The Impact of Newsroom Philosophy
on Story Ideation and Story Narration

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Research has shown that television news operations differentiate their product to strive to succeed in a competitive market. Stations use more or fewer soft news stories, for example, as a way of distinguishing their offering from that of other stations. Such product differentiation is often achieved through a creative process called branding, which consists of the development and maintenance of sets of product attributes and values appealing to customers.

At the core of branding often is what news professionals refer to as "news philosophy," namely the organization's general approach to the news product. Organizations make decisions to reflect some aspects of their communities and reject others, to provide a mix of news that is more serious or more entertaining, to downplay or play up news of conflict and news about crime. These decisions are market driven, for they are used to differentiate competitive news products. In radio and television, where competition is great, organizations opt for different news philosophies and then promote those differences, i.e., brand their products accordingly.

This paper argues that news philosophy is the key concept behind primitive distinctions between media types. In other words, television news operations generally differ from radio news operations, which differ from newspapers, fundamentally in terms of news philosophy, or the approach to news product. The news philosophy differences are the result of market forces and are more important theoretically than the rather obvious differences between media in terms of delivery technology. A radio station with a particular news philosophy would be more like a television station with that same philosophy in terms of key news production characteristics than it would like another radio station with a different news philosophy.

The paper examines whether news philosophy has impact on two key activities of journalists, story ideation and story narration. Before journalists produce stories, they must produce story ideas. Research shows that journalists actively talk about story ideas, discuss their potential as news stories, and lobby for them in newsroom discussions. News philosophy should shape the ideation process.

News philosophy should have impact on the structure and techniques that journalists use to tell their stories. For example, the journalist might decide to tell the story in a certain way, to develop

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character or not, to set the scene, or to create a sense of drama. These narrative techniques allow the journalists to differentiate their product from that offered by other media and, for that reason, should be influenced by news philosophy.

The Concepts of Branding and News Philosophy

Branding in the television industry has only recently received attention by media scholars (Chan-Olmsted, 2000; Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2001). Most local station general managers surveyed in 1998 said branding was an important tactical function for promoting a station and/or its news. Chan-Olmsted and Kim argue that ninety percent of the managers said they discussed the branding concept with department heads such as news directors, promotion directors and sales managers.

The terms "product differentiation" and "branding" are similar in meaning. According to Greer (1980), "when producers successfully differentiate their products, consumers may choose one brand over rival brands for nonprice reasons" (p. 60). Consistent with this view is the expectation that television news organizations, competing for viewers within the same market, should brand their product.

Thus, intramedia competition would be expected to create retention strategies in an effort to maintain viewers. According to Eastman and Ferguson (2002), meeting customer expectations creates brand loyalty. In order for customers to remain loyal to the brand (or station), the image of the organization must play a role. Fostering positive images is valuable in the building of audiences. "Local stations often vary only minutely in popularity, and a great deal of newscast or format promotion can boost one station above its competitors." (p. 290). Because there is most often only a single daily newspaper within a market, the branding mission is slightly different from broadcast. In the mid 1990's, the Newspaper Association of America (NAA) began a campaign associating branding with readership loyalty. Rogers (2004) defines branding as a framework for increasing revenue through product consumption. Branding strikes a balance between an internal perspective for company growth and financial success and the external perspective of the customers: how they expect the product to fulfill needs and wants. By defining the internal and external perspectives, it is possible to develop a sound brand strategy to drive long-term, sustainable revenue growth.

Much like their broadcast colleagues, newspaper industry executives agree that image is important in the retention of readers. NAA marketing development and promotion committee spokesman Terry Robbins said the real branding issue is "reader loyalty and what newspapers can do to maintain it." He continued, "It's all about your image, the quality of your product, and the satisfaction the consumer gets." (Rogers, 2004).

Local papers seek not only to maintain readership through the branding of the paper, but also to create readership. The *Orange County Register* underwent a branding campaign geared to 25-35 year olds entitled "Take Back the Morning." (Fitzgerald, 1997). The strategy was not to promote the paper solely on content or price, but to focus on the rewards of reading the newspaper. "We're not selling features, we're selling benefits and empowerment," said *Register* publisher David Stark (Mozes, 2003). Following the NAA's 2002 campaign that urged its members to "extol the virtues of newspapers," (Mozes, 2003) the *Register* is one of many papers that is creating branding slogans that appeal to their irregular readers.

The *Los Angeles Times* and the *Rocky Mountain News* have both initiated branding campaigns along the lines of content (Perucci, 1997). The *Los Angeles Times* underwent a campaign to promote its stories and reporting style with the slogan, "Get the story. Get the Times." Similarly in Denver, the *Rocky Mountain News*, which competites with the *Denver Post*, ran the slogan, "If you live here, you get it."

In sum, particularly with intramedia competition, differentiation is accomplished by using distinct content. Other differentiation mechanisms may include quality of information, style, narrative devices, or format. Studies that have examined differentiation as a strategic response to intramedia competition have found this difference primarily at the content level (Hicks & Featherston, 1978; Lacy, 1987; Sylvie, 1991; Chyi & Sylvie, 1998; Bae, 1999, 2000).

What media organizations often brand, either explicitly or implicitly, is what news professionals refer to as "news philosophy" (Nuell, 1998; Connolly, 2002). This is the organization's general approach to the news product (Chalaby, 2000). Organizations make decisions to reflect some aspects of their communities and reject others, to provide a mix of news that is more serious or more entertaining, to

downplay or play up news of conflict and news about crime. These decisions are market driven, for they are used to differentiate competitive news products. In radio and television, where competition is great, organizations opt for different "news philosophies" and then promote those differences, i.e., brand their products accordingly.

Media Differences

Studies examining media differences to date have focused on coverage of a particular news topic such as health care reform, international news, politics, or natural disasters. In coverage of natural disasters, television and newspaper coverage varied in that newspapers provided a higher percentage of soft news stories, while television produced relatively more hard news coverage (Wilkins, 1985). Television also tended to be turned to as the initial news source, was used more frequently by consumers than other media, and tended to function as the "community bulletin board," possibly due to its ability to constantly update content (Ledingham & Masel-Walters, 1985; Wilkins, 1985). Newspaper coverage tended to provide more overall analysis (Wilkins, 1985).

