggested how much UGC a site printed and how many comments the public made on articles, it did not show if these websites received submissions they chose not to publish. Therefore, the survey asked respondents to estimate what percentage of publicly submitted content they choose to publish in print and online. The respondents estimated they published roughly two-thirds of submitted content in print with a range for publication from none to 100%. The mode, cited by 24 respondents, was 80% of submitted content was published. Conversely, the respondents stated their publication used an estimated 54.1% of submitted content online, again with a range from none to 100%. In this case, the mode was represented by the 18 respondents who projected they published 10% of the content submitted to them on their website.

These figures intimate a preference for publishing UGC in print. However, when asked specifically about if they published UGC online that does not appear in print more community journalists (169, or 52.3%) stated their publications did publish UGC on their website that did not appear in print. This seeming discrepancy was partially clarified with a review of one of the survey’s open-ended questions. A small number of respondents stated they used material online that does not occur in print for reasons of timeliness or print space concerns. But the majority of respondents stated the reason for publishing content online that does not appear in print related to digital technology that made it possible for the sites to publish videos, photo slideshows and other elements not possible in print.
The attitudes of respondents indicate a possible pecking order in terms of what types of UGC they believe is most important to publish. Those managing community newspaper websites seem to prefer photographs, announcements, news articles, sports scores, and opinion for online publication. The respondents considered it much less important to publish personal experience essays and blogs, along with videos, and links to other websites.

While these descriptive findings suggest a preference, questions remain about the answer to RQ7 that sought to learn if the attitudes of journalists might influence the type and percentage of UGC published online. To test this idea, a standard linear regression examined the dependent variable of what percentage of UGC a community newspaper published online against the independent variables related to community newspaper website managers’ attitudes toward the publication of UGC online. In this instance, the independent variables were the general attitude toward UGC publication, and specifically the importance the respondents attached to the online publication of photographs, news articles, opinion, personal experience/blog material, videos, links to other articles, sports scores, and birth, wedding engagement announcements etc. The researcher used correlations to test for multicollinearity between the variables, and while the variables are correlated the highest correlation (R = .599) is low enough to indicate there is not multicollinearity (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). The total variance explained by the model is 46.4% F (9, 289) = 29.721, p < .001. In the model (see table 14), three variables reached statistical significance: overall attitude (β = .327, p < .001), importance of
publishing news articles (β= .187, p < .01), and publishing announcements (β= .208, p < .001).

Table 14: The importance of allowing the audience to submit UGC online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General attitude</td>
<td>7.167</td>
<td>1.378</td>
<td>.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>1.581</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Articles**</td>
<td>3.764</td>
<td>1.245</td>
<td>.187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>1.792</td>
<td>1.117</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience</td>
<td>.288</td>
<td>1.129</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blogs or essays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>1.001</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to other websites</td>
<td>1.727</td>
<td>1.088</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Scores</td>
<td>-.231</td>
<td>.999</td>
<td>-.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements**</td>
<td>3.915</td>
<td>1.012</td>
<td>.208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R = .693, Adjusted R Square = .464, F = 29.721, d.f. 9, p < .05*, p < .01**

However, there was some question regarding if a favorable attitude toward publication of UGC would exist concurrently in print and online. Therefore, a standard linear regression tested the influence of favorable attitudes towards the publication of publishing UGC in print and how much UGC the site publishes online. The dependent variable again was the estimated percentage of UGC received by a community newspaper.
website published online. The independent variables in this case were the overall attitude toward the importance of publishing UGC in print, and specifically photographs, news articles, opinion (excluding letters to the editor), and personal experience blogs or essays. While the model was again significant, in this case it explained 12.1% of the variance $F(5, 301) = 9.411, p < .001$, a much lower figure. The overall attitude was the only statistically significant variable ($\beta = .325, p < .001$).

As an additional check the researcher tested the survey respondents’ attitudes toward the importance of publishing UGC in print and what percentage of UGC the publications estimated they published in print. A standard linear regression tested the variance using the dependent variable of the percentage of UGC received that a publication publishes in print. The independent variables were overall attitude toward publishing UGC in print, and specific attitudes toward the print publication of UGC photography, news articles, opinion (excluding letters to the editor), and personal experience blogs and essays. In this instance, the model predicted 27.6% of the variance $F(5, 321) = 25.880, p < .001$. Within the model, two variables were statistically significant, the overall attitude toward publishing UGC in print ($\beta = .380, p < .001$) and UGC news articles ($\beta = .150, p < .05$). This test also predicted less of the variance than the test of a community newspaper website manager’s attitude toward the importance of publishing material online and how much UGC they published online. These findings suggest that the attitude of those who manage community newspaper websites does influence how much UGC is published online.
As an attempt to provide a further test of if the attitudes of those managing community news websites toward publishing UGC online impacts how much submitted content they use on their website, a logistic regression examined the impact of factors relating to importance of publishing UGC and if a publication used content online that did not appear in print (DV). The model contained nine independent variables, which were the overall importance of publishing UGC online, and specific questions about importance for photography, news articles, opinion articles, personal experience blogs, videos, links to other websites, sports scores, and announcements (see table 15). The model was statistically significant $\chi^2 (9, N = 308) = 70.06, p < .01$, and as a whole explained between 20.3% (Cox and Snell R squared) and 27.2% (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance and correctly classified 68.8% of cases. Four independent variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model. Those variables were the importance of publishing any UGC online, and the importance of UGC news articles, videos, and links to other websites. The importance of publishing news articles was the strongest predictor of content being used online that is not in print with an odds ratio of 1.312.
Table 15: Logistic Regression predicting the importance of publishing UGC online based on if a publication used content online that does not appear in the print edition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Odds Ratio</th>
<th>95% for odds</th>
<th>C.I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall UGC*</td>
<td>-0.337</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>5.173</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>0.669</td>
<td>1.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Articles*</td>
<td>0.272</td>
<td>0.137</td>
<td>3.907</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>1.312</td>
<td>1.002</td>
<td>1.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion</td>
<td>-0.099</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.722</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.396</td>
<td>0.906</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>1.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Experience Blogs</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.747</td>
<td>1.039</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td>1.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Videos**</td>
<td>-0.336</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>10.426</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.715</td>
<td>0.583</td>
<td>0.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links**</td>
<td>-0.396</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>11.135</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Scores</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.533</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.465</td>
<td>1.079</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>1.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Announcements</td>
<td>-0.090</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>1.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.810</td>
<td>0.524</td>
<td>28.723</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>16.606</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cox & Snell R Square .203, Nagelkerke R Square .272, p < .05*, p < .01**

These results seem to indicate that a favorable attitude toward the publication of UGC influences how much submitted content a community newspaper publishes both in print and online, providing some clarity to RQ7. The attitude of the person who manages a community journalism website to UGC significantly influences how much UGC they publish and if they publish content online that does not appear in print.

**Interaction Locations (RQ8)**

This dissertation also attempts to learn the attitude of community newspaper managers toward interacting with the public. RQ8 questions if the audience’s preferred location for interaction influences the actions or attitudes of the managers of community newspaper websites. One of the first steps to examining this research question was to look at how important those community journalists consider interaction. Exactly 209 respondents or 65.9% said it is very important to interact with the public in person. There
were only 14, or 4.4% of respondents that considered it somewhat unimportant or less to interact with the public in person.

The positive attitudes toward interaction continued as it related to social media; however, the rates were lower. There were 128 respondents, or 40.5%, who thought it very important to interact with the public on social media. In this instance there were 25 respondents, or 7.9%, who considered it somewhat unimportant or less to interact with the public on social media. When it came to how important it is to respond to online story comments the numbers fell again. There were 97 respondents, or 30.7% who considered it somewhat important to respond to comments. In addition, in this case 37.4% of respondents, or 118, believe it is somewhat unimportant or less to respond to comments. These descriptive statistics indicate that those who manage community newspaper websites favor some interactions over others.