Reporting about international news events tends to be greater in national newspapers than on the national broadcast networks by a substantial margin (Chang, Shoemaker & Brendlinger, 1987). Political news coverage varies between media as well. Robinson and Sheehan (1983) identified six major differences between network television (CBS) and wire (UPI) coverage, finding the television coverage more personal, mediating, analytical, "political," critical, and thematic than the wire coverage. Johnson (1993) found that television ran more polling stories than did newspapers, but newspapers ran more stories dealing with the financial or organizational strengths of candidates. Johnson suggested that this may be due to the fact that such stories typically lack visual or dramatic components more common to other media. With regard to polling stories, Johnson concluded that the higher number of polling studies was a reflection of the significant investment made by some television networks in co-sponsoring polls.

In covering health care reform, broadcast television news has been shown to become more political over time, and was more likely to feature persons or newsmakers (e.g. members of Congress) as a story focus than in print media (Kaiser Health Care Media Monitoring Report, 1995). In a study of

coverage of life and death "hazards," Singer and Endreny (1987) found that news weeklies were more likely to provide data about mortality and benefits, while television was "least likely to provide information about benefits or to devote more space to benefits than costs" (p. 25).

Wilkins (1985) found that television broadcasters relied more heavily on "official government sources" than did newspaper journalists, and that newspapers utilized a wider variety of sources and more citations. While newspapers tend to utilize the inverted pyramid structure, television tends toward a more dramatic style (Robinson and Sheehan, 1983).

The Concept of Ideation

For Gans (1979), the key process in news creation is story suggestion. Reporters have the responsibility for thinking up story ideas. To this end, they are required to "keep up with what is going on in the beats they patrol or in the areas of the country assigned to their bureaus, and they are evaluated in part by their ability to suggest suitable stories." Other staff members, including top editors and producers, are also expected to come up with story ideas, and nonjournalists are encouraged to do so as well, Gans notes.

Gans' conceptualization is informative, for it focuses on the generation of the idea that lies behind the story. In this view, raw material has the potential to become news only if it is recognized as having that potential by someone in the news construction business. Bantz, McCorkle and Baade (1980) have termed this process of story idea generation story ideation. Something became news, they observed in the television newsroom they studied, as a result of a process that began with the story idea. Individual newsworkers assessed the information flowing into the newsroom from various sources, such as press releases, general mail, newspapers, magazines, reporter ideas, police-fire-FBI radios, and phone calls to determine what could be a story. These story ideas were then discussed in the daily story meeting, where decisions were made on which of the raw material would become news.

This perspective suggests that there are two complementary explanations for the universality of beat structure in daily newspapers and the lack of an obvious beat structure in television newsrooms (Becker, et al., 2001). First, most of the existent literature on news construction falsely sees beats as

ways of structuring news gathering rather than as ways of generating story ideas. The generation of story ideas, in this view, is the essential element of news construction. Television organizations, it seems, have found other techniques to generate story ideas. Some of these techniques are similar to beat structures, and some are not. What all these techniques have in common, however, is that they produce the ideas that satisfy the needs of the media organization.

The needs of media organizations in terms of story ideas, however, differ. Though not considered by Becker and his colleagues, it is possible that beats or an equivalent structure can be used in product differentiation, particularly in television, where the presence of a specialist or specialized content area could be used to promote the news product.

This perspective differs from the existing work on news construction in an important way. While the news construction work focuses on the routines journalists use to gather the raw materials of news, this perspective focuses on the routines journalists use to generate story ideas. This is an important distinction, for it recognizes that the ideation process precedes the story creation process, with its routines for assembling the information that becomes the story. Seen in this light, news beats are a means of generating story ideas first and then a means of gathering information for the story.

Differences in the story ideation process reflect the different roles the media play in a community communication system. These roles determine the kinds of story ideas the organization needs, and the kinds of stories the organization needs determines how they go about generating story ideas. Understanding the role the media organization is seeking to play in a community—its "news philosophy," and its routines for generating story ideas is crucial, then, to understanding how that organization is likely to use resource materials on a topic such as health news and how an information campaign about that topic is likely to have impact on the organization.

To an outsider, it may appear this is an issue of expertise, that is to say, that some media organizations use expertise in the story ideation process. In fact, it is more a matter of structure. Media organizations do not necessarily assign people to specialties based on their expertise. Rather, they create a structure in which a person is commissioned to gather a certain type of news, and they assign

someone to handle that assignment. The person given the assignment is unlikely to have any real

expertise in handling the assignment. This is particularly likely to be the case in a small media

organization, where role differentiation is not great and individuals may be asked to take on a number of

assignments over a short period of time or even at the same time.

In sum, it is possible that media organizations differentiate themselves in terms of the roles they

seek to play in a community. These roles have impact on the types of stories ideas they need. In this way,

the roles help to determine the structure the organization puts in place to help it generate story ideas. In

other words, there should be variability between types of media organizations and even within types of

media organizations, based on the "news philosophy" they follow. To understand the news creation

process, it is crucial to understand the process of story ideation employed in that organization. That

process should vary based on the strategies the organization employs to differentiate its product in the

competitive market.

The Concept of Narrative Structure

According to various definitions, narratives are texts about events structured in time, or accounts

of events occurring over time. The study of narratives and narrative structures in the modern era began in

1928 with the work of Propp (1968), who examined the structure of 100 fairy tales and found common

elements and rules that made him identify a limited number (31) of functions of characters (or basic

components) of folktales. U.S. media scholars, such as Berger (1997), later called these functions

narratemes.

News accounts were studied as narratives by anthropologists before drawing the attention of

media scholars. Rather than treating news as objective reflection of events, cultural anthropologists

examine it as cultural construction of reality. Some media sociologists have embraced this approach,

analyzing media products--both in content and in form--as the result of cultural conventions of one society

at a specific time.