The survey then asked the respondents what type of news stories receive the most comments. Respondents stated that hard news with 183 responses, or 57.5% was most likely to receive comments, with soft news, 63 responses, or 19.8%, and opinion, 46 responses, or 14.5%, listed next. Only 13 respondents, or 4.1%, stated sports was the area that received the most comments.

In addition, while community journalists do not frequently respond to comments made on stories, they said they do read them. There were 165 respondents, or 53.1% who stated they always read the comments, and another 88, or 28.3%, who said they read comments most of the time. The remaining 19.6%, or 58 respondents, stated they read comments on the website half the time or less. There were only 20 respondents, or 6.4%
who reported they never read the comments. In the same vein, 155 community journalists, or 50%, stated they sometimes respond to comments made on the website. Meanwhile 61, or 19.7%, said they never responded to comments. There were 17, or 5.5%, who reported they always respond to comments, and 35, or 11.3% who indicated they respond to comments most of the time.

To move closer to offering some type of answer to RQ8, the survey asked where interaction most frequently occurred online. Respondents stated that Facebook with 187 responses, or 59%, was where they interacted most frequently with the public online and the second most frequent location was email with 105 responses, or 33.1%. There were 4 respondents, or 1.3%, who stated they use no online tools to interact with the public. When the respondents answered about all interaction with the public, respondents reported email was the most common comment format with 115 responses, 36.2%, and Facebook was next most frequent with 83 responses, 26.1%, followed by phone calls, 63 responses, 198%, and in person conversation 42 responses, 13.2%. It appeared that at least some respondents did not consider email to be an online response tool, based on them stating it was their primary response tool, but not including email within their online response list.

The researcher used a standard linear regression to test several variables related to interaction to answer RQ8. The first standard linear regression tested the dependent variable of what online tool the public uses most often utilize to interact with the publication’s staff. The independent variables were how important the respondents felt it was to interact with the audience in person, on social media, and by responding to online
story comments. Correlations tested for multicollinearity among the independent variables. The tests showed correlations within the independent variables, but none that were high enough to indicate multicollinearity. This model was not statistically significant.

The second standard linear regression model used the dependent variable of what type of story was most likely to generate comments. This model used the same independent variables. This model again did not reach statistical significance. The final regression model in this area tested the dependent variable of the digital tool such as Facebook, email, or responding to online comments where the public is most likely to interact with staff from a publication. The same independent variables again constituted the remainder of the model. This model did not attain statistical significance. This suggest the answer to RQ8 is that the preferences of the public in terms of interaction does not influence the attitude of community newspaper website managers toward interaction.

However, Pearson correlations further tested for relationships between the variables related to interactivity on the survey (see table 16). There was a low negative correlation between the online tool a community media outlet uses to interact with its audience most frequently and what method the public uses most often to interact with a publication, \( r = .112, n = 317, p < .05 \). There were also low positive correlations between the variable of how important it was to allow the public to voice their opinion on stories and the importance of interacting in person (\( r = .177, n = 313, p < .01 \)), on social media (\( r = .164, n = 312, p < .01 \)), and by responding to online story comments (\( r = .132, n = 313, \)
p < .05). Additionally, there was a low negative correlation between how often comments on social media contribute to coverage and the importance of interacting with the public on social media (r = -.280, n = 313), and the importance of responding to online story comments (r = -.155, n = 313, p < .01). The responses indicated a moderate positive correlation between the importance of interacting with the public in person and the importance of interaction using social media (r = .303, n = 316, p < .01). Finally, there was a moderate positive correlation between the importance of interacting on social media and the importance of responding to online story comments (r = .332, n = 315, p < .01). These correlations seem to suggest a positive attitude by community newspaper website managers to interaction extends across tools for communication measured within this study.
Table 16: Pearson correlation coefficients between values related to the importance of interaction and locations for interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most frequent online interaction tool</th>
<th>Most likely to interact with public</th>
<th>Importance of allowing public opinion</th>
<th>How often social media comments contribute to coverage</th>
<th>Importance of interacting in person</th>
<th>Importance of interacting on social media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most likely to interact with public</td>
<td>-.112*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of allowing public opinion</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often social media comments</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contribute to coverage</td>
<td>(314)</td>
<td>(314)</td>
<td>(314)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of interacting in person</td>
<td>-.039</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.177**</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(316)</td>
<td>(811)</td>
<td>(313)</td>
<td>(314)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of interacting on social</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>-.280**</td>
<td>.303**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media</td>
<td>(315)</td>
<td>(316)</td>
<td>(312)</td>
<td>(313)</td>
<td>(316)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance respond to story comments</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.132*</td>
<td>-.155**</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.332**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(315)</td>
<td>(316)</td>
<td>(313)</td>
<td>(313)</td>
<td>(316)</td>
<td>(315)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N reported in (N). Level of significance < .05*, < .01**

To further test interaction, a standard linear regression model used the dependent variable of how important those who manage these websites considered it to offer the public a chance to voice their opinion on articles. This model used the independent variables of the perceived importance of interacting with the public on social media, in person, or by responding to online story comments, and through moderating comments, and allowing the public to flag comments they believe to be inappropriate. Correlations
tested for multicollineality among the independent variables. This model was statistically significant (see table 17), but predicted 7.4% of the variance $F(5, 9.248) = 5.843$. In the model two variables were statistically significant, the importance of interacting in person ($\beta = .160, p < .01$) and the importance of moderating comments ($\beta = .158, p < .05$). This result further extends the idea that those who manage sites seem to either support interaction or not.

Table 17: Standard linear regression showing the results of the dependent variable of the importance of allowing the public to post their opinion on stories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance of in-person interaction**</td>
<td>.231</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of social media interaction</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of response to online story comments</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.054</td>
<td>.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of moderating comments</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowing the public to flag comments</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R = .300$, Adjusted R Square = .074, $F = 29.721$, d.f. 5 p < .05*, p < .01**

**Moderation and Anonymity**

The community newspaper website managers considered moderation much more important than allowing anonymity. More than a third of respondents stated it was very important to moderate comments and more than 80% considered it at least somewhat important (see table 18). Nearly 85% of respondents indicated a negative attitude toward anonymity. The heavy importance of moderation seems designed to keep comments civil in a manner that those who manage these websites support. Just more than 25% of
respondents were slightly or more uncomfortable with the tone of commenters on their site.

Table 18: Descriptive table of the importance of moderating comments, allowing anonymous comments, permitting the public to moderate comments through flagging comments they believe are inappropriate, and if the community newspaper website managers are comfortable with the tone of comments on the site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moderation Journalists</th>
<th>Public Moderation</th>
<th>Anonymity</th>
<th>Tone of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Economic Concerns (RQ9)**

Descriptive statistics further suggest some evidence why publications appear to publish more UGC in print than online. These figures help answer RQ9 which questions if economic concerns influence the material that community newspapers publish on their website. Respondents answered an open-ended question about the reason or reasons they have for publishing UGC in print that does not appear online. The responses “to save content for the newspaper” and “to give people a reason to purchase the printed paper” are both based on economic ideas within community media. Only 105 respondents answered the questions regarding why the manager publishes content in print that does not also appear on the website. However, 46 who respondents stated it was to convince the public to purchase the printed paper, and 31 respondents stated it was to save content for the newspaper. Therefore, economic concerns would appear to be one reason that community media websites might publish content in print, but not online since the printed
publication is more profitable than the web. This partially answers RQ9, which sought to learn if economic considerations lead to some UGC not being published online. However, the majority of publications, 169, publish material online that does not appear in print. Yet this was explained earlier as being primarily due to technology that allows content only that cannot be printed. Therefore, it appears that economic concerns influence those who manage some community newspaper website managers, but that view does not necessarily represent the majority.

**Legal Concerns (RQ10)**

Based upon descriptive statistics alone, it seems that those who operate community newspaper websites do not fear libel or other legal concerns regarding the publication of UGC. There were no respondents who stated that legal concerns were one of the reasons why they published content in print that they do not online, and only 1 respondent cited libel concerns. This helps to answer RQ10, which questioned if legal concerns influenced interaction and the publication of UGC. The answer, at least in part, is that those who manage community journalism websites do not appear not any more concerned about legal issues with UGC published online than they are with any UGC they might publish regardless of platform.