Schudson (1995) has found that five major conventions of twentieth-century American journalism

did not even exist in journalism of the mid-nineteenth century. These conventions are: the use of the

inverted pyramid rather than the chronological account; the promotion of the U.S. President as the most important participant in an event; the focus on a single and new event in a news account; the use of quotations in stories about important speeches and documents; and the coverage of political events to reveal broader perspectives than that of the acts themselves.

Gans (1979), as well as Schudson (1995), differentiates between events that are judged by journalists to be important and events that are judged as interesting. The existence of the news conventions identified by Schudson and others and the dichotomy *between important* and *interesting* have led to the idea that there is very little variation in how different journalists can cover similar situations. Consequently, an event presumably belonging to one content group but reported in a different manner would likely be confusing to the audience.

Bird & Dardenne (1988) have argued, however, that splitting the news in the two categories, hard versus soft, assumes that audiences perceive reality through this very simplistic division and does not allow for the examination of other patterns and phases of the news production process. Berdayes and Berdayes (1998) also have acknowledged the role of news in constructing social reality and have stated the importance of the analysis of news narrative variation.

The analysis of the narratives and of narrative techniques is based on the distinction made by Russian scholars between *fabula* and *sjuzet*. *Fabula* is defined as the order of the events as they happened, whereas *sjuzet* is the events as they are told. Following this perspective, French researchers operationalized the distinction between *histoire* (what and how it happened) and *discours* (what and how is told). The American literature uses the terms, *story* and *discourse*, for this same distinction.

This differentiation is very relevant for news analysis and is reflected in the newsroom vocabulary. When a journalist thinks she or he has identified an event that is worth being covered or has an idea that can be used for the news, she or he often says "I have a *story."* Analyzing the news accounts as narratives is understanding how this story is told and why it is told that way. Actually, the order of these two questions–how the story is told and why it is told that way--should be reversed, because usually the

journalists first make a decision about the design and intention of the narrative, or what Peter Brooks

(1984) has defined as *plot*, and then they use narrative techniques to create the news product.

Corner (1999) showed that two types of narratives coexist in television news products, *spoken*

(what you hear) and *enacted narratives* (what you see). Corner said that both types of narrative utilize

techniques that newspapers also use to engage their readers: anticipation, suspense, resolution delay,

and repetitions to build up symbolic profile. Focusing on print media techniques, Bird and Dardenne

(1988) suggested that the inverted pyramid in journalism is most often used for coverage of events that

usually are labeled as "hard news," but that "while the inverted pyramid is an efficient device for the

writer, it may be a disaster for the reader." Readers may simply stop after receiving only the minimal

amount of information. As a result, journalists might adopt another narrative approach, such as a cause-

effect model or a chronological model.

Chibnall (1981) developed a list of seven news codes used by crime reporters: actions, the

dramatic, personalization, the present, the results, simplicity and the unusual. Though Chibnal does not

do this, these can be divided into three major categories from a narrative perspective: General News

Characteristics (the present, the unusual); Plot Characteristics (the dramatic, results); and Narrative

Techniques (simplicity, actions and personalization). Foss (1989) outlines three steps to narrative

criticism: 1. Analysis of the substance of the narrative; 2. Analysis of the form of the narrative; and 3.

Evaluation of the narrative. This model was used to compare coverage of the "information superhighway"

in magazines that target different ethnic and demographic groups.

In a study that examined how heroes were created and how meaning and order were given to

historical events in mainstream news magazines during the twentieth century, Kitch (1998) found

journalists had some discretion about what news to put into the frameworks, but that there was relatively

little variation in the types of stories they selected.

In conclusion, the literature on the narrative qualities of news identifies different levels of

narrativity in news accounts but does not agree on how broad or narrow the range of options is for the

journalist who is making a decision about how to tell the story. Narrative structure can be defined as the

design and organization of the news account. The techniques can be defined as the tools used to implement the structure. The analysis of the selection of narrative structures and techniques suggests that the journalist makes choices about narrative structure and narrative techniques. These decisions might well be influenced by the news philosophy of the media organization, the education and the objectives of the individual journalist, the public for whom the message is designed, and the cultural conventions that shape journalism in a given society and at a given time.

Expectations

The literature reviewed above suggests that, rather than differentiating the news media by tradition and technology, it may make more sense to differentiate them in terms of their approaches to news, commonly referred to as news philosophy. News philosophy is the strategic approach that the news organization takes to its product in an effort to differentiate it from others competing in the market.

The literature also suggests that the news philosophy of the news organization should have impact on the routines of the journalists who work within it. Specifically, the news philosophy should have impact on the process by which journalists generate the ideas that become stories and on the narrative structure of the stories assembled and the narrative techniques they use.

In this view, story ideation, or the process of generating story ideas, should vary in response to the philosophy of the news organization. Story ideational strategies that produce news consistent with the philosophy should dominate. At the same time, the news philosophy should influence the ways in which the story ideas, once generated, are converted into actual stories. That is to say, the structure of story and the techniques used to tell it should vary by news philosophy.

Ideally, it would be possible to make directional predictions about the relationship between news philosophy and story ideation and between news philosophy and narrative structure. At this point, however, that is not possible. The three concepts are in need of empirical validation, and the relationship among them remains open for exploration.

Methods

Because of the novelty of the concepts and the lack of any empirical base for them, a research design employing in-dept interviews was used. Central to the design was the comparison of different types of media, based on technological classification, and comparisons within media type, where possible. To standardize context, a single, medium-sized market in the southeastern part of the United States with variability in terms of media type was selected.

On April 16, 2004, the research team, consisting of the authors of this report, visited seven different media organizations in the selected community: the community's sole daily newspaper, the sole city magazine in the community, the only radio station with a significant commitment to news, the three television stations with a news program, and one of several weekly newspapers in the community. One member of the research team visited each of the television stations, two visited the daily newspaper, and one individual visited the magazine, the radio station and the weekly newspaper. Newsroom managers had agreed to the visit in advance. They were informed that the visitor would attempt to interview reporters and writers to learn about how the organization covered local news.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 working journalists at the seven organizations. Ten of the journalists interviewed were working at the community's daily newspapers. Two worked for the city magazine. Two were at the radio station. Six interviews were conducted at each of two of the television stations, and five were conducted at the third. Four interviews were conducted at the weekly newspaper. One of the television interviews and one of the radio interviews were scheduled on the day of the visit but actually conducted by telephone within a week of that visit. Most interviews were taped; where taping was not possible, detailed notes were taken.

At each of the media organizations, attempts were made to interview all the news personnel in the newsroom on the date of the visit. Where possible, the interview followed a structured format. In four cases, the structured format was abandoned when it became clear that the individual being interviewed could not answer most of the questions because she or he was not involved in day-to-day story idea generation and news production. In those cases, other relevant questions from the structured instrument were asked.

The structured interview schedule contained the following questions designed to measure key features of story ideation:

1. One of the activities of journalists is to come up with story ideas. On most days, what percentage of the ideas you turn into stories come from your editors, and what percentage do you generate yourself?

2. Where do you usually get the story ideas you generate yourself?

3. I'd like talk a little more about the generation of story ideas. On a typical day for you, how much time do you invest in generating ideas that you will turn into stories?

4. Is this something you think about a lot? If so: Could you explain how this fits into your average day?

5. Do you have particular people you talk to or places you visit, sources you contact or other techniques that you use to generate the ideas for stories? If so: What are they? If has not specified: Do you have a beat or specialization? If so: What is that?

The use of narrative structure and narrative techniques was measured through a series of questions

The set of questions was introduced in the following way:

The next set of questions deal with what you do after you have an idea for a story. We're interested in learning how journalists decide how to tell stories, that is, what narrative techniques they use when they actually turn the story idea into a story. Can you think of a story you did yesterday or maybe in the last few days we could talk about? It should be a story of at about 25 column inches or 700 words in length (newspaper) / that you told in a package of about a minute and 20 seconds (television), that ran about 30 seconds (radio), that ran between 500 and 1000 words (magazine). I'd like you to tell me how you developed and ultimately told the story.

This was followed with the following six probes

1. How did you structure the story?

2. Did you develop characters, and, if so, how did you do that?

3. Did you try to set the scene or describe the location, and, if so, how did you do that?

4. Did you try to create a sense of drama in this story? If so, how did you do that?

5. Did you write the story from a particular point of view, and, if so, what was the point of view and how did you develop it?

6. What sources did you use to develop this story? Where did you get the information?

To measure news philosophy, the following questions were included in the interview schedule following the above items on narrative:

1. Can you articulate for me what you believe to be the news philosophy of this station/newspaper/magazine? In other words, what does your station/newspaper/magazine like to be known for in terms of news coverage? Probe if necessary: What is the news mission of the station/newspaper/magazine? Probe if necessary: How does this station/newspaper/magazine brand itself?

2. How does that news philosophy affect your reporting and writing?

The instrument also included a series of questions to measure the characteristics of the respondents.

The responses to the questions were summarized by one of the authors and then reviewed by at least one other to make sure the summary represented the complexity of the data at hand.

Findings

The day of the visit turned out to be a dramatic one in the community. A pregnant woman was believed to have been abducted after a burglary at her mother's home. A search was underway during the day, and journalists were attempting to interview the police and people who might have seen her and to contact her family. Her body was discovered the next day.

This event had no noticeable impact on the operation of the weekly or the magazine, and relatively little impact on the daily newspaper. At the radio, the event had not fully developed when the first interview was conducted. At the television stations, where observers spent the full day, the event consumed the resources of the newsrooms, as the journalists from the stations jockeyed to compete for the best video images and the best interviews for the story. In fact, it was very difficult to conduct interviews with the journalists in each of the stations because of the ruckus caused by the competition for the story.

In all of the media organizations, all of the persons in the newsroom who could take time were interviewed.

The mean number of years of experience of the 35 journalists interviewed was 9.8, while the median was 7.3. The range was from 9 months to 36 years. The mean number of years working in the current assignment was 3.2, with the median being 1.8. The range was from a few weeks to 16 years. The mean number of years at the current organization was 4.4, with the median being 2.0. The range was from one month to 16 years.

Interviews were conducted with one person holding the title of arts editor, two persons holding the title of anchor, two assistant news directors, one editor, one managing editor, four news directors, one news editor and one publisher. The remaining 22 journalists interviewed had titles of producers, reporters and editors.

The mean age of the journalists was 33.1; the median was 30. The youngest journalist interviewed was 22; the oldest was 60. Twenty-four of the journalists had a college degree in journalism

or communication. Four had master's degrees. Nine of the journalists were African-American, and two were members of other ethnic minority groups. Eighteen were women.

News Philosophy

The journalists interviewed had no difficulty answering the question on news philosophy. The television and radio journalists particularly indicated the term was used in every day conversation. Several also referred to their "brand" in response to the question on news philosophy.

While the responses of the journalists suggested that differences existed among the media in terms of news philosophy, and the news director at one of the television stations quickly rattled off the terminology for the differences among the three stations, there also was evidence of commonality. Throughout the responses was the notion that the news product was local. Only in one instance–at the local daily newspaper–was there any reference to national and international coverage in response to the question on news philosophy. One of the daily newspaper journalists, however, used the local focus to distinguish the paper from other newspapers. "USA Today is delivered here," he said. "The Wall Street Journal is delivered here." In other words, the local focus of the newspaper represented the paper's news philosophy, distinguishing it from the national papers.

Despite the focus on the local, the media products differed in terms of their focus on timeliness. The radio station was most focused on getting the information first; the magazine was least concerned about this. While this might seem to be an obvious outcome, it is possible for radio to focus on longer pieces that take several days to develop, and it is possible for magazines to come out more often than the six times a year of the publication visited and focus on timely news accounts. The summaries below of the responses of the journalists to the question on philosophy illustrate other differences.