However, after reviewing open-ended responses on why that these managers respond to comments on stories, it seems legality might be at least a small concern as it relates to the comment areas. There were 135 respondents who answered the optional written response question who stated they responded to commenters to clarify issues, correct mistakes, or to make sure readers do not misunderstand something in an article.
Based on the case of the Lexington Herald Leader mentioned earlier, these responses might suggest an attempt to avoid some potential legal cost issues based on the extra work and cost of allowing others to post incorrect comments on their site that might be libelous. The Kentucky case showed that despite immunity from being sued for comments made by others, newspapers can still accrue legal costs from providing information sought in a lawsuit regarding those comments. Therefore, to answer RQ10 it is possible that legal concerns have a small impact on decisions regarding interaction.
Chapter 11: Discussion

The findings from this dissertation make several suggestions. The first is that community newspaper website managers continue to exert gatekeeping control over material published online as would be suggested by networked gatekeeping. This study also proposes that while managers maintain some control, the public also makes choices, in particular, through what type of content to submit. In fact, the findings present some contrast in which survey results intimate that community news websites would publish more UGC if they received it. Yet, within the same survey, the editors suggested they published much less content online than they do in print and still make gatekeeping choices regarding some content.

The interactivity findings of this study propose there is no single tool that increases interaction for community media. Additionally, neither anonymity nor moderation increased the number of comments on these community newspaper websites received. There is also the issue of where interaction should occur. The public and those who manage community newspaper websites either disagree on where interaction should occur or those who manage the sites make gatekeeping selections about where journalists should interact with the public. This dissertation also deals with sports interaction and UGC, which offers more questions than answers with a lack of both interaction and citizen contributions. Overall, the decisions made by community media managers seems to connect to one concept networked gatekeeping choices being made for economic reasons.
While not mentioned in the findings, an interesting email from a survey respondent stated that while he (or she) would complete the survey he (or she) focused on print in their job because the web is “where community media go to lose money.” Another potential survey respondent, who declined to participate, did respond by email as well and stated that he or she did not pay attention to the web because it represented so little of their revenue. There were only four individuals who responded via email to any elements of the survey. One criticized the gift cards to Amazon, and the fourth, who is also an adjunct teacher at a local college near his publication, stated the survey was interesting and he asked about seeing the results when completed. There was not enough response to the survey through emails to provide any type of reasonable evaluation of what respondents might think about the issues overall.

This dissertation has limitations the first of which is the public is not questioned. Therefore, there is no way to extrapolate why the public takes the actions they do. Furthermore, the quantitative nature of this dissertation provides information about what occurs, what choices are made, but does not provide the type of rich answers associated with qualitative research. Also, as noted the survey instrument itself has limitations because while the questions were sent to the entire population respondents were able to choose to participate. The possibility exists that those who responded to the survey had significantly different attitudes toward the web than those who did not. In addition, content analysis has the limitation of only being able to state what occurred within providing information about why such choices took place. Qualitative studies have answered these questions in much different fashion through in-depth interviews,
watching the content on chat rooms, question the public about their attitude toward commenting and even engaging within the critical cultural tradition. This dissertation knowingly sacrifices the depth of qualitative studies for the generalizability of quantitative research.

**UGC, Preference and Gatekeeping**

The findings from this dissertation suggest a preference among community journalists for print, indicating a gatekeeping choice focused upon supporting the more profitable platform. Economic gatekeeping choices may represent a sizable consideration of why community media published content in print, but not online. There was a gatekeeping development to the decisions of media managers to save content for the print edition. This appears to be a type of control related somewhat to the ideas of Barzilia-Nahon (2008) where networked gatekeepers attempt to use less obvious means to control their audience, however this study goes further by offering a potential motivation for those decisions.

In a more general aspect, however, the apparent preference for print might result in a dilemma for those who manage comment media. They could continue to make gatekeeping choices emphasizing the print product, which is where they make the majority of their profit. This attitude seems like a reasonable, possibly even sound business strategy; to focus on print while print is profitable and the web is not. However, despite the geographic monopolies that continue to benefit community media (Abernathy, 2014), those advantages seem unlikely to last forever. Trends indicate the audience is moving online and this development appears unlikely to change (Abernathy, 2014).
Therefore relying on print may offer short-term success, but it would appear to result in long-term problems because it opens the opportunity for competitors who might make different economic gatekeeping choices online.

This study does seem to support the research of Lewis (2012), which suggests that making the submission of UGC easier for the public will have a positive influence on UGC, and the study suggests that community media does believe it is important to seek citizen contributions. This study’s results while inconsistent showed a number of methods were preferred in various news categories. Many options seem to be necessary to increase submissions. Furthermore, as Bruns (2003; 2011) theorized forcing the audience into certain actions without offering other choices may be a mistake. Community media outlets that make it challenging to submit UGC, or refuse to publish it, could force a potential audience to discover alternative outlets following the model of the vagabonds within networked gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008) who seek a website that allows them the freedom they seek. These vagabonds could find new outlets because citizen-produced news and low costs of entry for digital competitors could challenge local media to remain the only source for information about a community (Neuberger & Nuernbergk, 2010). Bruns (2003; 2008; 2011) studies suggest that the community media editors who responded to the survey might be making a mistake by attempting to use any gatekeeping reasoning, financial or otherwise, as a method of forcing the public to use a specific platform, in this case, print.

This study suggests that the publication patterns regarding UGC on community newspaper websites are similar to what occurred at larger publications in the Paulussen
and D’heer (2013) study. The content analysis portion of this dissertation indicated the publication of more submitted content occurred in softer news categories. However, previous studies pointed to the idea that journalists at larger, metropolitan publications attempt to limit the audience to submitting material in softer news areas (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013). This does not appear to be the case with community media managers, with respondents in this study offering considerable support for the contributions of the public in nearly every news category. Therefore, this study must consider possibilities other than journalistic gatekeeping preferences to explain why these sites publish considerably more soft news UGC than hard news. Gatekeeping choices by the journalists do not appear to be the primary reason why a publication preference toward softer news at community newspaper websites seems to exist.

The simplest, and possibly the most logical, explanation is the public simply prefers to contribute soft news stories, in particular articles about events or organizations in which they might participate (Bentley et al., 2007). The prevailing attitude within this study of those running community newspaper websites is UGC is important to publish regardless of story type, which suggests they would publish more if they received it. Therefore, this dissertation supports Horan’s (2013) suggestion that soft news UGC represents a preference of the public. His study indicated that on social media outside the gatekeeping control of journalists, the public produced twice as much soft news as compared to hard. However, within this study community newspaper website managers also indicated they do not use all the UGC they receive, creating a bit of a dichotomy. Yet the overall findings suggest that as it relates to community media, the preference of
the public, not the predilection of community newspaper website managers, might result in the difference between the submission of hard news and soft news on the community media websites that were part of this dissertation.

**Story Type and Who is Making the Choice**

This study also indicates that citizens contribute photography of all types more often than written articles. There are a number of potential reasons UGC photography submissions might occur more frequently, which include the preferences and ability of citizens. The proliferation of cell phones with increasingly improved photography capabilities allows witnesses to events the potential to take publishable photographs (Schmieder, 2015). Time may also be a consideration because it is quicker to shoot and edit a photograph as opposed to written content. In addition, the web offers unlimited space for photographs as opposed to print.

The willingness to publish a larger percentage of photography could also be practical. The lack of available photographers at community media outlets might result in a situation where the community media outlets might only retain the limited gatekeeping choice of either no photograph of an event or publishing a submitted one. The survey results seem to support the idea of a more limited form of digital gatekeeping for photography with community media website managers offering a positive attitude toward the contribution of pictures. It is possible, however, that these positive attitudes do not extend beyond community media, a topic that future research could explore. Furthermore, Schmieder’s (2015) study that interviewed photo editors indicated those editors believed that allowing UGC photography did not reduce their gatekeeping control because
amateur photographers provided a piece of the story, while the work of photojournalists offered the whole story. This separation appears to protect the journalistic gatekeeping privilege much in the same fashion that networked gatekeeping (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008) would suggest that those who control online networks allow more citizen contribution while maintaining control.

Additionally, the industry’s reliance on citizen photographers more than reporters may be mostly financial since media companies have made the decision to lay off a number of photographers over the past decade (Harrison, 2010; Nilsson & Wadbring, 2015; Mortensen, 2014). Therefore, fiscal decisions may be a primary reason why gatekeeping controls seem relaxed for photography, another potential influence of economic gatekeeping in digital networks.

**Interactivity**

Digital interaction also places community journalists in a potential conundrum as it relates to both gatekeeping and interactivity theories. Community journalists could attempt to engage in the type of frequent interaction online that seems to occur in local media using more traditional forums (Lauterer, 2006). However, increased interaction takes time, and the small staffs at community media outlets (Kirkpatrick, 2001) could make that challenging. Interaction might take time and resources away from more profitable measures pitting interactivity theory and gatekeeping choices potentially at odds.

This study provides further support that the journalists at community news outlets interact with their audiences on many levels as part of the personal relationships they
develop within the community, and at least to some degree based on the expectations of the public (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008; Reader, 2012a). While the relationship does appear to continue online, the results of this study suggest the locations where the community newspaper website managers believe it is important to interact may not always correspond with public wishes. Overall, the interactivity content analysis indicates that community newspaper websites still operate using a low level of interaction, supporting prior research by Chung and Nah (2009) and Larsson (2011). However, the results based on the small number of sites that engaged in back and forth response suggest more people will become involved in journalism if interaction occurred online (Kenney, Gorelik, and Mwangi, 2000). In addition, there appeared to be a disconnect between the results of the content analysis in which only seven sites responded to comments and the survey where the majority of respondents stated they at least occasionally respond to comments. However, this might be a timing issueing because the overwhelming number of sites received few if any comments during the time period investigated as part of the content analysis.

It is possible the voluntary nature of participation in the survey might explain differences. Those managers willing to respond to the survey might have a stronger predilection to the web or to audience interaction. There may also be a fondness among community journalists to avoid response as a measure of reducing legal liability. Court cases have ruled that the legal liability toward comment areas increases if someone from the site seems to exert control over comment areas (Perry & Zarsky, 2015). Yet, the main reason respondents cited they interacted in comment areas was to make a clarification or
correction, i.e. when they are afraid that the conversation has the potential to either get out of hand or the information is moving away from facts. This shows at least some interest in controlling the comment areas. Both clarification and correction might help to inform citizens but would seem to do little to engage them and encourage involvement (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). In fact, this type of interaction would appear to support the traditional gatekeeping idea of the media as purveyors of truth and expertise. However, there is some part of the audience that does seek to communicate with experts, so it is possible that this type of interaction could increase participation (Wang, 2017).

It is difficult to criticize those in community media regarding how they chose to interact with the public. It is a field with low staffing and tremendous workloads. Yet as Lowrey, Brozana, and Mackay (2008) suggest journalists who fail to interact online miss an opportunity to foster an engaged audience. They also might relinquish their potential to guide the conversation through the manipulation that networked gatekeepers can use (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005).

In addition, Webizens offer a potential group of sources to journalists facing an increasingly high demand for content. This dissertation supports previous research that shows journalists seeking to connect with an online community must willingly interact with the public (Meyer & Carey, 2014). There is a need for journalists through their interactions to support the growth of online community (Meyer & Carey, 2014), particularly if the goal is to create an online public based on consumption of content from a particular community media outlet. Overall, the results of this study suggest that community media might benefit from increased commenting and potential connection to
their community if they engaged in more direct interaction with the public on their websites using Rafaeli’s (1988) idea of perceived engagement through back and forth digital conversation.

This study intimates the public has a different willingness to interact with stories as opposed to submitting material. The results suggest people are most willing to both comment and submit opinion-based articles. This finding seems simplistic, yet it is still important. Prima facia logic would dictate that it is easier to write an opinion article; in addition, through letters to the editor (Byerly, 1961) the media have a long tradition of allowing public submissions within the opinion section. Thus accepting UGC opinion would seem normal for both the editor and the public. Therefore, it appears that as media transition from paper to the digital screen, the habits of the past traveled with them as Mitchelstein and Boczkowski (2010) suggested.

There are differences beyond opinion raised in this research. For example, hard news received the least submissions, but the second most comments. This points toward the public wanting to share their opinions on matters that are important to them. Opinion articles and hard news, as opposed to issues of less importance, such as sports or soft news, are often less controversial, which supports the findings of Ksiazek, Peer and Lessard (2016). Feature stories about people in a community do not seem to generate the same level of discussion as opinions, politics or crime stories (Ksiazek, Peer and Lessard, 2016). This is not to say that soft news and sports do not have value, but instead that hard news and opinion are more closely connected to the issues that generate passion and
interaction. One of the questions from this dissertation related to the influence of moderation and interactivity upon interaction, which leads into the next section.

**Anonymity and Moderation**

While anonymity, moderation, and the combination of allowing anonymity and moderating comments did not result in additional interaction, there remain some elements to discuss. Community newspaper website managers seem to place much more emphasis on moderation and have a negative attitude toward anonymous comments, a finding that is not surprising based on prior research (Nielsen, 2013). Therefore, this negative attitude toward anonymous commenting could influence who chooses to comment and who does not, even on sites that might allow anonymity. Previous research has indicated that some people will not comment without anonymity (Ingram, 2011; Reader, 2012b; Trytko, 2015; Yun & Park, 2011).

Furthermore, even if sites allow anonymity, the negative attitude of management toward the concept is likely public knowledge and might keep them away (Trytko, 2015). These community news websites, based on the attitude of those managing the websites, likely do not provide a virtual refuge for those who want to participate, but do not feel comfortable being identified (De Koster & Houtman, 2008).

In addition, the attitude of community journalists has the potential to encourage only certain people to comment online. People make decisions about how vocal they will be through guidance they receive from their environment (Meyer & Carey, 2013). The attitude of community journalists may provide that guidance if the journalists have the typically close relationship with the public associated with local journalism. Of course, it
is also entirely possible that people have their own motives, such as a lack of emotional attachment, or issue salience that leaves them unmotivated to comment. However, if the media has an influence, a negative attitude by the media to anonymous commenting could push people to look for sites that cater to their ideas because they feel isolated in other locations both off and online to avoid possible condemnation (De Koster & Houtman, 2008).

In this case, the negative attitude of those who manage community newspaper websites is telling. This outlook might also relate to and provide a reason for why such a large percentage of publications received no comments on any of their articles. Small towns might reduce people’s willingness to comment even if anonymity is technologically possible because some might believe their attitudes are easily identifiable (Tanis & Postmes, 2007). The more people interact, the more information about themselves they present even when anonymous (Joinson, 2001; Tanis & Postmes, 2007). While anonymity does make people feel more comfortable in commenting (Meyer & Speakman, 2016), people can at times identify others through their ideas or language even without a name (Joinson, 2001; Tanis & Postmes, 2007). Anonymity may be an idea that finds support in numbers, and small communities simply might not possess the necessary populations for people to feel able to hide in the background regardless of if the comment might occur in a community of place, virtual community or hybrid community. However, it is also important to remember that regardless of website design or other factors, there exists only a small percentage of readers willing to comment online (Chung & Nah, 2009; Larsson, 2011).
This study supports the idea that there is no simple formula that community media websites can use to create engagement and gain participation from the public. Moderating comments, allowing anonymity, or the use of Facebook to post each have minor influences on the willingness of people to comment on news stories within community newspaper websites. While Facebook commenting was significant, the influence was so small the industry might not be wise to rely on Facebook alone to increase comments. This study was not able to recreate the result of an experimental study that indicated Facebook would increase commenting based on social affordances the site offers (Oeldorf-Hirsch & Sundar, 2105). The simple act of creating a website with the capability of interaction does not appear to be enough to increase interaction (Chung & Nah, 2009). In addition, the website managers focus upon moderation shows a direct connection to classic ideas of gatekeeping related to both the White (1997) and Shoemaker (1997) studies. These community journalists remain uncomfortable with efforts that lessen control and might implicate financial risk, such as allowing anonymity, but seem to support those efforts that maintain traditional forms of journalistic influence. Community media, despite ideas of UGC publication and interactivity that differ from larger publications, seek to maintain their ability make gatekeeping choices.