The radio focused most on immediacy. As the afternoon news anchor said, there is a sense of "urgency to get it before any of our competitors." She continued: "If you miss a story or if you don't get it on (the air) quickly enough, you'll hear about it from your supervisors." The station also does its own reporting, rather than rely on the wire services. According to the news director, the goal is to get "a real, warm, live body to talk" so the station has that voice in the newscast.

TV station #2, experiencing the lowest news ratings in the market, was in flux. The news director said the station had just adopted a new news philosophy. "We are first an information provider and second an entertainer." The assistant news director said "we are more serious about news than the other stations." While the others had more syndicated news, he said, "we look for big local stories and try to find a variety of angles on them."

TV station #3 combined a focus on news coverage with the idea that the station was a representative for the viewer. "We like to be known for being best in covering breaking news. We know that we should advocate for the viewers who don't have access," said a reporter. The news director put it this way: "It's simple. You're a voice for the people you represent." An anchor expressed some bemusement about the approach. "Our philosophy is to cover the news. I've been here 11 years. It's changed probably six times under different management, different companies, different leaders. I think right now, we cover the news. "

TV station #1's news philosophy came from the earlier success of a consumer segment. The news director said: "People started identifying our station as the Station On Your Side." The station's investigative reporter said: "I try to help people out when I can....that's the brand, and then just try to be local--local stories with local impact, local characters." The station sought to be an advocate for the viewers in dealing with government, with business, and with other interests.

At the daily newspaper, most of those interviewed said the paper focused on local news, though they recognized that it also contained national and international stories. "We pride ourselves on local issues and local people," one of the reporters said. "Hyperlocal," is how the managing editor described the news philosophy. The paper differentiated itself, as the science and medical writer said explicitly, by going "beyond what events are and look at...solutions and not just the problems." The special projects reporter said the paper focused on "the local agenda, the daily grind." "The news philosophy?" a sports writer interviewed parroted back. "I think we try to get the most news, the best news, out on a daily basis."

Three of the four journalists at the weekly newspaper used the same phrase to describe their approach. They called it "refrigerator door" journalism, meaning that the stories the paper covered were

likely to end up pasted on the kitchen appliance. "We want to have as many people and faces in the paper as possible," said the school reporter. "We want to tell people about something they can participate in rather than something they have missed," the publisher said. "We hope to increase participation in community events."

The magazine had a news philosophy that differentiated it clearly from the other media. "I think our editorial philosophy is to represent (the city) and its proximity in an entertaining, fun, enlightened way," the assistant editor said. "One thing that readers appreciate about us is we usually cover things from a positive angle, not positive in the sense that we are going to sugar coat something to make it sound good, but usually the stories we go after are the positive stories." The magazine was well aware of the fact that it must compete for reader attention. The editor put it this way: "I think people are interested in what is local. That is what I try to focus on."

In sum, the journalists' ability to answer the question about news philosophy and the differences in the philosophies identified provides empirical support for the utility of the concept and provides evidence of the nature of variability of it.

News Philosophy and Ideation

A further test of the utility of the concept will come from an examination of its ability to show differentiation in the techniques of ideation used by the various media studied.

The story ideas generated by the radio station were very time sensitive. The news director said she depends on two sources for the story ideas she generates. She learns about the "breaking stories that would involve emergency, whether it be police, fire, anything like that" from hot lines for people to "call if they see something." The station also has a mobile news department--two reporters who work out of a car--who monitor the police radios in the area and go immediately to the scene to interview people and file reports. The second source is news releases. "As I get them I keep a file for the month," the news director said, and I will file those press releases and highlight the date of the event. Generally the day before the event is to take place, I'll pull that out and assign somebody the story and we either can cover it by telephone doing an actuality over the phone, or I will assign a reporter to go and be there for that

event." The news director said she spends six out of every eight hours generating story ideas. The station also partners with TV station #3 to produce news. "We give them video tape," the afternoon news anchor said. "Our mobile cars go out to the scenes of wrecks and things with a video camera" and give those video materials to the TV station. The television station "will give me some ideas every now and then that they think I might be interested in." The afternoon news anchor stressed the importance of tips from listeners. "I skim the web of the local papers," she said. "If they have breaking news or anything that looks interesting" she'll make calls to get an update. "I tell you a lot of it comes from tips from listeners."

At TV station #2, the news director said that each journalist is encouraged to come to each of the two meetings at which story ideas are discussed each day (one in the morning and the other in the afternoon) with two or three story ideas. "My philosophy is, 'Be creative! There's not a bad idea!'" To generate those ideas, reporters are assigned to focus on each of such areas as education, city government, the military and health, but they also are given other assignments and actually only focus on these areas about two days a week. One of the reporters interviewed, who was to generate crime news, put it this way: "I wouldn't call it a beat. It is an assignment." The reporter said he makes contacts with the sheriff's office and the police chiefs in the area to generate ideas and listens to the police scanner. He said he also reads newspapers and monitors the wire services. "Looking for news is second nature," he said. Another reporter, who referred to her assignment to cover education as a beat, said she usually gets her story ideas by "localizing stories from wire (services) and newspapers." Another reporter, who also has special topics to cover, said he gets his ideas "from online news publications, the local paper, local press releases, the wire, and Google." The reporter said "it is very important to have contacts," whom he calls about once a week. "Word of mouth is a valuable source," he said.