**Technology and Interaction**

This study supports previous research from Nielsen (2013) that indicated that a majority of journalists believe they should correct inaccurate public comments. In addition, journalists seem to believe they should engage with commenters by correcting comments, as opposed to directly interacting with them (Nielsen, 2013). Despite the lack
of an easy technological answer to increase involvement, this dissertation does suggest a nuanced possibility for those managing community media. There are a number of potential measures that community media can use if the goal is the creation of a vibrant forum for interaction (Meyer & Carey, 2014). First, asking the audience might have an impact, but only to a degree. It appears requesting submissions represent a case of diminishing returns. If a publication does not directly ask for public contributions then it seems unlikely individuals will submit, yet repeatedly asking for UGC may not result in a flood of comments be they beneficial or otherwise. This leads to the work of Buttry (2011; 2012) and Gillmor (2004) where they suggest that those seeking online engagement should have a clear goal and explain the reason why the publication seeks audience participation. Additionally, providing a specific area on the website for all UGC does not appear to result in more submissions; in fact, this study suggests it negatively impacts the amount of UGC published. The public seems to submit more UGC if the website intermixes submitted content and staff-written material.

The technology regarding how people can submit content may have an influence, but any possible effect appears to vary based on community and type of information. Therefore, this dissertation seems to support Gillmor (2004), who said to make submission of UGC as easy as possible for the audience. Those seeking to maximize contributions might want to provide as many methods as possible to submit because of the lack of consensus within this study. This could include mail, email, digital form on the site, and potentially others such as through Facebook or even Twitter. While it may challenge those managing community news websites to offer that many options, it still
seems as though digital forms, email, and mail as possibilities are less time consuming than taking submission by the methods of the past such as mail, by phone, or by fax.

One can argue that despite the results from this study, it remains challenging to determine direct conversation with the audience has a positive impact on interaction because so few community newspapers do it. Yet, direct interaction did have a considerable influence despite the small number of sites that engaged in such conduct. In addition, direct interaction explained one of the largest percentages of variance within this dissertation. It seems peculiar that in the Web 2.0 era focused on interactive technologies (Yang & Coffey, 2014), only around 2% of community media sites responded to comments from the public. However, the difficulties that media in general and community media specifically have in monetizing their websites may explain this finding (Abernathy, 2014). Yet, the result of minimal interaction comes at a time when the public expects, and some people demand engagement (Huang, Shen, Lin, and Chang, 2007). These findings suggest that using gatekeeping as a control mechanism through pushing the public to submit UGC in certain formats might have a negative influence on public engagement.

A Lack of Participation with Sports

The question about sports as the area with the lowest area of participation is vexing. This study suggests that sports represent one of the lowest areas for public participation in terms of both the submission of UGC and digital interaction. Yet, Blakely (2015) along with Lanagan and Smeaton (2011) offered some reason why sports does not dominate UGC. The findings of this study might suggest that people who want to talk
about sports may simply have a number of preferred venues to do so. Several studies have already focused on the proliferation of sports-related UGC on social media sites (Clavio & Walsh, 2014; Pegoraro, 2013). The abundance of sports-related conversations on social media and sports radio provide an instant and continuous feedback look for sports discussion (Clavio & Walsh, 2014; Pegoraro, 2013).

The local focus of community media could also influence citizen choices. People love to argue and discuss the actions of their favorite or least favorite college or professional sports team (Pegoraro, 2013). However, this same spirit of debate may not enthral the masses to boisterously deliberate high school or even junior high sports. It is doubtful people feel the same desire to engage in conversations regarding decisions made by a junior high football or Little League baseball coach or the performance of a player, in the same manner as they would those in the NFL, NBA, or NCAA. While sports fans’ passion is undeniable (Blakley, 2012), it appears that people exhibit a higher level of comfort commenting on professional or college teams and are less willing to engage in debate publicly over the local high school teams. The most logical suggestion for the findings of this study could be that fewer people desire to engage in heated sports debate over competition involving children.

The survey does suggest that those who manage these websites have an interest in and believe it is important to publish UGC as it relates to sports, in particular, sports scores. UGC does reduce the costs associated with covering sports (Smith, 2015); however, it remains unclear why these community newspaper websites do not publish more sports-related UGC.
While the lack of interactivity and discussion centered around athletics involving children seems easier to explain, the lack of submissions of more benign sports articles provides more of a challenge. The low levels of sports UGC submissions seem unexplainable based on the interest of sports fans in their teams and the importance that community newspaper website managers place on publishing the material online. In addition, while there are some community media that cover college sports. Either those publications did not appear in this sample, or community newspaper websites simply are not the preferred destination for discussing sports. In this case, it appears that gatekeeping in its traditional sense may be highly limited. The results of this study suggest either gatewatching or networked gatekeeping may better explain sports conversation, yet this study does not provide clarity in what new way of explaining gatekeeping might be more appropriate for explaining sports conversation.

**Fiscal Gatekeeping**

The public receives a growing proportion of their information online. Furthermore, as Lauterer (2006) noted, community newspapers, because of their size, are actually uniquely situated to experiment online because their lower cost portends less expensive online operations. However, the small size of community newspapers may also provide a clear detriment for online experimentation. The staff may simply not have the time or expertise for website experimentation.

Economics decisions as it relates to gatekeeping must consider both limiting public access to the website and the use of paywalls on journalistic sites. Community news websites appear to be part of a growing trend within the newspaper industry of
using paywalls (Pickard & Williams, 2014). These paywalls seem to go against the higher-minded idea of community journalism serving as a form of hybrid community online, yet certainly, respect the constraints of community journalism as a business that charges for both single-copy sales and subscriptions. They also seem to cause some limitation in terms of interaction. There are some within the industry believe that paywalls may eventually be part of a model that successfully funds digital journalism (Pickard & Williams, 2014). However, paywalls typically have a small influence on the bottom line for media companies, providing roughly 10% of circulation revenue (Franklin, 2014; Myllylahti, 2014). Conversely, paywalls go against the idea of the openness of the Internet and potentially limit the access the public have to viewpoints about issues (Pickard & Williams, 2014).

There is an argument that digital paywalls differ from subscriptions and single-copy sales due to one factor: traditionally newspapers priced subscriptions and single copy sales in a manner to provide funding for printing, packaging, distribution, and managing the circulation department (Langeveld, 2011) and online costs for those items are significantly lower (Potts, 2009). Paywalls seem to represent an economic gatekeeping function within community media.

The potential does exist for some success for paywalls at publications serving a certain niche or a geographically isolated community (Pickard & Williams, 2014). In this instance, gatewatching (Bruns, 2003; 2008; 2011) suggests these efforts would fail because media outlets do not have enough power over information to prevent people from going to alternative sources. However, networked gatekeeping applications would
argue that the public often accepts limitations online (Coddington & Holton, 2014) and economic based networked gatekeeping may represent another form of withholding (Barzilai-Nahon, 2005).

There are some potential risks for media using paywalls; they could lose their next generation of consumers as they find other information sources with the fewer limitations for online consumption. Paywalls are unlikely to change someone’s news consumption preferences due to the nature of habit formation espoused by LaRose (2010), which requires an initial thoughtful action to access material that develops into latent repeated behavior. If they cannot access the material initially to develop the habit, then it would seem that people would become more likely to find another information source, and idea that gains some support from Franklin’s (2014) economic study of the media. If LaRose’s premise is correct, then engaging in economic gatekeeping through the use of paywalls might harm the long-term future of community media. These fiscal considerations seem to relate to why the attitudes of journalists matter in terms of both interaction and UGC publication and connect both to the concept of economic gatekeeping in the digital sphere.