At TV station #3, one of the reporters, who did not have any specialization, said reporters are "expected to have a story or several ideas every single day." To get those ideas, she monitors national media. "I'm a news junkie," she said. "So if I see a national story on MSNBC, on the networks, I (ask myself), how can we localize it here." But she said she also gets lots of ideas from family members, friends, and "people who live in the neighborhood who know I work on TV." Because of the need for story

ideas, she tried to always have some stories she calls "evergreens–that are not time restrictive. I try to

keep those for a rainy day." A producer at the station summarized the story idea generation process in

this way: "We meet in the afternoon and we all talk about what's going on. We usually try to obviously

keep it timely, So it depends on the calendar, what kind of press releases we have, what we're interested

in covering, and usually we all agree on the same thing, depending on how many people it will affect and

our demographic, how many people...are going to be interested in watching this particular story." She

said she uses the wire services, newspapers, magazines and radio to generate the ideas. "Most of our

stories depend on what's going on that day." She said many of the ideas come from tips from callers, but

not all such tips are equal. "A lot of people call and they're upset, and maybe they feel like they got

screwed by somebody or something and they don't know who to turn to, so they call the news station. I

understand their frustration, but it's really not something we would cover at this time. We would try to refer

them to someone who might help them, or we refer them to the other (television) station."

At TV station #1, a reporter who has responsibility for covering a neighboring county, said she

comes into the station "about 15 to 20 minutes early to try to find out what's going on that day so I can

pitch a story for the day" in the morning news meeting. She says she reads the newspapers, does

computer searches and makes phone calls to generate those ideas. Some of the calls are to "regular

people on the street" and some are to government offices. The consumer investigative reporter–whose

"On Your Side" feature is at the heart of the station's approach to news, says he screens calls he get's

every day from "people complaining about businesses, or government things. Sometimes they've been

ripped off, want their money back, want a refund, or a rebate, or whatever. So I go through those and try

to research them and get their documents and help them out." When he was on general assignment, he

said, he used to spend a lot of time thinking up story ideas, "but now it's kind of easier because we get so

many calls. I mean the initial ideas are always around." If he needs more ideas, he can call the Better

Business Bureau or the state's Department of Consumer Affairs. "Reporters, pretty much, (are)

responsible for coming up with their own story ideas," an anchor at the station, who had worked as a

reporter for many years, said. He talked daily with police sources because he was assigned to cover the

"crime beat." Despite the station's focus on consumer advocacy, it also covers what one producer called

"current events that are going on that will interest people in our area." These ideas come from the wires

and "Internet sites." The station's focus on problem solving for the viewer, however, is illustrated in this

description of idea generation from another produce: "I have friends who tell me about things at the job,

things they notice in the community," she said. "A friend is a teacher, so she tells me about the things that

are bothering her, things she has to deal with. I have another friend who is a psychiatrist, and he tells me

about what is going on, and sometimes it translates into bigger stories. Also, just things I happen to read

when I'm looking at the Internet, or other papers, things that I notice that are strange. If a lot of buildings

are going up in one place, or if there is always trash piled up on in one particular place and there's no

clean up. Things like that."

All of the daily newspaper journalists described the process of story idea generation as

systematic. They did not necessary feel they devoted a lot of time to the process. Most said it was

ongoing. "I am always thinking of story ideas," one of the journalists working in general assignment said.

"When I go out, I look around and think, yea, that's a good story. Or if I meet somebody interesting I just

tuck their information away until it can be turned into a story." Those who had beats said the beats were

the sources of the ideas. The metro reporter said she had been in general assignment earlier, and she

found "it to be very, very dissatisfying because it's very difficult to generate a story idea that is not on

somebody's else's beat." She said she spends little time now actually thinking about story ideas "because

of my beat. There are stories that need to be done that I don't have time to do. One way of looking at it is

it's an always thing...I have a 45-minute drive here, and I'm always thinking. Not always constant, but, you

know, subconsciously, you're always aware of what's going on around you when you do your job."

The business reporter described his work habits this way. "Along my desk I have stacks of paper,

and those all have story ideas that I am planning to work on. I keep adding to the pile, but inevitably we

will need several stories in one day and I will go through that pile and it will get empty and I am going to

have to add to it again. I try never to get to the end of the pile where I have nothing to do." He replenishes

the pile through contacts he has on his beat, such as the president of the local Chamber of Commerce or

the heads of two development agencies. Another business reporter said: "I often hear things at

department meetings, the Chamber of Commerce, department of tourism, things like that." For the

science and medical report, the scientific journals are a major source of story ideas. Contacts from people

who call him with specific medical and science questions are another main source.

The weekly newspaper uses a beat structure very similar to that of the daily. The editor covers

the governmental beat. One of the reporters interviewed covered mostly schools. The publisher doesn't

have a beat, but he had very specific procedures for finding news. The sports reporter specialized in

sports. "Most of the ideas I generate are generated early in the morning," the publisher said. Story ideas

come from emails, from calls he makes to people, and "from observations I make in the community." The

publisher attends most county commission and school board meetings and talks to people on the

planning commission regularly. The publisher also keeps a calendar of events to help the paper monitor

closely what is going on in the community. The editor said that generating story ideas "is constantly on

the daily news task to do." A lot of those ideas have to do with schools, she said. "Not only in the nuts

and bolts of it, but just student-based, kid-based features drives a lot of what we try to put (in the paper),

especially on the front (page)." The education reporter said she gets calls all the time about stories about

the schools from parents, from teachers, and form others involved in the school system. She also attends

school board meetings and generates many ideas from them. The sports reporter said he gets his ideas

from the schools' athletic directors and from the county park and recreation department staffers. "People

I've made contact with in the county" call him all the time with story ideas.

The editor of the magazine said "getting ideas is challenging." The magazine has only two staff

members and relies on freelance writers for most of the ideas that actually becomes stories, and for the

stories themselves. "Sometimes the idea start out one way but evolve into something that is a little bit

more doable for a magazine," the editor said. She said she tries to network and "get from behind this

desk and out into the community enough to keep up with what is going on...You get to a point where you

just–everything that you hear, see, do, think about, dream about, consciously and unconsciously, you see

it and hear it and think it through magazine eyes. I know that sounds odd, but I don't know how else to

describe it. It is almost an automatic thing." Although the magazine doesn't have beats, it relies on a

stable of regular free lancers who cover special areas, such as the arts, food, history, and fashion. They

provide ideas that become stories. The assistant editor explained the cycle of his work this way: "If I am

approaching deadline then I will spend a lot of time thinking of story ideas. But for the most part I read the

newspaper, watch the daily news cast. Keep track of press releases that come in. And I also refer back to

the previous year's issue, and sometimes we will cover something from a different angle." The editor

makes a list of ideas that he can mine as the issue deadline approaches. "So it's all a process that you

have to go to constantly. What helps me maintain things is I always write things down and keep a very

good 'to do' list." The editor said he also gets a lot of good ideas from people who work for the magazine

as sales people. "I think that is a good thing when they don't work in an editorial function. That doesn't

mean they don't have good ideas. They can see and hear things just as well as I can. It is helpful when

they tell me 'This might be interesting. Here is a name and number.' That automatically eliminates a

couple of steps for me. It made it easier."