It appears that the attitude of community newspaper website managers matter more than other factors in terms of how much UGC sites publish and if online interaction occurs. The literature pointed toward the idea that corporate ownership would matter more than circulation (Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010), but the effect was small as opposed to managers’ attitude, which appeared to be much larger. Those publications whose managers have a more positive attitude toward and who receive the most UGC
seem to be those sites that publish the most UGC online. In addition, those who have a positive attitude toward UGC appear more likely to publish the content in print and online. It is understandable, and probably expected, that sites that publish the largest percentage of UGC online would be those who consider it important to publish. Yet, there is some lack of consistency because there is no relationship between the percentage of UGC a site publishes online and interaction attitudes such as the importance of replying to story comments, interacting with the public on social media, and offering the public the opportunity to voice their opinions on stories. This could relate to UGC potentially saving money for media outlets (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). Companies have not figured out how to monetize their websites (Abernathy, 2014), so it appears interaction takes time without any potential fiscal benefit.

However, newspapers that distribute content online that they either do not or cannot publish in print are successfully taking advantage of the possibilities of digital media because UGC is one of the more popular elements of websites (Thurman, 2008; Bulkley, 2012). These managers appear to understand that one of the benefits of publishing UGC online is a quicker publication, and they can publish additional photographs, which they might not have room for in print (Deuze, 2003). The websites also use video as a way of providing content online impossible in print (Deuze, 2003).

Some researchers classify UGC as a type of interaction (Riley, Keough, Christiansen, Meilich, & Pierson, 1998; Singer, 2010), and this study seems to support that concept. It also may advance it by providing some information on how those who manage the sites view UGC as more important than other forms of digital interaction.
Digital media helped bridge the separation between journalists at larger publications and the public with technology, providing numerous and continuous opportunities for them to communicate with the audience (Gillmor, 2004). This study provides insight into community website managers preferences for interaction. Interaction is especially important at community media outlets because a lack of community involvement is a potential fiscal threat to most community media outlets (Tremetzberger, 2009), and communication with the audience is part of a long tradition within community media (Lauterer, 2006).

**Future Research**

The results of this study suggest two areas that could yield interesting future research. The first is the use of UGC photography in the media industry. The second is sports interaction and UGC at community newspapers. A search of Articles Plus and Google Scholar contained no articles that focused specifically on the publication of UGC photography. Those who manage community newspaper websites believe it is important to publish sports UGC, yet they do not succeed in doing so based mostly on a lack of submissions. Further research could provide some clarity on why more people do not submit scores or game reports from high school and other lower levels of sports as it relates to community media. Additionally, while this dissertation shows that community newspapers do not generate extensive sports-related UGC online and are also not hubs for interaction about sports, people still debate local sports somewhere.

There is extensive research that examines the use of UGC on team websites, in sports marketing, and on social media. Yet, a search of Article Plus revealed only one
article using the search terms UGC, sports and community journalism and the same article was the top selection on Google Scholar. However, this article by Paulussen and D’heer (2013) found roughly 12% of UGC submitted related to sports, a ratio that does not correspond with the findings of this dissertation. Future studies could also effectively conduct interviews with sports fans in areas served by community media to learn where or if they debate local sports.

Future research might also study members of the public to attempt to gauge their preferences toward submitting photography to community media. The findings of this study suggest two potential ideas that might relate to the stark differences between amounts of UGC published from staff and the public. The first is the public might value photographs with soft news articles more than journalists, who might believe it is more important to use their limited staff to take photos of sports or hard news. It is also possible that the media make gatekeeping choices to limit photos in hard news and sports to emphasize the work of their staff. Furthermore, it is conceivable that the public simply value photos more than journalists and submit them with a larger portion of their submitted articles than journalists.

Finally, research in the future should examine deeply the concept of how important economics are in determining gatekeeping choices as it relates to digital media. This dissertation suggests that economic considerations are a factor for those managing community newspaper websites. Yet, there is much left to learn about how much influence economics have within networked gatekeeping and if this finding might extend beyond community media to larger publications.
Chapter 12: Conclusion

This dissertation takes a step forward from prior research projects that conducted surveys by using content analysis to gauge how much UGC community newspaper websites actually publish. In addition, the survey of community newspaper website managers offered some context to what choices might occur behind the scenes including the percentage of content submitted by the audience community media actually publishes. The expectation was community media websites would publish a high percentage of UGC received based on past research, which suggested that community media would make the gatekeeping choice to use UGC as a way of interacting with the public (Rennie, 2007). However, the results indicated that about two-thirds of submitted content end up in print, and just more than half appears online, meaning that while community media use most of the UGC submitted, they still engage in some amount of traditional gatekeeping, which is consistent with the ideas of networked gatekeeping. This occurs despite the idea from gatewatching that the public has other avenues for submission, which limit a publications ability to limit the audience’s access.

Despite limitations on space, community media continue to publish a larger portion of the UGC they receive in print as opposed to online, which indicates a potential preference for print as it relates to UGC. In addition, while news production does appear to include citizens in a number of manners (Thorsen, 2013), the potential does exist for community media to make greater use of UGC online and in print. Furthermore, this dissertation indicates journalists continue to struggle with maintaining traditional standards of the industry, such as verification of information and sourcing, while
allowing for increased public participation, which supports the results from the Thorsen study (2013).

Additionally, the findings of this research provide some additional insight into the gatekeeping choices of community newspaper website managers both in print and online. The results suggest that community media engage in a form of networked gatekeeping through omitting from the web content that these managers expect might encourage more of the public to subscribe to or purchase the print product. In addition, the survey results pointed toward a lack of interest among those managing community journalism websites in engaging in any form of gatewatching. For example, the survey respondents suggested that they considered it unimportant to help guide their audience to other reliable sources.

Community media seems heavily focused on print. The web appears to be less a concern to community newspaper website managers. However, print does have a seemingly limited future with the millennial generation (Meyer, Speakman & Garud, 2016), and the audience is moving online (Abernathy, 2014). Community journalism as both a business and a public service should determine a manner to survive online while making a profit. There is research suggesting that young people age into subscribing to print; however, those numbers have been steeply declining among all age groups (Pew, 2016), and Poindexter (2012) predicts that millennials are unlikely to fall into past media habits of increasingly reading print as they become older.

The Role of Community Media

More community news publications have the ability to take advantage of the additional capabilities of the web for telling stories as a manner of drawing a new and
different audience to supplement existing print subscribers. As the boundaries between print, broadcast, and Web journalism erode online, the audience has appropriated a more active role in news production (Domingo et. al, 2008). Furthermore, those in the media do not have to abdicate their gatekeeping control in a digital environment. Networked gatekeeping provides a potential format that explains how journalists could provide the audience new opportunities to participate while maintaining a subtle type of control that the audience willingly accepts (Coddington & Holton, 2014).

While the results of this dissertation suggest community media continue to attempt to control content, prior gatekeeping concerns including quality or space do not appear to be their primary concern. The most cited reasons by respondents about executing gatekeeping to control content were economic. Yet, there is some reason to believe that increased interaction through comment areas and UGC could benefit community media by reducing gatekeeping control. Both reciprocity through interaction (Lewis, Holton & Coddington, 2014) and submitted content remain important to community media as a method of public attachment (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013). Additionally, it appears that extensive publication of UGC would provide community media outlets with content different from that produced by professionals (Paulussen & D’heer, 2013) thereby appealing to a different audience. This is why UGC and interactivity remain important for community journalism online. Engaging in the level of interactivity recommended by Rafaeli (1988) could aid community media and appears to be more in line with the traditional relationship these publications have with their communities, as opposed to the one this research suggests community media have in
digital networks. While there is no way to definitively state that making better use of interactivity would make community media websites instantly more profitable, interactivity could at least help the publication connect to a potential new group of consumers who are less attentive or uninterested in print.