In sum, the news philosophy of the media organizations has at least some correspondence with

the ideation process or techniques used by the various media. The radio station, with its focus on

immediacy, had strategies designed to provide that. Its partnership with TV station #3 was at least

partially consistent with that. Partnering with TV station #1, with its consumer focus, clearly would have

been less consistent. That station generated story ideas using techniques–relying on consumer

complaints–to feed the needs growing out of that philosophy. One of those interviewed at TV station #3

said she would send stories of this type to another station–presumably TV station #1–because that is

what they do. But it wasn't the kind of idea her station would use. The daily newspaper had a developed

beat structure consistent with its philosophy, as did the weekly newspaper. For the weekly, schools were

very important, because they produce so much "refrigerator journalism," so it made schools into a beat for

the paper. But the weekly also used strategies to allow it to cover the calendar events of the community,

consistent with its philosophy. The magazine editor said generating story ideas suitable for the magazine

was difficult, and she depended on regular contributors, who represented the speciality areas usually

dealt with in her stories, to generate the ideas. The philosophy of having positive aspects of the community to present dictated the kinds of regular contributors she had. They are motivated to come up with ideas, for only then are they paid for their efforts.

News Philosophy and Narrative Structure and Techniques

Any evidence of the impact of news philosophy on narrative structure would provide further support for the utility of the news philosophy concept.

The questions on narrative structure and techniques asked the journalists to identify a story they had worked on recently and talk about how they wrote about it. One of the <u>radio</u> journalists–the editor– discussed a report she had written the day before about a prominent lawsuit in the community. "We got an interview with (the person involved in the suit)" and generated "five different 30 second stories" that contained background information as well as the person's reaction to the outcome. The account was "straightforward," the editor said. While there was some scene-setting, she said the story did not include character development or dramatization. The afternoon anchor talked about a story she had done about a pet store mishandling its animals. She said she developed the scene, but not the character or a sense of drama. "Just the facts," was how she described the story.

At <u>TV station #2</u>, one of the reporters talked about a story he had done on the dangers of weightlifting for teens. He said he personalized the story by "shooting in a gym an interview with a trainer. Then I had a sports physician speaking about short-term and long-term drug risks. Then I went back to some shots with teens exercising and I added a final comment." Clearly there was scene setting and a sense of drama. Another reporter for the station selected a story about wireless Internet security. "I selected 45 businesses in the area and I gathered protected information about them," he said. "I had a video with an expert getting the information and I explained how you can steal it and why cyber investigation isn't secure. Then I went back to the businesses and I asked the guys' bosses if they protect their wireless information. I taped them while I told them what information I had gotten about their businesses." The technique allowed for scene setting and drama. The journalist described himself as a "character" in the story. He said he usually uses humor in his stories as well. In this case, the humor was

developed through the shock on the faces of those he interviewed when they realized that he knew detailed information about their business.

At <u>TV station #3</u>, on3 reporter selected a story about a baby that had had multiple transplants. The reporter said he went to the family home and interviewed the mother and the grandfather. He used pictures of them holding the baby. "It is inherently dramatic," the reporter said. He said he told the story from the point of compassion and caring. "As a parent, you feel it " when you do this kind of story, he said. Another reporter talked about a story she had done about an animal control supervisor who bred dogs from the shelter and sold the puppies. "There was a lot of conflict in this story. Definitely drama," the reporter said."You've got 10 people on the advisory board saying 'Fire him.' You've got his director say, 'Well, I've handled it. Let's leave him alone.' I showed the puppies that he allegedly took." The reporter said she didn't develop character, because there were so many people involved it was hard to single one out.

At <u>TV station #1</u>, a producer described the way the station had covered the story of the missing woman from the day before. "Last night, with the breaking news with the missing pregnant women, we had two hits of the same shot in the show. We came up with a still of the woman who was missing." He called the account "strictly objective. We were just getting the facts in at the time." Another producer talked about a local meeting on the evaluation of local schools mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. He described this as a "standard package," without character development or drama. "Everyone knows meetings are the most boring thing possible, so what he did was manage to get file video of students in school, taking tests, doing what they do as students." This was as close as he could come to "dramatization," the producer said. A reporter selected a business story, focusing on how much money a local sporting event generated for local businesses. He said he "didn't have time" to develop character, and he didn't make any effort to develop the scene or a sense of drama. The consumer reporter selected a story he had done about a safety issue in a local river that threatens boaters. "We're always kind of on the advocate side," he said. He said the story developed when "we got a call about someone who wrecked their boat" because of an underwater obstacle on the river. "So I talked to the

police chief and asked him why it wasn't marked. So they went out there and looked at it, and now they're going to mark it better." He said he tried to create a sense of drama. "We're trying to tell the story, get the facts out."

The science and medicine reporter at the <u>newspaper</u> selected a story on medicaid cuts and their impact on childhood developmental problems. She said she used the Wall Street Journal or "doughnut" structure to tell the story. "You start off with a person who's an example of what you're writing about, lead into the issue, then conflict and resolution, then come back to the person at the end." She said she didn't develop the character or the scene. She also said she did not try to create drama. "I tell it plainly," she said. "I think the situation is dramatic enough that it comes across. I don't try to exaggerate or hype." The entertainment reporter selected a story about a charity hockey game for the benefit of children with autism. She began the story by telling simply about the game. She did not develop scene extensively, character or drama. The investigative reporter selected a story about interracial couples. He said he didn't set the scene. "Unless you're a great writer like a Hemingway or something and can really do it," scene setting isn't helpful in newspaper journalism. A staff writer selected a story about a conference for senior citizens and indicated she tried to set the scene and create drama. "I always do that," she said. Her basic technique, however, was observation. "I was there and this is what happened. I say that the best I can, in the most accurate and honest way that I know how."