In addition, this study provides additional support to the idea that community media outlets are more accepting than metropolitan media outlets of the abilities of nonprofessionals as contributors (Howley, 2005), and that support seems to continue online. The media use technology to influence the rules of participation, while at the same time, content flows across media channels (Vujnovic, 2010). This can occur despite any attempts by a single media outlet to stop the flow of content, even within networked gatekeeping which acknowledges the online influence of those who control networks. Barzilai-Nahon (2008) acknowledges there is a segment of the digital public that will seek out online networks that exert less control. However, community media managers indicate a positive attitude overall toward allowing the public to submit content while maintaining their ability to gatekeep those contributions.

**Dealing with Expectations**

Journalists at community news outlets interact with their audience on many levels as part of the personal relationship they develop within the community, and do so based on the expectation of the community (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008; Reader, 2012a). Yet, the community media outlets in this study did not appear to prioritize interacting with the public in their preferred channels. Media outlets that do not interact with their community run the risk of becoming alienated from the public, which could
create an artificial rift between the media and citizens (Christians, Ferre, & Fackler, 1993). However, community media appear inconsistent in interacting online with the public, willingly interacting on some platforms but not others. This avoidance of some channels for interaction could risk alienating parts of the audience.

Community media have a tradition of covering the news differently, at least in part, by providing a forum for information that might not receive any coverage elsewhere (Forde, 2011) and this opportunity often includes citizen contributions. Providing the audience a voice, through the submission of materials, in print and online is one manner in which community journalists exercise their connection to the public as part of their gatekeeping function (Graybeal, 2011). While this dissertation indicated the functional results of UGC publication resemble those of larger publications, the attitudes toward public submissions differs, which is an important finding because it points to a role for the public both in print and online that journalists can still somewhat control.

**Civic Engagement**

Similarly, community journalism typically seeks to promote civic engagement, a purpose that operates in concert with digital media’s ability to convince citizens to engage in informed participation (Lowrey, Brozana, & Mackay, 2008). In a similar vein, by loosening their grip over comment areas, media companies might encourage more online participation (Meyer & Speakman, 2016), which could increase the possibility for engagement and the chances to offer an audience to advertisers that spend considerable time on a website. This study suggests that community media maintains its grip over both the submission of UGC and what appears in the content areas. Networked gatekeeping
theory suggests it may be possible for community journalists to provide this opportunity, while still maintaining a multitude of online control mechanisms. Overall, the community journalism that appears online does not appear considerably different from that in print in the decades before.

This dissertation denotes community media may have room for advancement online, but for financial gatekeeping reasons may not have interest in doing so. In addition, while technical elements on a site might help, there appears to be no better method to create an interactive audience online other than the same type of involvement that community media often exhibit offline. This project suggests community media remain divided about how to follow their audience online.

The hope is my research in the future will continue to search for answers about how community journalists can reach an audience as the public transitions from print, even in areas of news isolation. Hopefully, over time those efforts provide some direction to those who try to reach the next generation of potential consumers of community journalism.
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Appendix A: Definitions for Content Analyses

Appendix A
User-Generated Content — Codebook
Definitions for coders:
• User-generated content or UGC is defined as any type of material that can be submitted by the audience and is then published on the publication’s website.

Access Definitions
Can access all content means the site allows you as a researcher to fully view any content available.
Limited content for purposes of this study relates to a limited paywall, which means the site will only allow a reader to view a limited number of articles per month.
Access to content denied means the site is blocked by a full paywall or that access is so limited, such as only being able to view the first paragraph of a story, that it is not possible to differentiate between UGC and other content.

Topic Definitions
• Hard News is defined as any story or photo that is not opinion-based that is of a timely nature and covers topics like politics, crime, courts, economic or social issues.
• Soft News is defined as story or photo that do not need to be run at any particular time and typically deal with topics like entertainment, arts and lifestyles.
• Sports stories and photos represent any type of story that covers a sporting event such as baseball, football, golf, track etc. or outdoor events such as hunting or fishing.
• Letters to the Editor are defined narrowly as any item that is listed under a category titled letter to the editor on the website or is an opinion piece that starts with wording similar to “To The Editor.”
• Social News constitutes any information about social clubs or announcements including wedding, birth, engagement, or anniversary. Obituaries are not including for this study because obituaries are typically paid content.
• Opinion as a topic is defined as any UGC story that reflects the author’s opinion.
• Not Applicable means that the website being search does not contain any of UGC from the question. For example on question 12-1 the answer is not applicable if the site does not contain any UGC photos.

Separation Definition
• User-generated content is considered separate from journalists content if there are separate links within the website that contain only UGC. For example if UGC appears under the category of local news.

Submission Method Definitions
• Mail means that publication solicits content from readers and asks they send material to a postal address.
• E-mail means that the publication provides an email address or addresses and asks that all UGC be sent to that address or addresses.
• Electronic Submission represents a form that would be on the website where UGC can be submitted without using E-mail.
# Appendix B: UGC Coding Sheet

User-generated Content Coding Sheeting

**Q1. Media Outlet**

**Q2. Website URL**

**Q3. Circulation (Will be completed by researcher)**

**Q4-6 Publication Location**

**Q7. Date of Publication** (Year, Month, Day)

**Q8. Pay Website Access**

1 = Can access all content   
2 = Can access limited content   
3 = Access to content denied

**Q9. Topics and percent of UGC found on the website**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q9</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Staff Produced</th>
<th>UGC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hard News Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hard News Photo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Soft News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Soft News Photo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sports Story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sports Photo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Letter to the Editor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Social News</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q9-9  Opinion  
    Staff Produced  

UGC  

Q10. Are UGC items separated from material produced by the publication’s professional staff?  

1 = yes  2 = no  3 = varies  9 = not applicable  

Q11. What methods does the publication offer for UGC submissions?  

Q11-1. Mail  

1 = yes  2 = no  9 = not applicable  

Q11-2. E-mail  

1 = yes  2 = no  9 = not applicable  

Q11-3. Electronic Submission  

1 = yes  2 = no  9 = not applicable  

Q12. How many times does the website solicit submissions from the readers  

196
## Appendix C: Interactivity Coding Sheet

**Interactivity Content Analysis Sheet**

| Q1. Media Outlet                              | Case Number ___ ___ ___ ___ |
| Q2. Website URL                              |                            |
| Q3. Circulation (Will be completed by researcher) | ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ |
| Q4-6 Publication Location                     | City | State | Zip Code |
| Q7. Date of Publication (Year, Month, Day)    | Y    | Y     | Y     | M   | M   | D   | D   |
| Q8. Pay Website Access                        | 1 = Can access all content 2 = Can access limited content 3 = Access to content denied |
| Q9. Does the Site allow comments              | 1 = yes 2 = no |
| Q10. Does the Site use Facebook for comments  | 1 = yes 2 = no |
| Q11. If the publication does allow comments how many comments you see on the following types of stories (if applicable). |

| Q11-1. Hard News                              | |
| Number of articles                            | |
| Commenters                                    | |

| Q11-2. Soft News                              | |
| Number of articles                            | |
| Commenters                                    | |

| Q11-3. Sports                                 | |
| Number of articles                            | |
| Commenters                                    | |

| Q11-4. Opinion                                | |
| Number of articles                            | |
| Commenters                                    | |

| Q11-5. User-Generated Content                 | |
| Number of articles                            | |
Q12. Does anyone from the publication respond to comments made on the website?
   1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable

Q13. Can comments be made anonymously using a screen name?
   1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable

Q14. Does the publication ask the public to air their opinion on news or community issues?
   14.1 Hard news
       1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable
   14.2 Soft News
       1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable
   14.3 Sports
       1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable
   14.4 Opinion
       1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable
   14.5 User-Generated Content
       1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable

Q15. Does the publication make any type of effort to specifically solicit comments from minority or nonmainstream viewpoints?
   1 = yes  2 = no

Q16. Does the site moderate comments?
   1 = yes  2 = no  9 = Not Applicable
Appendix D: Survey Instrument

Q1 You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to click the button at the bottom of the page, which will take you into the survey. Explanation of Study This survey is being conducted to study the opinions of individuals responsible for content on community media websites. There are 30 questions including demographics. That seems long, but answering them completely should take no more than 20 minutes. Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in the survey at any point. You also can pick and choose which questions you respond to. You do not have to answer them all, but we would appreciate it if you would. Even though some of the questions in the survey may be personal in nature, you can be assured that your responses will never be matched with your name. Benefits Honest responses to the survey will help news professionals, journalism instructors, and students understand the attitude of community media website managers toward interacting with the audience and the publication of user-generated content. Confidentiality and Records Your study information will be kept confidential because we will not ask for your name. If you decide to provide your email address to be entered in a drawing for a $20 gift card to Amazon, your email address will be stored in a separate file from your survey responses. Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with: * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research; * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Q2 Compensation As compensation for your time and effort in completing this survey, you will be entered into a drawing for a $20 gift card to Amazon after you have completed all of the questions, if you choose to provide your e-mail address, which is what will be entered into the drawing. Winners will be contacted by the lead researcher by the end of April 2017. There will be one gift card for every 100 responses. Please be aware that certain personal information, such as name, address and social security number, may be provided to the Ohio University Finance Office to document that you received payment for research participation. However, your study data will not be shared with Finance. Contact Information If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the lead researcher Burton Speakman at bs634313@ohio.edu or Dr. Hans Meyer co-investigator at meyerh@ohio.edu or (740) 597-3084. If you have any
questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664 or hayhow@ohio.edu. By clicking the button below, you are agreeing that: You have read and understand the benefits and risks of this study and you give your consent to participate. You understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study. You are 18 years of age or older. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Thank you!
Q3 How important is it for your newspaper to publish each of the following types of content the AUDIENCE can submit in the printed newspaper?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience submitted content in general (1)</th>
<th>Very Unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Unimportant (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat Unimportant (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat Important (4)</th>
<th>Important (5)</th>
<th>Very Important (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photographs (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Articles (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion columns (excluding letters to the editor) (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal experience blogs, essays (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q4 What percentage of content submitted by your audience do you publish in print? Please slide the mark in the center of the scale to answer this question.

_____ Percentage (from 0 to 100%) (1)

Q5 How important is it for your newspaper to publish each of the following types of AUDIENCE submitted content on your website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Very Unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Unimportant (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat Unimportant (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat Important (4)</th>
<th>Important (5)</th>
<th>Very Important (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any audience submitted content (2)</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs (3)</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
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<tr>
<td>News articles (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion columns (excluding letters to the editor) (5)</td>
<td>〇</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal experience blogs or essays (6)</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
<td>〇</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q6 How important is it for your newspaper to publish each of the following types of AUDIENCE submitted content on your website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Type</th>
<th>Very Important (6)</th>
<th>Very Unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Unimportant (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat Unimportant (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat Important (4)</th>
<th>Important (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any audience submitted content</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
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<tr>
<td>News articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion columns (excluding letters to the editor)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal experience blogs or essays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7 What percentage of content submitted by your audience do you publish online?
______ Percentage (from 0 to 100 %) (1)

Q8 Does your newspaper publish submitted content online that does not appear in the newspaper?
☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Q9 Why does your publication publish submitted content in print that does not appear online? Please choose the best response or type an answer in the other category.
☐ Based on the low quality of content (1)
☐ As a way to save content for the printed newspaper (2)
☐ Based on concerns related to copyright (3)
☐ Based on libel or other legal concerns (4)
☐ As a way to convince the public to purchase the printed newspaper (5)
☐ Other (please explain) (6) ____________________

Q10 Why does your publication published submitted content online that does not appear in print? Please choose the best response or type an answer in the other category.
☐ There is unlimited space online (1)
☐ The publication has created a special section for submitted content (2)
☐ Submitted content serves as unique material to publish online (3)
☐ Submitted content can be published more quickly online (4)
☐ Other (5) ____________________
Q11 How important do you think it is to interact with your audience in each of the following ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Unimportant (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat unimportant (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat important (4)</th>
<th>Important (5)</th>
<th>Very important (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In person (1)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On social media (2)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By responding to online</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>story comments (3)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>By responding to online</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>story comments (4)</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q12 What online tool does your publication use to interact with your audience MOST frequently (select one)?
- Email (1)
- Facebook (2)
- Twitter (3)
- Online comment area (4)
- None (5)
- Other (6) ______________________

Q13 What type of article is most likely to generate comments from your audience?
- Hard News (1)
- Soft News (features) (2)
- Sports (3)
- Opinion (4)
- Submitted news (5)
- Other (6) ______________________

Q14 In what location is the audience most likely to interact with staff from your publication?
- Website (1)
- Phone call (2)
- In person (3)
- Facebook (4)
- Twitter (5)
- Email (6)
- Other (7) ______________________
Q15 How often do you do each of the following to comments left on stories online?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always (2)</th>
<th>Most of the time (3)</th>
<th>About half the time (4)</th>
<th>Sometimes (5)</th>
<th>Never (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read comments (1)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to comments (2)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q16 Why do you choose to respond to comments made on news stories on your website?

Q17 Why do you choose NOT to respond to comments made on stories on your website?

Q18 How important is it to you to offer readers an opportunity to voice their opinions on stories?

- Very unimportant (1)
- Unimportant (2)
- Somewhat unimportant (3)
- Somewhat important (4)
- Important (5)
- Very important (6)
Q19 How often do reader comments on social media or the website contribute to coverage?
- Always (1)
- Most of the time (2)
- About half the time (3)
- Sometimes (4)
- Never (5)
Q20 How important is it to do each of the following on the website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unimportant (1)</th>
<th>Unimportant (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat unimportant (3)</th>
<th>Somewhat important (4)</th>
<th>Important (5)</th>
<th>Very important (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moderate comments (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow the audience to</td>
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<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>flag, or otherwise</td>
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<tr>
<td>complain about,</td>
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<tr>
<td>comments they believe</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>are inappropriate (2)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow the audience to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>comment anonymously</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>on stories (3)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q21 How comfortable are you with the language or tone of the comments made on your website?
- Extremely comfortable (1)
- Moderately comfortable (2)
- Slightly comfortable (3)
- Slightly uncomfortable (5)
- Moderately uncomfortable (6)
- Extremely uncomfortable (7)

Q22 Is there any additional information you would like to provide about the publication of material from the public or interacting with the audience?

Q23 What is your title?

Q24 What is your age?
- 18 - 24 (1)
- 25 - 34 (2)
- 35 - 44 (3)
- 45 - 54 (4)
- 55 - 64 (5)
- 65 - 74 (6)
- 75 - 84 (7)
- 85 or older (8)

Q25 What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?
- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year degree (4)
- 4 year degree (5)
- Professional degree (6)
- Doctorate (7)
Q26 What Is Your Ethnicity?
- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- Other (6) ______________________

Q27 Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q28 What is your gender?
- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q29 What is the circulation size of your publication?
- 0-4,999 (1)
- 5,000-9,999 (2)
- 10,000-19,999 (3)
- 20,000-29,999 (4)
- 30,000-39,999 (5)
- 40,000-50,000 (6)

Q30 Is your publication corporate-owned?
- Yes (1)
- No (2)
Q31 What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?
- Less than $10,000 (1)
- $10,000 - $19,999 (2)
- $20,000 - $29,999 (3)
- $30,000 - $39,999 (4)
- $40,000 - $49,999 (5)
- $50,000 - $59,999 (6)
- $60,000 - $69,999 (7)
- $70,000 - $79,999 (8)
- $80,000 - $89,999 (9)
- $90,000 - $99,999 (10)
- More than $100,000 (11)

Q32 If you would like to enter your email address to be eligible for the drawing for a $20 Amazon gift card, please click this LINK.