At the <u>weekly</u>, the editor used as an example a story about a meeting on zoning issues. She said she structured the story in a straightforward way, did not develop character, describe the scene or create drama. The school reporter talked about coverage of a school board meeting. She said she tried to see the story from the point of view of the taxpayers, but she did not describe the scene, develop drama or develop character. The publisher selected a story he did previewing an upcoming development of a community baseball park. He said he did not develop character, set the scene or create any drama. The sports reporter focused on story about a local golf course. "I used a basic introduction," he said. "Then I moved to the history of the redesign and some of the history of the course itself." He said there was no drama, scene setting or character development.

At the magazine, the editor talked about a story she had written about the home of a local couple on a lake. "I just kind of talked to these folks and said, 'What is your story? My, this is a great place. How did you come to live at the lake?' Just sort of a chronology I suppose." She said she let the photographs set the scene. "It is a great place," she said. They are really nice people. It is a beautiful environment. In this particular case, the lake is just so astonishing and (it is) unique to be on a lake and I try to convey to the reader some of that, what it is like to be there. What is it like to get to know these people. A shared experience, trying to evoke that experience in such a way that readers can understand a little bit and feel like they kind of know these people." The magazine editor selected a story he had done about twin brothers. He said he definitely developed their character. "I felt like they had accomplished so much at their young age," he said. "Because they are brothers and twins, you have that extra competitiveness." He said he wrote it from his own point of view "because I am not too far from their age."I kind of wanted to say, 'think of what my generation can do or is doing.'"

In sum, most of the journalists interviewed seemed to understand the questions on narrative structure and techniques. They had opinions about the use of character development, for example, and about scene setting. They seemed to recognize they had options in telling the story–whether it was to tell it "straight" or in some other fashion. There also were some clear differences among the media in terms of the narrative structure used. The radio accounts were most straightforward. The television journalists saw drama and scene setting as more suitable. Among the television stations, the news philosophy of _Television station #1_ came through in the decision to take an advocacy position in the story telling of at least one of the journalists. The daily newspaper mostly told the story in a very simple way, but even here the journalists recognized the value of drama and scene setting. At the weekly, however, there was no real sense that this was appropriate. At the magazine, however, the scene setting and personal involvement fit with the philosophy of the publication. The stories also were very positive, and told in a way to reinforce good news in the community.

Summary and Conclusions

The data provide strong empirical support for the concept of news philosophy. The journalists interviewed understood the terminology and provided meaningful explanations of the news philosophy of their organizations. Their characterization of the concept–as the approach the organization used to define and delimit the news product–also was tied to the marketing of the product. In other words, consistent with the perspective outlined at the beginning of this paper, the news philosophy was used to create brand identity and to position the organization competitively in the media market.

The journalists also were able to talk meaningfully about story ideation. In fact, their answers to the questions posed made it clear that they talk themselves in these terms. They knew that they spent time generating story ideas, that story ideas were the commodity of value in the newsroom, and that story ideas were at the core of the news product.

Less clear is that the journalists understood fully the questions on narrative structure. They responded meaningfully to them, but with less detail and certainty than would be ideal. They certainly understood that they could tell stories in different ways, and that they could use different elements, such as drama, scene setting and character development, in telling stories. Whether this list is exhaustive or even represents the crucial elements of narrative structure and techniques isn't so clear from the responses given. And while the journalists understood the questions, it isn't clear from their answers that they actually engaged in much thought about the narrative structure they used on a day-to-day basis. It seemed, instead, that they assumed they were going to use or not use certain techniques pretty much as routine.

The expectation was that news philosophy would vary with traditional media classifications based on technology of distribution, but that news philosophy also would vary within these media types. In fact, it was expected that news philosophy would be a more precise way of differentiating among the media than distribution system. A radio station that had as its news philosophy the goal of representing the governmental structure of a community should act more like a newspaper with this same philosophy than it would like a radio station with the goal of producing news first. The data show that news philosophy differed by traditional media type, and that news philosophy varied within the only media category–

television--for which multiple units were available. Journalists at the three television stations articulated different news philosophies.

That there is a linkage between news philosophy and one important behavior of news organizations seems clear from the data. Consistent with the expectation outlined above, news philosophy did predict different story ideation strategies. The radio station, with its philosophy of producing news quickly, developed ideation strategies to allow it to do that. The magazine, with its philosophy of producing positive news that was uplifting and enjoyable to read, had ideation strategies that allowed it to do just that.

There also appears to be at least a weak linkage between news philosophy and story narrative structure and techniques. Clearly radio used a different narrative structure than did television, based on the responses given by the journalists interviewed. And the radio and television journalists told their stories in a different way than did the newspaper or magazine journalists. What isn't so clear is that the different news philosophies among the three television stations predicted to different narrative structures.

The study is limited in some very important ways. It is based on only a small number of interviews–35–from a single media market. The journalists were interviewed during what turned out to be a very demanding day, particularly for the television journalists, in terms of newsroom tensions and demands. The measures of the key variables, news philosophy, story ideation, and narrative structure, were exploratory.

What is now needed is more data from a broader sample in which even more refined questions about these three variables are posed. Ultimately, a category scheme reflecting the potential differences in news philosophy will have to be developed. Similarly, more needs to be know about ideation techniques and strategies so that better, more precise questions can be posted. Clearly additional empirical investigation is needed to refine the story narrative measure.

This study strongly suggests, however, that efforts at further empirical explication of the concepts will pay dividends by helping to explain key aspects of news production.

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